



REVIEW OF “ARTS-BASED CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES IN EDUCATION”: 2017 CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION ARTS PRE-CONFERENCE

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Riffing with

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ABSTRACT: This review is a poetic and photographic response to a pre-conference session convened in May 2017 by the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS) of the Canadian Society for Studies in Education, and organized by Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel, Carl Leggo, and Diane Conrad. The gathering took place in Toronto, Canada on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, and of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. The theme of the pre-conference was arts-based contemplative practices in education. The day offered a collaborative space for learning and co-creation as a community of practice supported by a hospitable and responsive design. This enabled movement away from traditional vertical hierarchies of knowledge dissemination towards more lateral exchanges and emergent learning structures.

KEYWORDS: Art/Research reviews; Arts-based practices; Contemplative practices; Participatory conferences; Responsiveness; Lateral relations

Spacious Space

The invitation is clear: arrive as you are; join in the mix; be at ease. Conference organizers welcomed participants with warmth. An energetic buzz builds in the room.

An open space filled with comfortable furniture and a large kitchen at the centre. A second room lays off to the side where the labyrinth will be made. This is a [community arts and social innovation space](#) in the heart of Toronto.

Soon a gentle pulling: a flute, a non-verbal summoning to gather, a melodic call to attention. An awakening to different ways of attending, of calling to one another.

This land

We circle to acknowledge this land, the six directions, and our hosts—the first inhabitants of this land. We do not rush this opportunity to sense into our larger-than-self consciousness of ecological relations and broad notions of community.

Emptying out

We began with a pause. to which we return

again and again.

What do you need right now?

Sit in silence

write

walk the labyrinth

talk softly with another

sketch

stretch

dream.

Attend to your sweetness

your sadness

your frazzled nerves.

Be:

utterly

non-productive

shift the ground to ease

align yourself with a gentle and open hand

Where does the doing go when it is done?

Small Catalysts: Large Results

Lectio Devina. We are invited to bring meaningful quotes to read and share in small groups. We offer words that rest in our hearts, dance through our minds, are held in our bodies, run through our scholarship. We offer these to one another with appreciation. What might we know/grow from these seedlings? In the Lectio Devina (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015) tradition, we read our quotes three times each contemplating the multiple layers that arise.

Simple and deep questions widen, tug, surface, coalesce collective insight. What is a contemplative arts practice? What is contemplation? Why are contemplative arts practices important? No need to over determine the content or process: Trust who is in the room.

Collected-collective wisdom. Sign-up on the whiteboard to share an artful contemplative practice session that enthuses you: contemplative photography; embodied poetics; intuitive arts; meditative inquiry through classical Indian music; ecological inquiry; haikus about inner and outer traffic; love-making as book review; dramatic inquiry; post-life contemplation.... and that's not all of us. We are many with much to share. A generous generativity ensued.

Three Appreciations

Community of Practice. We are an arts-based community and we aspire to disruptive approaches to knowledge production and collaboration, yet we are often stuck “doing conferences” in the traditional ways. On this day though we exemplify an authentic disruption of the habits of broadcasting expertise and scholarly identity. We enact a more lateral and participatory mode of exchange. All generations of scholars mix and share.



Figure 1 & 2. Photos by Kathryn Ricketts riffing with Pamela Richardson taken in Vancouver, BC.

In response to the pre-conference, we have endeavoured to create renderings in the form of prose, poetry and image. The photos were taken during our shared walking/reflecting/composing where we were struck by street images that were emblematic of our rich

ruminations on traditional paradigms of scholarship, often built on vertical hierarchies, and new forms of scholarly exchange representing lateral frameworks.

Hospitality. Attention to our physical, emotional, and social well-being is intentional. A radical inclusion of our whole being. Nothing is forced or abrupt. We are summoned by the sound of Vicki Kelly's flute. We flow from experience to experience. The kitchen is at the heart of the space and Diane is often found attending with care to food preparation.

Responsiveness. The shape and flow of the day is responsive to both the environment and the participants. The use of the space is open and organic. The conference organizers skillfully balance responsiveness with structure. Participants are called to contribute and there is a porosity in terms of realization. Diverse ways of sharing and an undoing of hierarchies of expertise emerges. It is a living event.

Gentle Questions

Building on the groundbreaking nature of the day, here are questions to walk us forward with open arms, minds, and hearts:

How might we go even deeper with the responsive, emergent, and lateral design to further participatory and diverse engagement? How might Indigenous awareness be even more interwoven and included throughout the event? How can we ensure new and emerging scholars feel supported and included in meaningful ways?

REFERENCES

Walsh, S., Bickel, B., & Leggo, C. (Eds.). (2015). *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honoring presence*. New York, NY: Routledge.