

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence

Edited by Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel, & Carl Leggo

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Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel, and Carl Leggo gather the writing of kindred souls/authors into one edited volume, *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence*, which brings to life varied intersections across mindfulness, contemplation, and spirituality. The subtitle of this edited volume, *Honoring Presence*, is revealed to hold much wisdom for living well in the world with others. As a whole, the volume focuses on how arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching draw attention to the ability to see, and concomitantly act, on the potentiality of the present. It is the shared commitment of participating authors to ground their understandings of what it means to honour presence in their distinct arts-based and contemplative practices. In doing so, they highlight “the embodied, active, and also disciplined (repeated) quality of [their] contemplative and artistic engagements with the world” (p. 13), as presence is deeply sought and evoked. The authors’ wisdom is expressed as the text engages readers, providing opportunities to surrender and reflect again and again, and awakening them to the potentiality of being alive within every present moment.

It is the capacity for awakening, released through the journey to surrender and reflect, that permeates my read of this volume as a whole. I am reminded of Aoki’s (1991)

characterization of such awakening as being “inspired—a quality of body and soul intertwining in their fullness” (p. 18). The introduction, co-authored by the editors, grounds the revered, shared commitment of all contributing authors within their personal artistic and contemplative practices. An invitational tone is set, positioning readers to bring their personal experiences and embark on an inspired journey. This invitation is extended further in Chapter 2, as authors Kerri Mesner, Barbara Bickel, and Susan Walsh encourage readers to embrace the journey of surrendering and reflecting. They explain how selected “Lectios” within the book offer readers a contemplative space or path between all successive chapters, and are intended to position readers to intertwine body and soul throughout the reading experience. Readers then encounter poems, photographs, and prose, fostering a reading experience with its own found pace and pattern. Chapter 4, co-authored by Susan Walsh and Heeson Bai, foregrounds the necessity of generous spaces “for the other to be-with-what-is” (p. 26) through writing and rewriting practices that attend or “witness” non-judgementally to each other’s inquiries. Chapter 6, authored by Vicki Kelly, powerfully enables readers to understand their relatedness to each other through arts-making experiences following the sacred pathway of an Indigenous artist.

In Chapter 8, authors Celeste Snowber and Barbara Bickel confront and negotiate the accompanying qualities arising through attending to meaning-making processes such as openness, emotions, discomfort, and invigoration, among others, that both of their work elicits through the intertwinings of dance, sound, and paint. In Chapter 10, author Kerri Mesner wrestles with the ambiguities, challenges, and gifts found within multiple identities and across varied disciplines and traditions. Giving expression to the movement of thinking and ensuing ideas through performative ethnography, Mesner exposes the lived sense-making spaces between queer sexual and gender identities. Through performative inquiry, Chapter 12 author Lynn Fels places particular emphasis on the birthing process of moments and the significances manifested for all involved. “Stop moments” (p. 121), as Fels terms them, hold gifts for receiving and giving. “Mindful play” (p. 132), foregrounded through freestyle rap, characterizes the rhythmic sense-making authors Sean Park and Shahar Rabi portray as key to all learning in Chapter 14. “The beat of education” (p. 136) is not imposed, but found within the texture of the unfolding account itself. Chapter 16, the concluding chapter, authored by Carl Leggo, brings forth images of poetic remembering, forgetting, imagining, living, lingering, and loving tales as a “way of being and becoming” (p. 166) that moves minds, bodies, and spirits. It is this move-

ment to which the book in its entirety speaks, while revealing the terrain from within.

All those interested in cross-disciplinary connections will find this edited volume offers powerful insights, found at the intersections of contemplative studies and diverse artistic practices and traditions. Each chapter reveals how the arts, education, and spirituality become catalysts for individual and community transformation through attention to the temporality at play within the present. The findings that emerge insist on participation being "...ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call, to walk with others in life's ventures" (Aoki, 1991, p. 21). Indeed, this book offers many paths to walk with others, but reminds all of us that the "inspirited" journeys that ensue must honour what is given, embracing the past, yet remaining open to what might be. The "inspirited" journeys that comprise the book come into presence through attention, relation, and connection, and in doing so, the authors collectively provide voices and imagery to reframe education. It is only by traversing the inspirited terrain exposed, and providing access to, and practise with, matters reframing education, that I surmise a language will emerge and strengthen, prompting new capacities to see and act accordingly with these matters. It is such matters that will invest long-term in human well-being in a shared world. I join these authors in seeing the possibilities that abound for research, pedagogy, and living. The authors included in this volume create an inspirited reading experience that motivates readers to boldly act upon what they learn.

References

- Aoki, T. T. (1991). *Inspiring curriculum and pedagogy: Talks to teachers*. Edmonton, AB: Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.