

# ***Editorial: Introducing Contemplative Perspectives and Practices in Holistic Education***

**Heesoon Bai, Charles Scott, Renee Owen**

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## **Abstract**

An editorial by Charles Scott, Heesoon Bai, and Renee Owen to introduce the artfully curated articles surrounding the general theme of Contemplative Perspectives and Practices in Holistic Teaching Learning and Research for the *Holistic Education Review*, Issue 3 Volume 2.

**Keywords:** *contemplation, contemplative practice, contemplative curriculum, contemplative pedagogy, holistic education, well-being, arts-based research, reflective practice*

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Most journal editorials provide a summary of the content of a publication along with editorial commentary on the larger significance that threads articles together. Read on, and this editorial introducing HER's themed issue, *Contemplative perspectives and practices for teaching, learning, and research*, will do the same. Guest Editors Heesoon Bai and Charles Scott provide their approach to curating the content for this issue and share their editorial perspectives. However, before delving into the *content*, I invite you to engage in the contemplative act of exploring the *context* of this issue via a story—the story of how this issue developed.

At HER, when we publish a themed issue with a guest editor, one of the senior editors—usually the editor who proposed the particular theme—is responsible for working with the guest editor (or editors) to shepherd the issue from its conception

to its publication. In the case of this issue on contemplative aspects of holistic education, I (Renee) took on the shepherding role. Over a year ago, I met with the original Guest Editors to craft the call for this issue. Soon after, 29 authors submitted proposals to write articles on the contemplative topic. I was pleased with the response.

Nonetheless, I felt a larger perspective on the philosophy of contemplation in holistic education was needed, and I sought to recruit a few other Authors. About the same time, the original Guest Editors had both dropped out, leaving me feeling alone and somewhat desperate. Someone suggested I talk to Heesoon Bai, Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University, where she teaches in the Contemplative Inquiry and Approaches in Education program. So, I called Heesoon, hoping she would agree to write a

feature article. After an hour on the phone, which was filled with more laughter than talking, Heesoon agreed to not only write the feature article but to be our new Guest Editor. (With a “twinkle” in her voice, she says she has a rescue complex.) She also wanted to bring her colleague at Simon Fraser, Charles Scott, on board, which he readily agreed to do, not because he has a rescue complex, but because Charles says “yes” to everything. He is the most agreeable person I have ever known.

At our first editorial meeting, we agreed that as holistic educators and scholars, the process of working together was more valuable than the final product, and having fun was a top priority. Eventually, we added HER’s new Production Editor, Annie Rappaport, to our team, who was as much of a delight as Heesoon and Charles. We opened each meeting by sharing stories from our lives, making jokes about the state of the world, academia, and our own struggles and shortcomings. Our meetings had a sense of timelessness to them. Sometimes we didn’t get onto the topic of our meeting until about halfway through, but the work, when we got around to it, often felt effortless.

Together, we would meander into ontological dialogues about the meaning of contemplation, and my understanding of contemplative practices deepened. But better than words, is experience. Heesoon and Charles *embody* contemplation. And for anyone who mostly associates somberness or solitude with contemplation, being with Heesoon and Charles was the opposite. I developed an understanding of contemplation as a disposition, more so than a practice. A disposition that is relational, where we are always in motion – always *becoming*– in relation to one another. A disposition that is compassionate, where the

quality of our relationship matters more than the quantity of what we accomplish. Most palpable in my time with Heesoon and Charles was a disposition of joy. Every moment of working with Heesoon and Charles was joyful. Not that we were always happy, for there is much, far too much, suffering in the world. But authentic joy is an internal state that transcends our external circumstances. I could often sense how overworked Heesoon and Charles are, how much they give to their students, yet I never heard them complain. In fact, Heesoon once joked that she is trying to teach Charles how to complain, but it doesn’t come naturally to him. That’s because he embodies joy. I hope you enjoy this special issue of the *Holistic Education Review* as much as I enjoyed working on it.

One of the questions readers might consider as they engage with the various contributions in this issue is the following: As educators, how do we conceptualize contemplation or contemplative inquiry? And supposing that we have our conceptualization, then how do we apply that to, or translate that for, curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and assessment? That is, how do we create an educational praxis of contemplation or contemplative inquiry? We suggest that incorporating contemplative forms of inquiry in education can have a significant impact on the above-mentioned areas of curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and assessment.

### **A Note on Curating this Special Issue on Contemplative Education**

The contemplative field of educational studies is a vast and still growing domain of research and teaching, marked by deep diversity—as deep as humanity and human experiences. Given this, we

the Editors anticipated that the collection of papers we will end up with after the review process would exemplify a great degree of diversity. Diversity that is found in nature is, however, not just a collection of various items. Rather, diversity in nature is a matter of ecology, embodying the principle of interconnection and mutuality. With this understanding in mind, we the editorial team have attempted to see interconnection and mutuality revealed in the articles before us. We note here that such seeing is, not incidentally, a contemplative art. Contemplation is a way of seeing that reveals deeper, often hidden, meaning that comes out of understanding how things are interconnected and mutually supported. With this understanding in mind, we invite our readers to walk through the gallery of articles that we have curated for you.

### ***Gallery Walk***

As you enter the gallery, you will see a co-authored work by **Bai, Anderson, and Scott** (Simon Fraser University, Canada) that names “Contemplation as a Quintessential Educational Project for our Times,” as its title says it all. The authors mount an argument in which an etiological link is made between contemporary existential malaise and marginalization of human subjectivity/intersubjectivity and prioritization of the modernist science-driven value of objectivity. Going beyond the etiological argument, this work then showcases an educational program that honors and centralizes the subjective and intersubjective powered by contemplative practices.

Next comes the work by **Thomas Falkenberg** (University of Manitoba, Canada) that can be seen as a call to which the first article you read is a response. Falkenberg points out that over the last

two decades, well-being in schools has become a major concern to educators, communities, and researchers. At the same time, there is a two-thousand-year-old tradition of contemplative practices that has been mostly ignored in the concern for well-being in schools. This conceptual and theoretical article makes the case for a central role of the latter to advance the former for an education system that places student well-being at the core of its purpose.

Standing close to the first two pieces is a dialogue-based reflective essay, “Life as/of a Holistic Educator,” composed by **Jwalin Patel** (TIDE Foundation, India) and **Maya Shakti Berggren-Clausen** (Auroville, India). This piece, too, is a response to Falkenberg’s call in that it examines and demonstrates the lives of holistic educators. It underscores the importance of educators embodying holism whereby holism is understood as an epistemology that supports educators embracing a way of living and being for themselves. It explores how teachers embody personal values to walk the talk, question and decondition themselves to develop new visions and approaches to education, and are engaged in lifelong learning of self-transformation. Ultimately, starting with inner-work and self-transformation, the growing consciousness guides interactions with others, the pursuit of one’s dharma, and contributions to the larger society.

Speaking of “Life as/of a Holistic Educator,” we have in our midst a holistic educator extraordinaire, Professor **Jing Lin** (University of Maryland). The bold title of the interview, “From Contemplative Inner Quest to Care and Love for the World and Oneness of All Creations: An Interview with Jing Lin,” accurately sums up Dr. Lin’s life as a holistic and contemplative educator. As an educator her sphere of influence is very

large and is still growing. So many of us are personally and professionally inspired by her life, and thus inspired, we, too, carry on spreading the educational vision and mission that inspired her. The interview covers her early life experiences in China, her career as a scholar in North America, and her various areas of scholarship that touch on both contemplative and holistic education.

Rounding a corner, we then come to a large open area that has been set up to host a whole collection of inspiring Community Voices pieces. Inspired, very lively conversations amongst gallery visitors are taking place here.

The first piece we encounter is “Gently Riding Waves in the Ocean of Our Humanity: Embodying Contemplative Practices” by **Narelle Lemon** (Swinburne University of Technology, Australia), **Joanna Higgins** (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand), **Linda Noble** (Brooklyn College) and **Malgorzata Powietrzynska** (Brooklyn College). These authors present their autoethnographic and hermeneutic explorations around being academics who are embodying various contemplative orientations and practices: “We share how we each embody contemplative practices in different ways and with(in) different contexts through poetic expression, musicianship and being nurtured by earth and sustained by water.” These various artistic, embodied, and creative expressions beautifully capture well-being, ‘well-becoming,’ and the enchantment that attends contemplative awareness.

Next comes “Emanations from the *Dendron Series*” by **Kathy Mantas** (Nipissing University, Ontario, Canada) who offers a contemplative métissage of photography and writing (her own and short passages by authors likely well known to our readers) that focuses on her as learner,

teacher, and scholar engaging in the contemplative aspects of wandering, wondering, wa(l)king, noticing, attending, being/becoming/living and, especially for the artist, trusting in the contemplative arts processes themselves. She delightfully frames this all as a “peripatetic aesthetic praxis” that does indeed serve as an encounter and a provocation. Her writing focuses on the verbs—the contemplative processes—while the photographs serve as opportunities to see these qualities captured in the scene, in the moment; the photographs represent a series of revelatory ‘emanations,’ testaments to what she refers to as ‘artful attention.’ And she brings us to a slowing down, a looking down, slowly; the eyes of wholeness can allow us to act with integrity and kindness.

Carrying forward with the theme of contemplative inquiry through the arts, **Simran Sarwara** (Simon Fraser University, Canada) in “Bhojan-Veechar: A Contemplative Essay” offers a deeply personal perspective—a ‘living response’ —in addressing, “What is Contemplation?” (‘Bhojan’ is Hindi for food; ‘Veechar’ translates as an active form of contemplation; in Sikh culture, *shabad-veechar* is a contemplation of the sacred teachings.) For Sarwara, contemplation becomes an active, contemplative engagement that acknowledges and builds on presence; it is a ‘gentle attentivity.’ In her creatively unique approach of mixing poetry with scholarly prose, she begins the poetic expression with this enticement, reminiscent of Rumi’s “Special Plates”:

*Have you ever  
Noticed  
The cool echo of a steel pot  
Etched with the markings of your  
Mother’s home ...*

Continuing the devotional theme in contemplative education, we come upon **David Jardine's** piece, "Adorned with the Greatest Fortune," which is inspired by the life and work of Thich Nhat Hanh. Jardine (Professor Emeritus, University of Calgary, Canada) highlights two key educational elements: the life of the teacher and the primacy of the educational encounter, the between, the daily miracles we encounter in the most 'mundane': "Come put your bare foot down. All is a miracle." Understanding this could be the *sine qua non* and life work of developing an integrated curriculum—*Vitarka*, the wheel or flow of the teaching; its fearless presence. The radiant beings like Thich Nhat Hanh who manifest these teachings, who are "adorned with the greatest fortune," are themselves, like us, impermanent. But even here, in the heart of impermanence, we sow seeds—miracles unfurling anew. Tathata! Tidings of wonder and joy!

Another strong community voice rises high above the usual cacophony of educational discourse. "After all, we are not here just to impart information or teach memorization of facts, but to teach aliveness," asserts **Troy Gregorino** (University of the Columbians, Ohio) in "The Five Remembrances: Fuel for Contemplative Education." Toward that end, he reminds us of "The Buddha's Five Remembrances: Fuel for Contemplative Education," suggesting they "serve as a kind of ballast for standing in a place of stability and clear perspective." Fittingly, he asks us to consider the purpose of education itself; how might we, he asks, "arrive as our fullest, most present and attentive selves?" The Five Remembrances can serve as a call requiring our individual response.

**John Bickart** returns with a similar call in "Learn to Return." He asks us to "Learn to Return," meaning

attend to the here and now. As well, Bickart tells us, we need to appreciate that time and space are not separate and that time is a space. To aid in our understanding, Bickart shares a story of "The Fairy Gate" that touches on a fairy, a princess, the longing for togetherness, and the passing through a gate to eternity.

We now come to the last piece in Community Voices. **Remington Cooney** (Universitas Triatma Mulya Stenden, Indonesia), in "A Journey Through the Creation and Delivery of Mindful Leadership: Application of Mindfulness in Industry; the Power of the Classroom Container and the Emotional Transformation That Occurs Within It," takes us through the development and enactment of a mindfulness leadership program in a bachelor's program in Human Resources Management for senior students at a university in Bali, Indonesia. His aim is to provide "integrated foundational practices of mindfulness and emotional intelligence into more contemporary leadership studies." As the title suggests, he focuses on the power of building community and creating the learning 'container': the psychic space of committed engagement and possibility. The essay provides valuable insights for those undertaking integrated approaches to contemplatively based educational programs.

Leaving the big open space for Community Voices, we now enter a long corridor in which an extensive set of curricular research papers that address contemplative approaches in teaching are displayed. First piece, "Teaching and Teachers of Mindfulness Interventions in Western Educational Settings," is by **Narelle Lemon** (Swinburne University of Technology, Australia) and **Melissa Pineda Pinto** (Trinity College, Ireland). Their work offers a systematic literature review of mindfulness interventions in western educational

settings, pointing out that the applications of mindfulness have at times been problematic, “highly ambivalent” interventions. Their review of 54 studies examines various impacts of these interventions and illumines a number of considerations of approaches, impacts, the role of the educator, and ethical challenges. Lemon and Pinto point to the need to offer a critical examination of the purpose of applying mindfulness in education, calling for a return to considering mindfulness more holistically in its potential roles in personal transformation and development of teacher practice.

Next comes “Cultivating Contemplative Inquiry” by **Kathleen Kesson** (Professor Emerita, Long Island University) who advances the contemplative approach of Descriptive Inquiry as a means of enhancing the learning relationship with children through a deep, well-integrated approach to contemplative attention. Kesson shows how understanding and meaning can emerge out of a more intimate relationship with the child, wherein there is an ‘indwelling in the other.’ Kesson explains that intersubjective indwelling through descriptive inquiry offers ways forward that bring both student and teacher into a greater manifestation of the fullness of being.

Next comes **Lea Carla Abrams** (independent educator (ECE to graduate level), writer, and poet) who, in “The Contemplative Practice of Crossing the Threshold,” explores what it means to cross the transformative threshold between spaces in entering the dynamic, intentional space of the classroom. This notion has been for her both a concept and practice that she has found “sacred and powerful.” She beautifully shares a touching vignette of a young student of hers and his journey in coming to cross the threshold: “Until, one day...” A bit later in recounting the story, she

adds, profoundly “... I realized then how powerful the space between spaces could be.” Abrams goes on to share how she implemented the concept of crossing the *Threshold* and how students responded positively to the practice: “It was magic. Students loved this new way of experiencing changes in their environment.” Most inspiring!

We then come to **Haley Moore’s** (doctoral candidate in Music Teaching and Learning at the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester) piece, “Fostering Connection through Core Reflection.” This piece examines the possibilities of a contemplative approach she refers to as “Core Reflection” in helping educators harness the full potential of their students—and themselves!—by focusing on “teachers’ and students’ core qualities ... the most basic and unique characteristics that define your being.” The author undertook an action research project of this process with a group of high school students, where she explained the process to them and gave them opportunities to engage in the process during the semester.

Then comes a paper, “The Thorns and Roses of Contemplative Curriculum: Exploring Undergraduates’ Journeys with Self-Awareness,” by **Jennifer Schneider, Jon L. Smythe, and Jo Flory** (all at Oklahoma State University) who offers a glimpse into qualitative research that explores the living nature of contemplative curriculum through the experiences of an educator and students at a university in the central United States. While the process of generating data for the project is ongoing, we share findings based on a sliver of the data, namely, what emerged through their collaborative analysis of 11 students’ writings produced during an undergraduate course dedicated to contemplative inquiry. Their analysis

reveals how such inquiry invites the self to be sensed more fully and how beliefs constructed about selfhood can become problematized. Very thought-provoking . . .

In “Exploring Adolescents’ Perceptions of Contemplatives Practices and Forms of Learning in Indian Secondary Schools,” **Robert Roeser** and **Marisa DeCollibus** (The Pennsylvania State University) offer the results of their mixed-methods research in India how these findings relate to outcomes in the West and, significantly, how different concepts and framings of education may well play a role in determining the outcomes. Their particular research focused on “novel contemplative educational approaches focused on cultivating students’ attentional, social-emotional, and ethical skills” as they were applied in four different schools, so these approaches would seem to represent more holistic approaches to contemplative education. In the analysis and discussion, the authors focus on the orientation behind providing contemplative practices (aims), the specific practices employed (curriculum and pedagogy), and the results or ‘fruits’ expected from the adolescents’ perspectives (students’ assessments). The cross-cultural implications are worth noting.

Speaking of the cross-cultural theme, we now come to **Maryann Krikorian** (Loyola Marymount University) who presents a uniquely challenging research project in “Cross-Cultural Validation of a Measure of Contemplativity with a Chinese College Sample.” This follows earlier, similar work of the author’s published in the Journal of Contemplative Inquiry that laid the groundwork for this quantitative research project; here, Krikorian seeks to provide cross-cultural validation of a particular scale of contemplative practices. As editors who work in educational philosophy and

are required to address conceptual analysis, we suggest that presenting an objective and empirically based measure of contemplation represents a formidable challenge, which Krikorian has attempted to address. In a field that is most often characterized by qualitative, phenomenological, and hermeneutic forms of research, presenting a quantitative research project may well be just what is required, if for no other reason than that it forces each of us to consider what contemplation or contemplative inquiry represent *and* what, if anything, make them unique and distinct from other forms of reflection and reflective practice.

Our research-work stroll ends with **Justin Pilla’s** work, “Quantifying the Spiritual,” that offers a useful conceptual essay revolving around assessing spirituality in students. The essay is prefaced by a helpful prologue from journal editor Renee Owen that offers background context to the development and inclusion of the essay in this issue. To be clear, Justin Pilla (Northern Virginia Community College) argues that he is trying to “quantify the ineffable (i.e., measure spirituality).” Incredible! We agree they do focus on ‘measurement,’ but suggest they appear to reside more in the realm of the qualitative and are in fact affirmations of various forms of qualitative assessment. We heartily agree with his assertion that “observing Spiritual Values . . . can be a far more subtle, nuanced and subjective process.” Pilla offers Four Aspects of the Spiritual Domain that he feels can serve as a “comprehensive, elemental map to help observe and evaluate spirituality,” and he focuses particularly on the fourth of these, spiritual values. Finally, in what might be the most important section of the essay, he addresses the lens of the evaluator (epistemology) and the spiritual capacities of the

teacher required in the evaluative process he proposes.

At last, we exit the research work corridor, and our gallery walk is about to end. We come to our Finale piece: in “The Farther Reaches of Contemplative Inquiry,” **Charles Scott** (Simon Fraser University, Canada) draws from both ancient contemplative teaching and contemporary scholarship in an exploration of contemplation as a transcendent, spiritual inquiry that is holistic and integrated in nature. He also frames contemplative education as a transformative epistemological, ontological, and axiological project that can allow us to explore the farther reaches of contemplative inquiry.

That concludes our gallery walk! We want to thank all our reviewers for their generosity, as expressed in time and critical insight. As most of our readers are aware, there is almost a crisis in reviewing across disciplines today: scholars are overworked as it is between publishing, teaching, and committee service; adding reviewing tasks, which are essential to scholarship, adds another significant burden. We all can relate to having turned down requests to review. So we are very grateful for the time and careful effort—so discernable in their reviews!—our reviewers put forth. It is no exaggeration to say that advancements in our field of holistic education and contemplative inquiry could not occur without these efforts.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field.*

*I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas,*

*language,*

*even the phrase "each other"*

*doesn't make any sense.*

~ Rumi (Barks, 1995, p. 36)

#### Peer Reviewed Articles in This Issue:

Thomas Falkenberg

*“Contemplative Practices and the Concern for Well-Being in Schools: A Well-Being Pedagogy”*

Kathleen Kesson

*“Cultivating Contemplative Inquiry”*

Haley Moore

*“Core Reflection for Teacher and Student Connection”*

Narelle Lemon & Melissa Pineda Pinto

*“Teaching and Teachers of Mindfulness Interventions in Western Educational Settings: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review”*

Maryann Krikorian

*“Cross-Cultural Validation of a Measure of Contemplativity with a Chinese College Sample”*

Jennifer Schneider

*“The Thorns and Roses of Contemplative Curriculum: Exploring Undergraduates’ Journeys with Self-Awareness”*

Robert Roeser & Marissa DeCollieus

*“Exploring Adolescents’ Perceptions of Contemplatives Practices and Forms of Learning in Indian Schools”*

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## Author Bios

**Heesoon Bai, Ph.D.**, is Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU). She is an educational philosopher and a psychotherapist with a deepening interest in holistic-contemplative education and Ethics of Healing. Through contemplative inquiry and practices as well as psychotherapeutic education, Dr. Bai offers ways of healing, replenishing, and animating human beings and encourages making a collective transition to a post-egoic culture. Her current research interests cluster around examining and deconstructing ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie our culture's hurtful and harmful ways with the earth and its inhabitants. She has co-edited three volumes on contemplative education (State University of New York Press), and one volume on ecological virtues (University of Regina Press).

Website:

<http://www.sfu.ca/education/faculty-profiles/hbai.html> Many of her academic publications can be downloaded from her SFU web depository here: <https://summit.sfu.ca/collection/30113>

**Charles Scott** is an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University where he is co-coordinator of and teaches in a Master's program in Contemplative Inquiry and Approaches in Education. Scott is also an Associate Professor at City University in Canada, where he teaches courses in the M.Ed. School Counseling program. His research interests are in contemplative inquiry, spirituality in education, dialogue in education, holistic education, and the considerations and intersections of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

**Renee Owen** teaches Educational Leadership, Adult Learning, and Holistic Classroom Management courses at Southern Oregon University, in Ashland, OR. She has over 20 years experience as a holistic school leader in unique public and private schools, where they used a holistic, human-centered approach toward closing the opportunity gap and uplifting the human spirit. Her doctoral degree is from Columbia University Teachers College where I studied Organizational Development/Adult Learning, through a program that focused largely on transformative learning. In both my practice and research, I continue to view education through the lens of transformative learning, both at the individual level and at the systems level.