

Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research Conference Proceedings Day 1: August 16th, 2022

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1) Opening Remarks

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Abstract

The Opening Remarks for the *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, & Research Conference* begin with Dr. Jacqueline Gahagan, Associate Vice President of Research at Mount Saint Vincent University. She situates the work in the context of the University and its focus on research that respects different ways of knowing. Dr. Antony Card then congratulates scholars from various fields, faculties, and communities for collaborating around the concept of meditative inquiry as a universal approach to education. Rounding off the Opening Remarks, Alice Salt, Commissioning Editor at Routledge, offers comments from reviewers of the edited collection, *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts*, and thanks Ashwani Kumar (the editor of this volume) and contributing authors for their contributions to the field of curriculum studies.

YouTube Link:

<https://youtu.be/hqVoziuD3E?t=341>

Keywords: diverse ways of knowing, diverse perspectives, curriculum studies

Opening Remarks by Jacqueline (Jacquie) Gahagan

Associate Vice President, Research, Mount Saint Vincent University

Good morning and welcome. Bonjour et Bienvenu. Pjila'si. My name is Jacquie Gahagan, and I am the Associate Vice President of Research at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am joining you, with gratitude, from the ancestral, unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, noting that we are all Treaty People.

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to this important conference focused on Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research. I would like to thank Dr. Ashwani Kumar and colleagues for making this conference possible, particularly as we prepare for the start of the new academic year and reflect on our own approaches to teaching, learning, and research in the classroom, in the community, and in the world around us. This work is important as well in terms of the development of our new Mount Saint

Vincent University 5-year research strategic plan. We need to set our path for understanding the diverse ways of knowing and conducting research, moving beyond the privileges of Western approaches toward the meaningful inclusion of other research philosophies and principles.

I would also like to congratulate Dr. Kumar and the contributors on their new edited volume recently published by Routledge called: *“Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts.”* As noted in the Book

Description:

This collection of multi/interdisciplinary essays explores the transformative potential of Ashwani Kumar’s work on meditative inquiry – a holistic approach to teaching, learning, researching, creating, and living – in diverse educational contexts (Kumar, 2022, p. iii).

I wish you a highly productive and energizing conference and again I would like to express my deep thanks to Dr. Kumar and colleagues for bringing this important conversation on meditative inquiry forward. Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

Opening Remarks by Antony Card

Dean of Education, Mount Saint Vincent University

I would like to just take a few moments to say a few things about the Faculty of Education at the Mount. Many of you are obviously connected to it, but we have some visitors as well. So, next year, this coming year, the Mount celebrates its 150th anniversary, and our history of teacher education and education in general runs through that chronology. And, of course, the key themes in the current strategic plan at Mount Saint Vincent are

equity, diversity, inclusion, and access, and that is important to the Faculty of Education. I think you will see that through much of the scholarship that you will be hearing in the next couple of days.

The history of the Faculty of Education really was profoundly changed in 1995, when there were three faculties of education in Halifax—one at St. Mary’s, one at Dalhousie, and one here at the Mount. They came together in a consolidation that meant there was obviously a larger Faculty of Education created. We currently have 13 graduate program areas with around 850 graduate students, about 300 Bachelor of Education students, and of course, we share a doctoral program with Acadia University and St. Francis Xavier University. Many folks in this conference are connected to that program as well. We have significant international work going on in Belize; in fact, when the current project finishes, we will have reached every school, school community, and principal in Belize, and in St. Lucia as well. We also have cohort programs that run throughout this province and into other provinces as well. I hope that just gives you a little bit of a sense of the Faculty of Education. We have some really wonderful colleagues, and I’m really excited to be listening to their work.

In preparation for this event, I read the book, *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research*, which is the focus of this conference. I really enjoyed the book—as I have all of Dr. Kumar’s work—and the contributions of so many of my colleagues. It gave me the opportunity to become more familiar with the idea of meditative inquiry. There are many questions that I have, and I am looking forward to having them answered throughout the conference. But a few things stood out to me

having read the book—the quality of the actual discourse, the poetry, the artistic work—it is beautiful. It is so well put together.

I think that many academic conferences tend to be fairly narrow, requiring esoteric knowledge, and offer a limited scope of academics to be able to join together. In this conference, I noticed that it really does not matter what your background is. You can come from a perspective that is Western, African, Asian, Buddhist, Indigenous—it really doesn't matter your culture or philosophy, or spiritual traditions and backgrounds, there is an opportunity to engage in this work from all perspectives. And I think that makes it more appealing to a wider audience. I look forward to hearing the diversity that will come from this engagement. One of the things that stood out to me was a chapter by Dr. Ritchie and Paul Stemmler. They talk about the importance of dialogue—dialogue between us, and also within ourselves. And that also resonated for me in the chapter by Dr. Downey, where he coined the phrase *meditative mind*. And I thought, “that is something that I want to do in the next couple of days: take the opportunity to ask myself some serious and meaningful questions that perhaps I have had as a university administrator going through the pandemic.” This conference is going to be a wonderful time for all of us.

Thank you so much Dr. Kumar. I really look forward to the next couple of days, and to the closing event as well. Thank you, and welcome everyone!

Opening Remarks by Alice Salt

Commissioning Editor, Routledge

I would like to introduce myself as the Commissioning Editor for Education Research

titles at Routledge, working with William Pinar on the Studies in Curriculum Theory series. Routledge was delighted to support the publication of *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research*, and I am thrilled to have been asked to contribute some opening remarks to the conference.

I thought I would begin by sharing some comments from the original reviewers of the book proposal, which highlight the strengths of the book and strong foundation from which it was conceived, and subsequently accepted for publication. One reviewer says:

“This area of research is growing while at the same time there are cuts to education programs that can implement this form of inquiry and learning. With the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative that these forms of inquiry and pedagogy are highlighted with theory and practice as this book offers. I appreciate the international and interdisciplinary educational flavour that is present in this book, and that it is engaging dialogue with different worldviews and educational theories, such as Zen Koan, Steiner, Indigenous Knowledge, Afrocentric, arts-based and critical theory. It raises dialogues where chapter authors raise questions of conflict, inner and outer, complementarity, and comparative education within this methodology. This book is timely and stands to make a huge impact if others take this practice on. This is a strong core foundation to implementing the meditative inquiry as a way of life. Kumar has created a niche for himself in the field of education and curriculum in Canada.”

Another reviewer remarks:

“This text makes an important contribution to the field of curriculum studies. I believe that

meditative inquiry (MI) can be an inside-out decolonizing force in our world. It will appeal to students and instructors in curriculum and pedagogy studies, as well as those with interests in the social foundations of education. The international and intercultural focus of the book will appeal to graduate students and instructors in the field of education in many different parts of the world. Most importantly, there is still a lot of interest in mindfulness and holistic approaches to educational praxis and such, the book is extremely timely.”

Both comments speak to the uniqueness of the topic, the reputation of Ashwani Kumar as the leading scholar in advancing research around the practice of meditative inquiry, and to the strength of the collection in bringing together such a diverse and international range of contributions that speak to the power of utilising this approach. We are delighted to see it come to fruition.

Thank you for listening and please enjoy the conference ahead. If anyone has further questions about our publishing with Routledge or is interested in developing a book idea for the series, please do not hesitate to get in touch with myself or Professor William Pinar.

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Author Bios

Jacqueline (Jacquie) Gahagan, PhD (Medical Sociology) is a Credentialed Evaluator (CES), a Full Professor and Associate Vice-President of Research at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) in Halifax Nova Scotia. Prior to joining MSVU Jacquie was a Full Professor of Health Promotion in the Faculty of Health at Dalhousie University where they taught community health promotion, program planning, and measurement and evaluation courses. Jacquie is a founding member and serves as the Co-Director of the Atlantic Interdisciplinary Research Network for Social and Behavioural Aspects of HIV and HCV (airn.ca), is a Founding Fellow of the MacEachen Institute for Public Policy and Governance and is an Affiliate Scientist with the Nova Scotia Health Authority. Prior to this, Jacquie held a variety of Research Scholar and Research Associate positions with the Jean Monnet European Union Centre of Excellence, the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health, the Health Law Institute, the Healthy Populations Institute, and the Beatrice Hunter Cancer Research Institute, among others. Jacquie serves as a Scientific Officer for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and an Institute Advisory Board member of the CIHR Institute of Gender and Health (CIHR-IGH).

Jacquie’s long-standing program of mixed methods health promotion research focuses on evaluating policy and programming interventions using sex and gender-based analyses (SGBA+) to identify and address health inequities among equity-deserving populations. Jacquie has been involved in HIV research and advocacy for over 30 years working with women living with or affected by HIV, HCV or other STBBIs and received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for

their efforts. Jacquie's funded studies focus on the scaling-up of access to innovative HIV testing technologies, the health equity and health outcomes of LGBTQ2I populations, including access to safe and affirming housing and healthcare among LGBTQ2I communities, and end-of-life decision-making. Jacquie worked as an evaluation specialist in public health at the municipal, provincial, and national levels in relation to harm reduction, HIV/HCV prevention, and tobacco use cessation prior to their academic career.

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Antony Card joined the Mount Saint Vincent University community as the Dean of Education in September 2018. He came to the Mount from Memorial University of Newfoundland, where he served as Associate Vice-President Research at the Grenfell campus, and Director and Dean of the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation at the St. John's campus. As well, he has taught both Teacher Education students and graduate students at Memorial. Antony's areas of teaching and research interests include pre-service and teacher education focused on health and physical education, and health promoting schools. His research projects have focused on children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador, and engaging policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in jointly setting priorities for youth health in schools across Canada, such as with the development of Core Indicators and Measures of Physical Activity.

Alice Salt is Commissioning Editor for the Education, Psychology and Mental Health Research programme at Routledge. She actively commissions high-level research monographs across all sub-disciplines of these subject areas, and is keen to consider proposals for both

authored books and edited collections which present cutting-edge and academically rigorous research in these fields.

2) Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Editor's and Illustrator's Panel

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Abstract

In this panel, Ashwani Kumar and Adam Garry Podolski introduce meditative inquiry and the conceptualisation of the edited collection *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts*. Kumar speaks about meditative inquiry and its design as a universal approach across diverse contexts. He explains the seven principles of meditative inquiry and opens the conference as a dialogical space to explore meditative inquiry from varied perspectives. Podolski reflects on his process of illustrating the key concepts of meditative inquiry by means of his artwork, featured in the meditative inquiry collection.

YouTube Link:

<https://youtu.be/dKS1TS-6WcU?t=105>

Keywords: *meditative inquiry, awareness, creativity / artmaking, dialogical collaboration, visual metaphors*

Introducing Meditative Inquiry and the Edited Collection

Ashwani Kumar

Mount Saint Vincent University

In this presentation, Ashwani Kumar introduces the concept and practice of meditative inquiry—a holistic approach to teaching, learning, researching, creating, and living—and discusses the thoughts and processes that guided the

development of the edited collection, *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts*. The collection is made up of multi/interdisciplinary essays exploring the transformative potential of meditative inquiry in varied settings, and this collection is the focus of this conference. Kumar explains how the book came about, briefly shares his thoughts about the contents of the book, and gives an overview of

how the diverse and rich contributions contained in this book offer valuable perspectives and practices for scholars, students, and educators interested in exploring and adopting the principles of meditative inquiry in their own specific fields and contexts. He also explains how he was first inspired by meditative inquiry as a youth in India, while reading the poetry of Indian poet, Kabir. Examining multiple perspectives while studying curriculum at University of British Columbia led him to articulate the fundamental ideas of meditative inquiry as an educational approach to teaching and learning. In this presentation, Kumar suggests that meditative inquiry is an awareness, a deeper understanding of how one thinks, feels, and acts, how one connects to the self, and how meditative inquiry is an existential and social exploration rather than an isolated practice. He also outlines the seven core principles of meditative inquiry: questioning deeply without fear; critiquing social injustice, oppression, and discrimination; celebrating the freedom to think, to observe, and to express; the cultivation of awareness; partaking and rejoicing in the flow of creativity; understanding relationships and connection to people and nature; and participating in dialogical exploration honestly. Kumar opens the conference as a space to discuss ideas, using dialogue to share common understandings and practices around the meditative inquiry approach, as well as to create a platform to engage with the book's contributors, their perspectives, insights, and ideas.

Artmaking and Meditative Inquiry in the Spirit of Dialogical Collaboration

Adam Garry Podolski

My illustrations live in the meditative inquiry edited collection—within a meditative landscape that exists between my imagery, Ashwani

Kumar's quotes, and the chapters that are part of this book. Ashwani and my dialogues together uncovered gifts, what I believe to be graceful forms, and gratitude found in the value of holistic educational experiences. Ashwani and I discussed the meaning held in his writings on meditative inquiry and selected specific quotes from his writings that we felt could be expressed as artworks. I engaged in meditative inquiry and a series of dialogues with Ashwani to illustrate the concepts embedded in each quote. I was also inspired by nature, limited to my yard, as I worked from home during the pandemic.

Meditative inquiry can be used to observe, animate, and experience creative energy. The nature and purpose of my images are to act as *visual metaphors*. By connecting meditative inquiry to my creative process, I translate academic and lived experiences into images, which I hope complement and embody meditative material to contemplate alongside Ashwani's quotes from his writings on meditative inquiry and the contributing authors' chapters.

Ashwani and my collaboration began when I was editing his chapter titled "The Way of Gratitude" for the book *Influences and Inspirations in Curriculum Studies Research and Teaching: Reflections on The Origins and Legacy of Contemporary Scholarship* (Kumar, 2021). In our email dialogues together, I expressed my interest in Ashwani's reflections and writing on meditative inquiry. As our dialogues deepened, Ashwani asked me to illustrate key insights from his writings and reflections on meditative inquiry. Through engaging in meditative inquiry as an illustrator, I uncovered joy, a vital rhythm connecting me to the subjects I studied and to Ashwani's reflections and writing on meditative inquiry in relation to my own research (Podolski,

2018, 2021). By engaging in the holistic practice of meditative inquiry, a web of awareness developed in me during my artmaking, allowing me to explore dream material and my place of quarantine during the pandemic. Guided by my imagination and sense of beauty, I found meditative inquiry to be transformational as I conceptualized metaphors and intellectual insights, entering into inner dialogue, opening a path by dissolving preconceived categories and superficial misunderstandings I associated with *pests* in my yard. In exploring a form of silence while illustrating earwigs, spiders, and dandelions, I eventually experienced a sense of relationality and shared existence with them. I even came to consider the intimate interconnection between my presence and theirs. For instance, as I studied the dandelion, I learned the leaves, roots, and flowers of the dandelion are nutrient-rich, and invisible to us but readily apparent to a bee; further into the ultraviolet range, a landing pad is present—the bee, a quintessential pollinator for human foodstuffs, is supported by the resilient “weed.”

By pausing, by observing elements of shared existence, meditative inquiry’s pedagogical nature helped me become sensitive to misunderstandings I held between myself and the world around me. In my experience, this deeper sense of awareness and curiosity nurtures creative potential, compassion, academic rigour, and a holistic way of being. Such contemplative attention left me with a profound sense of interconnection and gratitude for my place and existence even while I was quarantined in so-called “isolation.”

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Author Bios

Ashwani Kumar is an Associate Professor of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax, Canada). His teaching and research focus on meditative inquiry, which is a self-reflective and aesthetic approach to teaching, learning, researching, creating, and living. He has conceptualized several key curricular and pedagogical concepts, namely, curriculum as meditative inquiry, teaching as meditative inquiry, and music as meditative inquiry. He has also developed a contemplative research methodology called dialogical meditative inquiry to conduct subjective and intersubjective qualitative research. He is the author of two

scholarly books: *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *Curriculum in International Contexts: Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). He is also the editor of *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts* (Routledge, 2022). He has served as the President of the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society, Canada. His book *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* was chosen as an Outstanding Academic Title by Choice Reviews in 2015. His co-authored paper, "Teaching as Meditative Inquiry: A Dialogical Exploration," which describes his pedagogical philosophy and practice, received the Outstanding Publication in Curriculum Studies Award from The Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies in 2019. He is also the recipient of the Mount Saint Vincent University President and Vice President's Advanced Career Teaching Award 2022 and the University of British Columbia Faculty of Education's Alumni Educator of the Year Award 2022.

Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts.

Adam Garry Podolski is a teacher-editor-artist-author-poet and curriculum theorist. His doctoral dissertation *Towards a Personal Philosophy of Curriculum: Approaching Currere and Narrative Inquiry within an Aokian Paradigm of Reciprocity* was recognized as an original and unique contribution to the field of values and leadership in education, receiving runner-up for the Paul T. Begley Award. He is co-editor of the volume *Influences and Inspirations in Curriculum Studies Research and Teaching: Reflections on the Origins and Legacy of Contemporary Scholarship* and the illustrator of *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching,*

3) Keynote Panel 1: The Contributions of Meditative Inquiry to the Field of Education

Michael Corbett, Kent den Heyer, Lisa Merriweather, and Jack Miller

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Abstract

Michael Corbett opens this session with his presentation entitled, “Educational Research Methodology and Meditative Inquiry: Three Meditations.” Building on the chapter he wrote for the book, he offers three questions stemming from his reflections on the book as a whole. The first relates to how meditative inquiries might relate to more quantitative explorations; the second considers the metaphor of a laboratory; while the third looks at relationality and the limitations of meditative inquiry. In his presentation, “On Becoming Subjects to Our Learning and Lives,” Kent den Heyer looks at key themes he drew from the edited collection. He addresses such notions as subjectivity as the theme of education, truthing, learning from the whole, and giving consideration to Indigenous ways of knowing and meditative inquiry contrasted with the current status quo. Following that is Lisa Merriweather, with her offering “Someone Please Call 911: Meditative Inquiry, Àṣẹ, and Spirit Murder.” After defining and discussing Àṣẹ and Spirit Murder, she asks whether meditative inquiry can be used a restorative practice by serving as a vehicle for Àṣẹ, the power to manifest change that is self-determining and self-affirming for individuals and community. The final presentation of the panel is “Meditative Inquiry in My Life’s Journey” by Jack Miller which opens with his comments on the edited book and contributing authors. He then shares the role meditative inquiries have played in his life’s journey and deepening understanding of holistic education, highlighting the shared principles of presence, interconnectedness, and developing wisdom.

Meditation: In this session, Lisa Merriweather offered a meditation written by Tita Engenko entitled: “Kindness to Those Suffering from Pranic Injustices,” guiding us through conscious breathing and reflections on loving kindness. The meditation brought awareness to those who suffer, and it focused on connection and safety. This calming practice was soothing and concentrated on creating space for kindness and conscious awareness.

YouTube Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewsFSamdl5A&list=PLfvjDB_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf&index=3&t=5s

Keywords: *educational research, inequality, poststructuralism, structural analysis / truths, Badiou, future, curriculum, existential education / anti-Blackness, spirit murder, AŞE, Africentricity, meditative inquiry / Eastern practices, insight meditation, holistic education, Taoism*

Three Meditations

Michael Corbett

Acadia University

In my conference presentation, I begin by elaborating on what I see as three contemporary educational problematics: 1) questions of socioeconomic inequality and ecology; 2) what I call the end of innocence in educational institutions and their academic and professional support spaces; and 3) related post structural questions of (and about) how language cannot save us from the inevitability of power in discourse. It is my sense, following Bill Pinar's foreword to the meditative inquiry collection, that resolving the inevitable tensions that arise from "the posts" is a central aim of Meditative Inquiry (MI).

As I reflect on the three meditations set out in my chapter, I consider three questions that built upon my own chapter on educational research in relation to other contributions to the collection. First of all, I reflect on the metaphor of the laboratory and the tension between technical-rational quantitative measurement studies on the one hand, and qualitative interpretive or "naturalistic" educational studies on the other. Reading the collection, I was struck by how many contributors seemed to see themselves as research subjects in someone else's lab. This leads to my second question, how might MI relate to the idea of the laboratory? I think this question at one level might query how MI can relate to quantitative research frames like the "science of reading." But at a broader

level, I wonder whether MI is a complete rejection of the lab metaphor. Or rather, does MI suggest that educators (practitioners and academics) develop our own unique laboratories to explore ourselves and our questions.

Next, I consider the question of relationality, which Kumar's vision of MI considers very carefully, seeming to welcome a diversity of worldviews (including presumably those I signal above). While I appreciate how this approach can help encourage necessary dialogue, as someone who has strong commitments to forms of critical empirical sociological analysis and who believes that this work has provided the basis for understanding and addressing social inequality, I wonder how MI squares with forms of structural and/or identity-focussed analysis that make strong claims about truth and justice. I also wonder about the limitations of MI and what it does not explain. I conclude by reflecting on how one of my current struggles is to find ways to dialogue in a genuine way with those I consider deluded and misled.

In Trothing We Trust

Kent den Heyer

University of Alberta

What excites me about the meditative inquiry collection is the affirmation of subjectivity as the subject of education. This is a collection of scholars unabashedly proclaiming that the schooled subjects are but a means to enliven the educational priority of subjectivity and

consciousness by “encompass[ing] an ethics of subjectivity, a politics of emancipation and an aesthetics of freedom” (Biesta & Safstrom, 2001, p. 542) to counter what David Sable (2022) names as psychological and spiritual materialism dominating contemporary social life.

I cannot help but see fellow travellers as my recent work seeks to extend the philosophy of Alain Badiou to education in a reasonable fashion. Badiou details an architecture of an *event* as some moment that happens—either in the fields of art, politics, science, or love—rendering previous symbolic understandings mute. He couples such with a physics of truthing-processes as “becoming subjects”, articulating what the event will have meant, a process judged by the beginnings and re-beginnings it authorizes within one’s own journey and those of others (Badiou, 2001).

This, then, is *an ethics of the future anterior*—a continual and unending striving to articulate both what the event *will have meant* and its implications for education (den Heyer & Conrad 2011).

As I explore related to education (den Heyer, 2009; 2015), Badiou’s existentialism does not consist of grasping a *whole* but of learning from the *hole*—an eventful encounter with the void that shatters the symbolic order through which one has learned to speak, read, be read, and emotionally identify that constitutes the heart of any social situation, that differentiates into hierarchies those who are more and less human, more and less “Man” (to borrow from Sylvia Wynters (2006)). As Badiou (2001) notes, since truths are indifferent to difference as distinguished in the symbolic order, truthing renders differences meaningless.

Indeed, as explored throughout this collection, meditative inquiry calls forward, in my language, a truthing—or to become *in troth*—that renders absurd status quo differentiations of caste, read and enforced through pigmentation, gender, and culture. This is especially so in light of Indigenous ways of knowing-being and meditative inquiry’s ontology of an intersubjective connection to all our relations, as Diane Obed (2022) details in her chapter in this collection.

If by truths, then the curricular question is less “what knowledge is of most worth?” and more “how might the forms of knowledge be arranged for the possible inauguration of a ‘truthing process?’” (Badiou, 2001; den Heyer, 2015). I am convinced, for now, that this is a necessary question for mainstream Canadian educators if we are to be able to grow the ears to adequately hear and learn from our treaty partners’ sophisticated theories of education.

For me, the work by this collection of scholars exemplifies that maintaining fidelity to being in troth is the joy of human aspiration given material form—despite all status quo discouragements—as if selves will have mattered beyond their commodified bundling of exchange.

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Someone Please Call 911: Meditative Inquiry, Aşę, & Spirit Murder

Lisa R. Merriweather

University of North Carolina, Charlotte

911, a popular song in 2000 by Wyclef John and Mary J. Blige, centered a toxic romantic relationship that serves as an apt metaphor for the toxic relationship between Black people and education. Historically education has been important to the Black community from clandestine schools to Septima Clark's Freedom Schools and involved risk of death: physically,

emotionally, spiritually. Even today, academia's claim of equity and inclusion does not square with Black scholars and students experiencing a culture of learning and teaching while Black: microaggressions, prejudice, isolation, and attempted inferiorization, leading to spirit murder.

Williams (1987) coined spirit murder to describe multifaceted outcomes of racism: systemically and interpersonally. Love (2016) described it as "a slow death... intended to reduce, humiliate, and destroy people of color" (p. 1). It is fundamentally fuelled by white supremacist and anti-Black racist ideology, policies, and practices. It is physical, embodied, emotional and spiritual. Our survival as Black people demands proactive, intentional, centred responses to spirit murder grounded in our ontological right to humanity.

Kumar's (2022) meditative inquiry speaks to those ontological humanity rights by advocating understanding self in relation to others and honoring of the truths discovered as we attend with intentionality, criticality, and honesty to the process. Brigham (2022) highlights parallels of relationality—"compassion, empathy, connectivity, creativity, open-mindedness and cooperation" (p. 31)—between Africentricity and meditative inquiry as well as noting how structural and psychological factors support racial conflict. Each has holistic visions of humanity—physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions—with Africentrism's born from African indigenous values and belief that vitality of the spirit must be employed to counteract attacks on Black humanity. Humanity has an integral connection between individual personhood and the ontological we (Merriweather, 2019). That is, community cannot exist with the individual and the

individual is incomplete without the community, resulting in a communal consciousness.

But I wonder when we are faced with spirit murder would meditative inquiry be enough? Is shifting to a focus on inner consciousness from external structure as Kumar (2022) suggests a transformation of consciousness, enough or even an appropriate approach to racial conflict when anti-Blackness is ingrained in structures as well as psyches? If racially minorityized others are not deemed human within the dominant groups' consciousness, and that consciousness has shaped the policies, practices, and lived realities of all, what is the objective of shifting? Africentrism involves groundedness to our ancestors, each other, and to our land (Brigham, 2022). Meditative inquiry is not as culturally centered, invoking a universalism that feels misplaced for those enduring racialized spirit murder. It is a universal solution to a particularized problem, a problem not universally experienced. A universal particularism (Merriweather, 2011) such as Àṣẹ is needed for Black people combating spirit murder.

Àṣẹ, a Yoruba word, speaks to affirmation, a life force, and power manifested within and through orality (Paxton, 2019). Our confidence and humanity are buoyed by the spirit of our ancestors, forming our communal identity. Àṣẹ is the life force of our ancestors and future descendants that causes reaffirmation of our commitment to learning self and determining our own worth of self. Spirit murdering has been part and parcel to the experience of Black people ever since that fateful voyage through the Middle Passage but Àṣẹ has been around even longer, and we can infuse it into our thought life and practice as we pursue and

overcome the inequities and challenges of educational systems. This world promises to give Black people no peace, but the Àṣẹ can and will answer our 911 call.

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Meditative Inquiry in My Life's Journey

Jack Miller

University of Toronto

In this presentation, I talk about the role of meditative inquiry in my life. As a young American facing the draft and the Vietnam war, I experienced stress. I started doing hatha yoga in 1968 and found that doing the asanas were very helpful and triggered an interest in Eastern practices. This led to starting insight meditation practice in 1974 which I have continued throughout my life. My practice reflects how meditative inquiry, as explored in *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research* (Kumar, 2022), has been central to my life and work.

Insight meditation focuses on awareness of the breath and gradually expands to body sensations, sounds, thoughts, and feelings. Key elements of the practice are being present to what is happening in the moment and seeing interconnections in life. The goal of the practice is the development of wisdom and compassion which arises from seeing interconnectedness.

My work in holistic education grew out of my insight meditation practice, and it shares the same principles of presence, interconnectedness, and the development of wisdom and compassion. Being present is essential for the holistic teacher. Mindfulness practices which are connected to insight meditation help teachers be present to their students. Holistic education seeks to be in harmony with the way things are and helps students see reality as interconnected. The development of wisdom and compassion are central goals in holistic education. Finally, I have found Taoism to be helpful in providing support for holistic education as it sees nature as a guide to inquiry. Using nature as a guide helps bring our lives and our education into balance and harmony. It can also play an important role in addressing climate change and other environmental challenges.

In summation, I have found that Eastern forms of inquiry provide an inclusive, non-dualistic perspective for further inquiry and development.

Author Bios

Michael Corbett has worked as a professor in the School of Education at Acadia University since 2002. He has studied of rural outmigration, youth educational decision-making, the politics of educational assessment, literacies in rural contexts, improvisation and the arts in education, the position of rural identities and experience in education, conceptions of space, place and mobilities, and the viability of small rural schools. He has published widely both in academic venues, as well as for educational and

policy and practice audiences. Between 2015 and 2018 he served as Professor of Rural and Regional Education at the University of Tasmania.

Kent den Heyer works the lonely intersection of history and social studies education, curriculum theory, educational philosophy, and that of the educational implications of Alain Badiou's anti-philosophy. Committed to psychoanalytical approaches to anti-racist education, his scholarship appears in international journals, handbooks, and in Canada's nationally distributed newspapers. Kent den Heyer has taught a range of subjects and grades in Canada, Japan, Taiwan, and Colombia along with prospective social studies teachers in Canada and the United States. He currently professes in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6316-4948>

Lisa R. Merriweather is a Professor of Adult Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a PhD in adult education from the University of Georgia, co-founder of Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal, and aspiring writer of historical science fiction centring issues of race and racism. Employing the art of story and dialogic engagement, complete with creativity and innovativeness, emotionality and theorizing, and historical and contemporary cultural and political critique informed by Africana Philosophy and Critical Race Theory, Lisa invites readers and interlocutors to a space of reflection through

(re)presenting and (re)linguaging racialized experiences.

John (Jack) Miller has been working in the field of holistic education for over 40 years. He is author/editor of more than 20 books on holistic learning and contemplative practices in education which include *The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and the Workplace*, *Love and Compassion: Exploring Their Role in Education* and his memoir, *A Holistic Educator's Journey*. His writing has been translated into eight languages. The Holistic Curriculum has inspired the programs in four different schools including the Equinox Holistic Alternative School in Toronto. Jack teaches courses on holistic education and contemplative education for graduate students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto where he is a Professor. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_P._Miller_\(educator\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_P._Miller_(educator)).

4) A Conversation on Meditative Inquiry

Ashwani Kumar and William Pinar

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Abstract

In an experiential model of the transformational potential of authentic dialogue, this conversational presentation between Ashwani Kumar and William Pinar explores Kumar's thoughts on meditative inquiry as dialogue, and, most importantly, a way of being. Together, Pinar and Kumar explore how meditative inquiry has informed Kumar's work in teaching and curriculum studies, as well as in music.

YouTube Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGSs0KIA5Uk&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf&index=4

Keywords: *dialogue, holistic education, meditative inquiry, currere, interconnectedness and relationship, being*

A Conversation on Meditative Inquiry

Ashwani Kumar
Mount Saint Vincent University

William Pinar
University of British Columbia

In an experiential model of the transformational potential of authentic dialogue, this conversational presentation explores Kumar's thoughts on meditative inquiry as dialogue and a way of being. Together, Pinar and Kumar explore how meditative inquiry has informed Kumar's work in teaching and curriculum studies, as well as in music. The themes that emerge from this dialogue include: the relationship of meditative inquiry with the field of holistic education, *currere*, and the meditative sensibility; the influence of people and

place on one's meditative exploration, identity formation, academic fields of study, and teaching (and vice versa); and Kumar's ongoing meditative inquiry of Indian classical music through meditation, composition, practice, teaching, learning, and performance.

Pinar facilitates the discussion through a series of questions whereby the two authors offer their considerations on a few important principles of meditative inquiry. They reflect on the importance of dialogue as an existential process, discussing Kumar's experiences growing up as a young school teacher in India. They also discuss the importance of holistic education as defined by Jack Miller—rooted in humanistic psychology and Eastern philosophies—with Kumar highlighting that this term considers more than mere cognitive

learning, and that the underlying concepts exist in many Indigenous ways of knowing.

In their discussion, they consider the idea of Kumar's meditative inquiry and Pinar's concept of *curre* as curricular cousins, ultimately acknowledging that they are intimately connected. Importantly, the two pedagogues explore the significance of human subjectivity, identity, and the role of stillness in the human experience. They conclude that meditative inquiry is a sensibility that exists as more than a method or a practice, that it extends to a presence of being.

Pinar prompts Kumar to share his thoughts on teaching as an expression of who we are, and to explore the idea of teaching and learning in the light of consideration of the self, relationships, and engagement through personal interests. Kumar notes the importance of asking students to explore their true purpose, acknowledging the value in Pinar's concept of autobiographical inquiry. He also briefly critiques the mindfulness movement in education as being a false solution to the inattention of students in schools. To Kumar, we are generally attentive to learning when we are interested in the material and engaged by an understanding teacher.

Bringing the discussion to a close, Kumar affirms that he is continuing to deepen his understanding of meditative inquiry through explorations of it relating to various fields, including music. He plans to write about it using simple terms and language, with the hope and goal of making it more accessible, thus breaking out of the current Eurocentric neoliberal system of higher education.

Author Bios

Ashwani Kumar is an Associate Professor of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University (Halifax, Canada). His teaching and research focus on meditative inquiry, which is a self-reflective and aesthetic approach to teaching, learning, researching, creating, and living. He has conceptualized several key curricular and pedagogical concepts, namely, curriculum as meditative inquiry, teaching as meditative inquiry, and music as meditative inquiry. He has also developed a contemplative research methodology called dialogical meditative inquiry to conduct subjective and intersubjective qualitative research. He is the author of two scholarly books: *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *Curriculum in International Contexts: Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). He is also the editor of *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in diverse Contexts* (Routledge, 2022). He has served as the President of the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society, Canada. His book *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* was chosen as an Outstanding Academic Title by Choice Reviews in 2015. His co-authored paper, "Teaching as Meditative Inquiry: A Dialogical Exploration," which describes his pedagogical philosophy and practice, received the Outstanding Publication in Curriculum Studies Award from The Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies in 2019. He is also the recipient of the Mount Saint Vincent University President and Vice President's Advanced Career Teaching Award 2022 and the University of British Columbia Faculty of Education's Alumni Educator of the Year Award 2022.

William Pinar was named the Tetsuo Aoki Professor in curriculum studies in 2019 after two

terms as the Canada Research Chair in curriculum studies in the Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy at University of British Columbia. Known for his work in the area of curriculum theory, Pinar has been strongly associated with the reconceptualist movement in curriculum theory since the early 1970s. At that time, Pinar, along with Madeleine Grumet, introduced the notion of *currere*, shifting the notion of curriculum as a noun to curriculum as a verb. Apart from his fundamental contributions to theory, Pinar is notable for establishing the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, founding the Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, and founding the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies. He has also spoken about and written on many other topics, including education, cultural studies, international studies, and queer studies.

5) Journal Editors' Panel: Meditative Inquiry and Holistic and Alternative Education Theories and Practices

Paul Freedman, Laurel Tien, Helen E. Lees, Carlo Ricci, and Teresa Strong-Wilson

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Abstract

In this panel, the editors from four journals discuss the interaction of meditative inquiry and holistic education. Paul Freedman and Laurel Tien explore the importance of research design that is centred in holistic education and contributes to subjectivity, observation, identity, and presencing in their talk, "Meditative Inquiry and Holistic Education: Resonant Practices." They welcome publishing such research in the *Holistic Education Review (HER)*. Helen Lees presents, "A Talent for Meditative Inquiry Through Alternative Education Concepts?" whereby she discusses the importance of inquiry and seeking in education. Lees illustrates that inquiry rather than "provided" education is the mission of *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*. Founder and editor of the *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*, Carlo Ricci, shares his knowledge of unschooling and de-schooling. He discusses unschooling and Kumar's seven principles of meditative inquiry in, "The Connections I Make Between Self-determined Learning and Ashwani's 7 Key Principles of Meditative Inquiry." Lastly, in her presentation "Touching Interiority, Given Time and Space: A Journal Editor's Perspective," Teresa Strong-Wilson describes the wide spectrum of subject and research available in the *McGill Journal of Education*. She explores what meditative inquiry means for her journal, and she welcomes contributions from scholars working from contemplative perspectives.

Meditation: Paul Freedman opened the session by leading the conference participants through a meditation by Thich Naht Hanh. The meditation focused on breath awareness, and it brought our collective intention to each inhale and exhale with the mantras, "Calm and ease, smile and release." Our presence was centred in the wonderful moment of calm and relaxation.

YouTube Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03iPqLeUCAk&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf&index=5&t=1s

Keywords: *Holistic education, holistic research, education journal, meditative research methods / alternative education, curriculum, concepts, curiosity / unschooling, meditative inquiry, willed learning, self-determined learning / writing as meditative inquiry, conversation, contemplative practices, autobiographical research*

Meditative Inquiry and Holistic Education: Resonant Practices

Paul Freedman and Laurel Tien

Holistic Education Review.

As holistic educators, it is essential for our research methods to align with our core beliefs and worldview. A landscape of qualitative methodologies that elevate the wholeness of subjects, honor, relationships, and allow researchers to bring their interiority and subjectivity into the work are very much needed. We too often encounter scholars writing about holistic education rather than embodying the practice as an integral part of their research.

In this conference session, we dialogue with several other journal editors to discuss the collection of essays published in *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: Realizing Transformative Potentials in Diverse Contexts* and explore their implications for qualitative research, looking through the lens of holistic education.

Holistic education is a pedagogy that recognizes and values the interiority of individual teachers and learners. Meditative inquiry also values interiority. In many ways, holistic approaches to education align seamlessly with meditative inquiry. The holistic teacher brings all of themselves to the learning encounter. The holistic learner does the same. In much the same way Martin Buber (1923) describes the *ich-du* relationship, all of me sees all of you, and that must include awareness of each of our inner lives. The *Holistic Education Review (HER)* seeks to

publish stories of this kind of meditative exploration.

Increasingly, we are receiving submissions in which the researchers are engaged in a similarly meditative process. They bring all of themselves, including their interiority to the process of qualitative research. They bring their subjectivity, their identity, and their integrity to their observation, their presences to the reporting of their findings.

In this session, as the editors of the *HER*, we discuss our engagement with meditative inquiry both as the content and process of our published work. We share our experience with other editors, and we find common ground and share with these other journals a deep value in meditative inquiry as an approach to living.

A Talent for Meditative Inquiry Through Alternative Education Concepts?

Helen E. Lees

Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives

In *Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research* (Kumar, 2022), Ashwani Kumar writes “our existential quest as human beings from time immemorial [is] to ask fundamental questions about the meaning, origin, and purpose of life” (p. xix).

Asking questions and seeking answers is something education purports to help people do.

However, if education—and its curricula—provides all the answers, without the seeking or the inquiry, what then occurs? A significant talent for asking questions borne of practice in handling the unknown, the wonder-full and the curious is required for us to appreciate fundamental aspects of life—there are no simple answers, nor are there simple roads to answers that work for any individual. Inquiry is a skill, and one needfully done meditatively, carefully, and thoughtfully.

Do people become deskilled in inquiries about living well and life (as a fundamental aspect of why education matters) if they are given answers? Do they move quickly and thoughtlessly to their aim to know? Are they ready to just accept what is given, never wondering or searching, instead believing what is provided for them, without inquiry, is all they need to live well? It is the philosophy of the online open access journal *Other Education* to aid children and adults with various kinds of meditative inquiry, by introducing us all to, and developing the concepts of, alternative education. Such education is of a kind which fosters talent to seek and ask. However, the concepts of freedom in education, consent over coercion, respect for voice, and the challenge and beauty of discovery based on curiosity (instead of a curriculum followed as supplied), are not obvious, nor are they commonly adhered to in the kind of education that involves teachers and students together. The concepts are not obvious because the very idea of education has become entangled with the concept of school as education (Lees, 2012), and schooling is determined largely these days by imbalances of power (teacher has power over student) deemed as appropriate for learning, colouring, and conditioning how pedagogy functions to render it the mere filling of a bucket (Freire, 1972). The concept of education

has become learning what is given to know (Biesta, 2006). *Other Education* as an educational project does not think this is education.

In my presentation, I discuss what a talent for meditative inquiry is when it meets education and curricula that are alternative. I suggest the key to such talent and successful inquiry is connection with specific concepts that *Other Education* has as its core scholarly focus (as above). Furthermore, I suggest that meditative inquiry in mainstream schooling where curricula are provided rather than explored, may be hindered by factors to do with an absence of choice, given the link between choice and curiosity as pedagogic drivers for success.

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The Connections I Make Between Self-determined Learning and Ashwani's 7 Key Principles of Meditative Inquiry

Carlo Ricci

Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning

In the Introduction to *Engaging With Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research*,

Ashwani Kumar (2022, p. xxiv) outlines the seven key principles of meditative inquiry. In this presentation, I focus on these principles and offer the connections that I made to unschooling for each.

1. Questioning deeply about everything without fear.

Unschoolers have the freedom to ask and seek answers to whatever questions they choose without fear that they will be reprimanded for being off task.

2. Critiquing social injustice, oppression, and discrimination.

Although unschoolers are not forced to focus on issues of social injustice, oppression, and discrimination, they live their lives in freedom. By doing so, they appreciate what it means to live a just life within a democratic context. And, of course, if they so choose, they can critique any issue of social injustice, oppression, and discrimination that they feel compelled to address.

3. Celebrating the freedom to think, to observe, to express, and to be.

Unschoolers are free and thereby can think, and observe, and express, and be however they desire. Unschoolers can decide what, when, how, where, why to learn and be.

4. Cultivating awareness of the ways one thinks, feels, and acts.

Since unschoolers self-determine their own curriculum and life journey, they become aware of themselves and how they think, feel, and act. In a mainstream school, learners are told what, when, how, where, and why they need to learn one thing or another; they are less likely to be aware of themselves since they are being directed and controlled by external beings. If they would like to explore their artistic, athletic, or scientific side at any point, an unschooler has the freedom to do so. You often hear mainstream schoolers lament

that they are going to respond based on what they believe the teacher wants to hear, rather than what they believe.

5. Partaking and rejoicing in the creative flow of life.

Unschoolers can rejoice in the creative flow of life because they learn and live on their own schedule. If they are engaging in an activity and want to keep doing it because they are in a state of flow, they can. No one is going to ring a bell and force them to stop and move on to something else. Similarly, if they want to move onto something else, they can, since there is no external authority or compulsion telling them to move onto something else or to stay on task.

6. Understanding relationships and connecting with people and nature deeply.

Unschoolers can connect with people of all ages and demographics. They are free to connect with anyone, anytime. They can talk and engage in any way they wish. Similarly, willed learners can stay indoors if they so choose, but they can also move between places and spaces as they desire. Their bodies are not being controlled or constrained.

7. Participating in dialogue with oneself and others honestly and authentically.

An unschooler can be honest with themselves. They can self-determine what, when, where, why, how they want to be. They can authentically unfold in ways that make sense to themselves. They do not have to follow other peoples' agendas.

Unschooling is about living democratically and honestly, which is, in my view, consistent with meditative inquiry.

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Opening Silent Wings, Given Time and Space: A Journal Editor's Perspective

Teresa Strong-Wilson

McGill Journal of Education

To read Kumar's volume as a journal editor is to have an eye on its reception by scholars as well as its import for practitioners; as a generalist journal in education, the *McGill Journal of Education (MJE)* caters to both. As journal editors, we are regularly asked to read and respond to others' writing, open spaces for thinking and dialogue, provide avenues for peer review, and consider the probable reception of a work to the communities of concern to the journal. To be a journal editor is to be a kind of gatekeeper. It is to ask questions like: What *is* meditative inquiry? What will be its contribution—to teachers, to students, to researchers—within contexts of formal and informal learning? The *MJE* is interested in contributions across the spectrum, in various sites of learning and teaching.

Looking up the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I find that meditation is considered a disposition of being "inclined or accustomed to meditation." The argument in Kumar's book speaks to my own autobiographical research with teachers. Provoked, I ask myself: How might I "observe the movement of thought without the interference of the 'I'" (McCaw & Quay in Kumar, p. 144)? I get stuck on the word *interference*, however, as if I was a *MJE* book reviewer, and turn back to the book. I recognize, with Podolski, that "while I have heard of the phrase meditative inquiry only recently, I believe I have been engaged in it for a long time" (p. xliii). Writing as

meditative practice immediately comes to mind. For teachers (one of our key audiences as a journal), Downey suggests that meditation would begin "by asking yourself serious, meaningful questions and giving yourself time and space to answer them" (p. 88); I think of our *Notes from the Field* section. For graduate students, who are *MJE* authors and readers, Kumar offers "suggestions... to slow down, to be aware of the internal turmoil" and "give attention ... to those things" that matter "so that they may grow further" (Acharya, p. 3). Curious, I look back into the journal to find evidence of mindfulness. Kyte (2017) on yoga for teachers turns up as does Stewart and Alrutz (2013) on contemplative practices of service-learners. Then I stumble across Clifford Papke's (1984) *Méditation*, which only consists of a black and white drawing of a silent wood whose trees in the foreground have been disturbed: flattened. Further research in the journal discloses past *MJE* editors, like William Talley or John Harley, who encouraged the use of images and poetry, often incorporating one or both into their editorials. I muse. I consider how the *MJE* Forum could be used as a place to have a conversation, discursively and through images around meditative inquiry. I then find Rajabali (2020) and wonder how the journal could engage in "opening silent wings" (p. 701).

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Author Bios

Paul Freedman is the Coordinating Editor of *The Holistic Education Review*, an Open Access peer review journal. He is the Founding Head of the Salmonberry School on Orcas Island, WA, where he continues to serve, and where he taught for many years. Paul is on the faculty of The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES). Paul served as President of the Graduate Institute for Transformative Learning, was a Contributing Editor for *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, and is the Co-director of the Holistic Education Initiative. Paul has presented papers and workshops at many conferences. His TEDx Talk is on "Deep Education," and can be found on YouTube.

Laurel Tien: Inspired by the self-directed learning journey of my children—now young adults!—I embarked on my own parallel path through the SelfDesign Graduate Institute's MA program. I have continued to deepen my understanding of post-traditional education through my PhD in the Transformative Studies program at California Institute of Integral Studies, where my dissertation focused on privileging emergence and relational learning as generative collective wisdom. My teaching and research over the past ten years has focused on experiential, holistic, integral and transformational approaches to education. In these roles I get to see the power of holding space for holistic, emergent knowing with individuals and intentional learning communities. Academic Website: <https://laureltien.academia.edu/>

Helen E. Lees is an independent scholar working at the interface of alternative education concepts

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Teresa Strong-Wilson is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill University and Editor-in-Chief of *the McGill Journal of Education*. Her research has primarily been with teachers on the critical use of stories in the classroom. She has published extensively in autobiography, curriculum, early childhood, memory studies and social justice education, in such peer-reviewed journals as *Changing English, Children's Literature in Education, Educational Theory, Journal of Curriculum Studies, Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, Teachers and Teaching*, and *Theory into Practice*. Her most recently-published book is called *Teachers' Ethical Self-encounters with Counter-stories in the Classroom: From Implicated to Concerned Subjects* (Routledge, 2021).

6) Holistic and Contemplative Education Scholars Panel

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Abstract

In the *Holistic and Contemplative Education Scholars Panel*, the speakers discuss the place for arts-based research, as well as holistic approaches in education. Ehaab Abdou considers wisdom-based knowledge systems, contemplative practices in higher education, and meditative inquiry in his presentation, “Reflecting on the Meditative Inquiry Volume in Relation to Contemplative Practices in The Classroom.” Alexandra Fidyk presents on the importance of silence and attention in “Silence as Generative Process and Practice.” Martin Morrison connects culturally responsive teaching practices and meditative inquiry in “Exploring the Implications of Meditative Inquiry on Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy and the ‘African Nova Scotian Dream Keepers’”. Darlene St. Georges presents the significance of creation-based research through examples of work in her presentation, “Maeve: Threads of Creation-Centred Research.”

Meditation: This panel began with Alexandra Fidyk guiding us through a meditation entitled: “Soft, Slow, and Somatic”. This meditation focused on breath awareness, inviting participants to intentionally focus on slight movements in synchronicity with breath.

YouTube Link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HeiPt7V5NU&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf&index=6&t=1s

Keywords: *ancient and Indigenous wisdom traditions, traditionally marginalized wisdom traditions, reconciliation and inter-religious dialogue, curricula and classroom practices / silence, presence, attention, place, love / meditative inquiry, culturally relevant, culturally responsive, pedagogy, opportunity gap / creation-centred research, métissage, storying, poetic inquiry*

Reflecting on the Meditative Inquiry Volume in Relation to Contemplative Practices in the Classroom

Ehaab Abdou

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In my presentation, I reflect on the meditative inquiry edited collection, especially based on my efforts to introduce contemplative practices within my university teaching. Further, I reflect on how I plan to draw on some of meditative inquiry's approaches in my ongoing research and teaching.

In courses that I have been teaching on social entrepreneurship and community development, I seek to expose students to contemplative practices and critical self-reflection methods, including through drawing on various wisdom traditions. Within such efforts, I had the pleasure of inviting Ashwani Kumar to share insights into the key tenets of meditative inquiry and practices. In students' reflections, it was clear how such insights would inform practices that they decided to adopt moving forward in their civic engagement and activism. However, such discussions also prompted me to ask: how can we continue to sustain and deepen our students' exposure to and potential adoption of more contemplative, reflective, and holistic approaches, including drawing on meditative inquiry's seven key principles (Kumar, 2022).

Further, engaging with some of those contemplative practices prompted me to seek to engage with other questions, including how I, as an educator, can be better prepared to proactively encourage and critically engage with potentially uncomfortable discussions, including shortcomings posed by instrumentalism and perhaps inadvertently propagating dominant and

exclusionary ideologies (see Kumar & Acharya, 2021; Kumar, 2022).

Finally, it encouraged me to ask how we can continue to create safe and brave spaces to engage with historical injustices and exclusionary social structures and practices endured by, as well as sometimes propagated by, some of these wisdom traditions I seek to draw on. It is my hope that such critical reflections can help identify and develop more culturally responsive approaches that can encourage students to be more comfortable vis-à-vis drawing on their own communities' cultural backgrounds and wisdom traditions.

As I note in my presentation, in terms of my ongoing research and future teaching, I plan to draw on the contributions offered in the meditative inquiry collection, including in a new course on education and global wisdom traditions. First, in engaging with some of the marginalized and misrepresented wisdom traditions, there would need to be more attention paid to question and challenge "colonial and capitalist forces," which have "undermined and marginalized non-Eurocentric ways of being and knowing" (Kumar, 2022, pp. xxii–xxiii). Relatedly, the edited collection will continue to inspire me to seek to restore/(re)story the value of various ways of knowing. In her contribution, Diane Obed (2022) reminds us of the importance of Indigenous teachings in offering, "a reintegrated way of learning and thus holistic sense of beingness" (p. 160). We are also reminded by Susan M. Brigham (2022) that such efforts need to reintroduce other traditionally marginalized perspectives, including "reclaiming of African Indigenous knowledge" (p. 34). Finally, I am strongly inspired by Kumar's (2022) reminder that one of meditative inquiry's objectives is to restore

the value of “intuition and intrinsic intelligence” (p. xxiii). Thus, I see meditative inquiry as offering helpful avenues towards reconciling with and drawing on vernacular and popular beliefs and practices, including syncretic practices, that might have been historically negated, undervalued, or misrepresented. I consider this as a potential entry point towards restoring some traditionally marginalized wisdom traditions and approaches that can themselves hopefully offer spaces for dialogue and reconciliation.

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Silence as Generative Process & Practice

Alexandra Fidyk

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Growing up small in the Canadian prairie made for a radically different childhood than most today. As Wallace Stegner (1992) describes, “there is something about living in big . . . space, where people are few and distant, under a great sky that is alternately serene and furious—there is something about exposure to that big country” (p. 9–10). I witnessed and was part of life’s cycles—mating, birthing, and dying—and knew that my existence was intricately interwoven with theirs. Such immersion led to merging—an experience where the edges of things blur even dissolve or invert the imposed divisions of subject

and object. This symbiotic relationship between self and wildness, a “psycho-spiritual experience” (p. 21), drew me to deeper psychic layers into “the world of archetypes, including the Self”—an organizing and creating impulse toward fuller becoming (Hollister Wheelwright, as cited in Hollister, 2013, p. 25). Here, I met Silence: ancestral, paradoxical, Mother of cosmic and terra places.

This description locates my experience with meditative inquiring: living deeply in place, in relation to fields, drought, night skies, and my horse—elements with which our lives were intimately interwoven in a cosmic continuum. Sustainable farm-life with extended family and interdependent rural communities was a “caring obligation” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 147) where what we did was “care as doing” (p. 160); life sustaining practice as “care as situated” (p. 162). Care with conscious and unconscious limitations as there was exclusion, racism, sexism, and violence. Even with these realities, “each task of creation is a social effort, employing the whole universe” (Whitehead, 1929/1969, p. 222).

Meditative Inquiry as “social effort” is “attentiveness to daily life” (Kumar, 2022, p. xxii); “an emergent process” (p. xxiv); “an art of listening” (p. xxv); and an engaged practice “learning from [and] through silence” (Kumar in Kumar & Downey, 2018, p. 56). “Meditative Inquiry is an exploration within oneself and of how one is connected to life relationally, ecologically, economically, politically, and culturally. It is this existential and social exploration” (Kumar, 2022, p. xxix) that can underwrite profound change—because it can undo learning and believing—and redo from another ethno-onto-epistemology. Similarly, my studies of/in Silence as “poetic consciousness,” “practical

philosophy,” and “contemplative practice” offer “a pedagogy of presence” (Fidyk, 2006, p. 20) for renewal in our teaching practices and living well collectively. Such exploration, itself named “a meditation about silence and love” (p. 26) is a meditative inquiry.

Meditative Inquiry invites us whole—. Whole includes the unseen, unthinkable, and unspeakable. With amplified division, fear, and reduced capacity across contemporary societies, the practices of slow, attention, and attunement provide a critical beginning if we are to perceive and respond to one another and sentient beings in ethically-responsible ways. Such embodied practice coupled with attentive listening provides a necessary place to reflect; re-member; re-consider; re-story; re-imagine and a host of other re-vitalizing responses. Silence as active experience; pre-conscious multiplicity; and bodily feeling, provides the necessary ground for knitting knowledge between self and world. Relationship is fundamental to learning, teaching, living, and becoming . . . more whole. Relationship and relations demand attention, as Martha Nussbaum (1990) wrote, “an openness to being moved by the plight of others,” the willingness “to be touched by another’s life” (p. 162). As such, relations are imbued with Silence because Silence relies on attention. Attention, the “rarest and purest form of generosity” (Weil in Pétrement, 1976), is a contemplative act through which we reap the riches of existence. Attention, for Simone Weil (1999), when taken to its fullest is “prayer. It presupposes faith and love” (p. 117). Attention is where education begins.

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Exploring the Implications of Meditative Inquiry for Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy and the “African Nova Scotian Dream keepers”

Martin Morrison

Mount Saint Vincent University

Professional development supports for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning are being provided to Centres of education and schools across the province of Nova Scotia. This training and support are being offered by representatives of the education system in response to school climate concerns and student performance gaps experienced by racialized and marginalized learners (Commission on Inclusive Education, 2018).

The central tenets of culturally responsiveness embody using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate (Gay, 2010). Culturally relevant teaching and learning requires the presence of each of the following criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and development of sociopolitical or critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, these interventions have not created a critical mass of educators capable of responding to the historical and ongoing negative student performance and school climate concerns experienced by African Nova Scotian learners (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021).

Kumar’s approach to meditative inquiry offers an additional and central component that is often missing in traditional professional development offerings, which is the place of the educator

beyond their credentialization in student success and safety. An exploration of the implications of their personal cultural values and beliefs, in reflecting on the ways in which who they are may be impacting their ability to meet the needs of learners whose culture, values, and beliefs do not align with their own, is central to unearthing gaps in the application of effective response to current educational challenges.

Meditative inquiry, as articulated in Kumar’s (2022) seven key principles of meditative inquiry, centres the location of the teacher and the depth at which the teacher knows, understands, and applies their own theoretical framework and directs their pedagogical approaches in affirming and validating students in their class. It requires the following seven principles: Questioning deeply about everything without fear; critiquing social injustice, oppression and discrimination; celebrating the freedom to think, to observe, to express and to be; cultivating awareness of the ways one thinks, feels, and acts; partaking and rejoicing in the creative flow of life; understanding relationship and connecting with people and nature deeply; and participating in dialogue with oneself and others honestly and authentically.

This presentation explores the opportunity meditative inquiry offers as a transformative approach to a more culturally relevant and responsive teaching and learning environments for all learners.

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needed unravelling, re)learning and discoveries to take place.

Maeve is a creation story of living—surviving and evolving—through layered complexities of being. It is a dreaming and counternarrative of becoming through agency and ancestral connection.

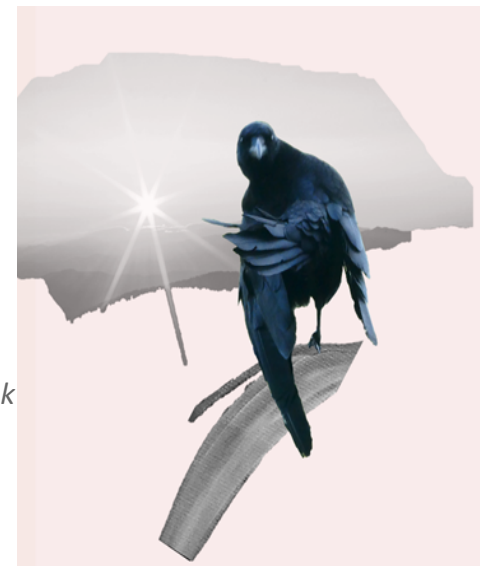
Maeve: Threads of Creation-Centred Research

Darlene St. Georges
University of Lethbridge

Spirit and mind, soul, and body, are one, and together they perceive a reality greater than the vision experienced in the ordinary world —Gloria Anzaldúa, 2015 p. 24

The gift of creation-centred approaches to inquiry, learning, unlearning, and teaching resists the colonial lens by virtue of exploring inner subjective space. By relinquishing colloquial aesthetic constraints, and enveloping a sacred space in which to restore, heal, and decolonize the imagination, creation-centred inquiry ushers in our creative life force as a conduit for a re)telling of our cosmic story. This restoration of knowledge(s) and knowing, ancient and ethereal, offers a critical and sacred place)space for much

*breathing into
Her slowed blood
acidity grew fear
in Her gut
remembering the break*



Maeve. [Photo-digital collage]. Darlene St. Georges 2022

Creation stories are rooted in epistemologies, that recognize and attend to the interconnections between making, learning, and knowing, through the entanglements and relationships of Self with Other, which include human and non-human beings (Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Deloria, 2012; Ermine,

1996; King 2003, 2008; Wilson, Breen, & Dupré, 2019).

*transfixed in silences
and unravelling
lines of existence
assemblages of shadows
and meandering memories
found their way to Her
through windows and openings*

Creation-centred research (St. Georges, 2020, in press) relies on creative-experiential-engagement and inter/intra-action, building upon relational connectivity and engages with embodied and lived experience. It is uniquely rooted in métissage (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009), poetic inquiry (Fidyk & St. Georges, 2022a/b) and storying (Archibald, 2009; 2019). It leans into art education theories and practices (Leavy, 2015, 2018).

*breathing into
Her slowed blood
with stillness
She chewed
with radicle root
and DNA obsession*

Situated in an aesthetic creation-centred paradigm, creation-centred inquiry honours the ontological and cyclical nature of artistic practices and supports its creative intention and integrity. It relinquishes colloquial aesthetic constraints and invites complexity and deeper realms of knowing and being, which include fragmentations; bits and pieces, holes and gaps, and silence(s). It offers a method of braiding poetry, image, fragments, myth, and verse. It mixes, juxtaposes, challenges, and hosts an artful research praxis. Specifically, it offers a “rapprochement” between mainstream

curriculum discourses and like meditative inquiry, it seeks a “sincere dialogue.”

Creation-centred research offers a critical place)space for much needed unravelling, re)learning and re)discovering to take place, igniting “a sense of freedom and a celebration of freedom as the highest principle of teaching, learning, and living.” (Kumar, 2022, p. xii). It offers a way to engage with learning outside traditional frameworks, where rather than studying an object or concept, one can experience it (Aoki, 2005).

*breathing into
Her slowed blood
in Her solitude
with spruce
and rivers
and creeks
and roads
wind swept
She became what she loved*

*fluid silver keys
dangling between points
sitting on the edge of light
before daybreak*

fluent

slick

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Author Bios

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Alexandra Fidyk, poet, philosopher, and professor, serves the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada. Her transdisciplinary research engages youth, teachers, and health-care

professionals on wellness, body image, and voice using somatosensorial, contemplative, relational, and creative-centred processes. Her scholarship integrates process philosophy, Buddhist thought, hermeneutics, poetic inquiry, and life writing to explore questions central to loving, suffering, and living well. She is a registered Jungian somatic psychotherapy with trauma-specialization, and Program Lead for the Trauma-Sensitive Practice Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies.

Martin Morrison is a member of the African Nova Scotian communities of Danvers and Southville and is the proud father of six children and one grandchild. Martin is a two-time MSVU graduate who holds a Master of Education in Lifelong Learning with a focus on Africentricity and a Bachelor of Education. As a current PhD candidate at MSVU, Martin's dissertation explores the themes and characteristics of teachers who have been identified as being culturally responsive to the needs of African Nova Scotian learners by representatives of the community. He is also the recipient of an Inter-University Research Network Grant to support his research.

Darlene St. Georges is a visual artist, poet, and creation-centred scholar. She is assistant professor of art education at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. Her theoretical and practice-based research recognizes the creative, critical, spiritual, and performative ways of knowing in the world. Through her work she generates and shares counter-narratives and creation stories that invites innovation in learning. Her creation-centred research embraces an unfolding metamorphosis of scholarship in provocative, creative, and intellectual ways. See: www.darlenestgeorges.com