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Self, Eco-relationality and Peace Pedagogy: Lessons and Challenges from Wisdom Traditions ~ A Dialogue

David Tim Archer, Edward Sellman, Josefina Unger, & Rosanna Wilson

Abstract

As peace and peace education struggle in a climate of existential threats we worry that current onto-epistemologies are insufficient to truly influence sustainable change. Instead, we fear existing pedagogies of peace only become co-opted into reproducing the dominant cultural system, which is based upon problematic notions of individuality, human-centrism, competition and violence. As peace educators and scholars we ask whether alternative onto-epistemological framings of peace could offer ways beyond our current predicaments and genuinely affect how we interact with each other and the other-than-human world. In particular, we wish to explore our own experiences working with what we define as Wisdom-informed traditions; approaches that respectfully borrow from worldviews outside of the Western Modernist mindset. These perspectives encompass transpersonal notions of Self as interdependent and interrelational with the world around us. We believe such perspectives align with, and in some cases even predate, decolonial and philosophical critiques of peace education, offering specific methodologies that could transform our ways of being away from current Neoliberal framings towards more ecologically-centric and relational sensibilities. To discuss such perspectives, we wish to invite you the reader into dialogue with us to further destabilize the production of knowledge symptomatic with the current onto-epistemologies we seek divergence from. We therefore invite you into a diasporic co-poesis and diffractive dialogue about how Wisdom-informed traditions both challenge and

inspire pedagogies of peace whilst reaffirming the central importance of an integrated Self and eco-relationality.

Introduction

In response to this special edition's theme, 'Bridging Traditional Wisdom and Modernity: Exploring an Eco-Relational Paradigm for Peace', we wish to share our experiences as four practitioner-scholars (Lederach & Lopez 2016) working in differing capacities within education, attempting to incorporate pedagogies drawing from outside Western Modernist traditions. While our backgrounds and approaches carry divergences, we believe synergy exists between the philosophical motivations underpinning our practices: in particular those that aim at shifting our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the other-than-human world towards more eco-relational ways of being. The aspiration of this paper is to share our attempts to integrate such pedagogies in ways we hope push outside of and challenge harmful and fragmenting Western Neoliberal forms of education (Ball 2003; Sellman 2020; Jones & Ball 2023) through incorporating what we call Wisdom-Informed Traditions. These perspectives take inspiration from worldviews who believe intimate relationships between humans and the other-than-human world exist. They draw from worldviews, or onto-epistemologies, outside of Western paradigms that we believe offer nuanced perspectives on peace and notions of the Self that changes how we interact with the world. Examples that have particularly influenced us include ancient East-Asian philosophy and spirituality, indigenous ways of being with nature, plant medicines and rites-of-passage. We anticipate such perspectives will align with current decolonial calls within our fields of education and peace education that show violence contained in existing educational systems (Harber 2004; Cremin & Bevington 2017). We will explore why we feel incorporating practices from wisdom traditions are important and how we hope they inspire and challenge contemporary education. We offer Self, eco-relationality and peace pedagogy as intertwined concepts, shifting our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the Earth.

We believe such discussion is paramount given recent reports that consistently attest to a world facing conflict with increasing destructive potential and environmental damage (Rust & Totton 2012, Aspey at al 2023; OECD 2025; WEF 2025). We highlight how the educational systems we four inhabit not only hinder the transformation of cultures of violence (Galtung 1996), but may actively maintain and reproduce these very systems, including itself, that perpetuate them (Harber 2004; Cremin & Bevington 2017; Gatto 2017). We, as educators, have in our own ways sought to directly elucidate and destabilize this link through our work

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(Berila 2016). It is this work we share here. We four consider ourselves educators and practitioners who work in capacities aimed at changing our current ways of being in/with the world. This could be in relation to notions of holistic health, well–being, or human flourishing, but we believe all could be captured under a broad banner of peace, intra- and inter-personal peace (Dietrich 2012; Cremin & Bevington 2017). While definitions of peace can be contested, we believe an anchoring in the notion of peace offers a clear integrative framework by focusing on inner and outer states of being. The resolution of the tension between these states, and an overarching idea of peace, frames our shared beliefs throughout this paper.

Methodology of the paper

As we encourage divergence from Modernist forms of education, it is important for us that our approach is congruent rather than reverting to linear and hierarchical forms of knowledge-production and exchange (Rogers & Freiberg 1994; Palmer 1998; Connell 2014; Berila 2016; Manathunga 2020). To do so this paper offers reflexive responses to each other's writing as we engage and learn from each other's contributions, allowing ideas to emerge between us that may also resonate with you the reader. We hope such an approach showcases the types of knowledge production we advocate; constructed in encounters (Wegerif 2025). We also hope it engages you to discover something anew through such elicitation (Lederach 1995, Seikkula & Trimble 2005). Perhaps this approach inspires your own reflections while concurrently mirroring peace education scholarship as vulnerable, reflexive, improvised, and affective (Kester 2018; Zembylas 2018; Cremin & Kester 2020; Archer et al. 2023; Kester & Misiaszek 2025). We see this approach as embodying Gur Ze'ev's (2011) call that peace should never be static or at 'home' but constantly constructed through *co-poesis* in the moments where we meet, and where a 'contact boundary' is formed between us, we become changed (Hycner 1993, Koppensteiner 2020). Such an approach has been inspired by previous dialogical formats (Cremin & Kester 2020; Archer et al. 2023; Abura et al. 2025) and resonates with our beliefs around knowledge as temporal, contextual, and reflexive.

Who are we? Who are we speaking to?

Before beginning we wish to lay bare who we are. Tim considers himself a practitioner of peace and conflict resolution processes who has worked in post-conflict contexts as well as domestically in the UK and Canada. A major element of this identity is being a peace educator who tries to integrate diverse onto-

epistemologies with scholarly insights from the fields of peace and conflict studies, education, and behavioural sciences.

Edward brings the identities of being a peace educator, an integrative transpersonal counsellor and psychedelic-assisted therapist to this dialogue. His academic journey has slowly moved from a focus on restorative approaches to conflict in schools to mindfulness and education, ultimately leading him to a transpersonal orientation that extends to see the relationships within therapeutic and wisdom tradition containers as deeply pedagogical.

Josefina sees herself as a lifelong seeker of meaning, where the personal and the professional merge into a single path. A child psychologist with a Gestalt background, her practice in Chile profoundly shaped her perspectives on human beings and their deepest emotional needs. Her journey took her to India, where she encountered Integral Education based on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's Integral Yoga (The Mother, 1999; Partho, 2021). This experience now informs her academic career and vision for a more conscious and integrated society.

Rosanna brings an ecopsychological and intergenerational justice lens to her work and this dialogue. Committed to ground-level perspective sharing, she draws from her twelve year career as a languages and social-science teacher. Her research focuses on the intersection between wellbeing and sustainability in education through participatory approaches, voice, activism and deliberative democracy practices.

In our first entries we will say a little more about our early educational careers, what brought us to peace education and the themes and questions our initial journeys raised before revisiting each other's reflections.

Tim

I have always felt a disconnection within the worldview I was raised in, particularly in the ways we in the UK saw the natural world as separate to us and simply a resource to use (Rust & Totton 2012). Why this was I could not say, but it inspired me to seek and learn from other traditions that I hoped would provide differing perspectives on how to be in the world that complimented my beliefs. As a young boy I was drawn to traditions of the First Nations of the Americas and learnt as much as I could about their diverse and varied traditions. In the early 2000's I moved to Canada and was introduced to Elder Dr Doreen Paskostikwanewkihew

Iskwew Onikaniw[1] Spence O.C., or Grandmother, who became my teacher in the traditional ways of the Cree Nations. The teachings she introduced resonated with my beliefs regarding an interconnection between all things and provided an alternative language that countered the worldview I received from my own UK educational upbringing: where 'man' was separate to nature, where nature provided resources that 'man' had learnt to tame and utilise (Brito et al. 2021b).

As practitioner-scholars we can sometimes feel there are multiple aspects to our identity. At times these parts may feel contested, in conflict, or unaccepted by our peers, and need to be negotiated, concealed, or even dissociated (Fitzmaurice 2013; Sheridan 2013; Shams 2019). As a practitioner-scholar of a Western higher education institute, the part of myself that felt drawn to worldviews outside of the Western Modernist tradition often felt unaccepted, even illegitimate, to my academic work and community. For me, however, there was no separation between these positioned disparate parts as I felt they complemented each other and informed my professional practitioner-scholar identity (Tsuruhara & Archer 2023).

I found my way towards peace work (or peace work found me) to complement and fully express how I wished to be in the world: where I try to make a positive difference in the world and 'walk my talk' on the Earth. A life of service beyond ourselves. Peace scholarship, however, quickly highlighted how our motivations and approaches to peace required reflection, explicating how peace programmes may unintentionally do harm (Pupavac 2001; Gur Ze'ev 2001; Fontan 2012; Kester & Cremin 2017). Fellow scholars encouraged deep reflection on who, what, and how peace was taught (Kester & Cremin 2017). As McGregor (2014) notes, peace is deeply philosophical and thus as educators we need to be cognizant of our own philosophical foundations. Scholars began to acknowledge absences or explicitly rejected perspectives in peace. Brantmeier et al. (2010), for example, notes how world traditions all have their own interpretations and approaches to peace that need valuing. Similarly, Dietrich (2012) suggests the need to incorporate what he terms 'energetic' traditions to peace that focus on conceptions of harmony and balance. But it was decolonial scholarship, such as de Sousa Santos (2014, 2018) and Escobar (2020) who illustrated what we as peace educators often deny, finally encouraging me to feel able to explore and integrate - even celebrate - dissociated parts of my-self. They showed how Western scholarship had explicitly demeaned other systems of knowledge as inferior, relegating them off the 'Abys' (de Sousa Santos 2018) of legitimacy. Such scholarship argues that only through incorporating disbanded knowledges can solutions to problems caused by Modernity be solved (Escobar 2020).

[1] Bald Eagle Woman Who Leads

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To be clear, a respectful caveat is needed, as I have said elsewhere (Archer 2021; Tsuruhara & Archer 2023), Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) words ring in my ears. I acknowledge I am not from these traditions, and therefore have no expertise, or rights, on representing them. As her influential quote states, I wish not to be another "They came, They saw, They named, They claimed" (Tuhiwai Smith 1999 p.80) scholar as that would only be a further example of colonial scholarship that I seek divergence from. It is only through the gracious permission of Dr Doreen Spence that I share these thoughts as an outsider, seeking to feel infused by traditions outside of my own. Incorporating these worldviews into peace pedagogies allows different ways of being and interacting with the world to be included into peace paradigms. These worldviews allow for the exploration of what I believe fits with Barad's (2007) onto-ethico-epistemologies: where one's ethics is inseparable to our ways of interpreting the world. Our ontological and epistemological framings therefore require critical exploration and how we *are* in the world matters as much as how we perceive the world to be. It is these perspectives that offer an eco-relational way of being in/with the world that I believe can shift current violent relationships we have in/to the world.

I have found such worldviews, or onto-ethico-epistemologies, introduced to me by Dr Doreen Spence reorientates our relationship with the world towards more interconnected relationships, what Wall-Kimmerer (2013) notes as a reciprocal relationship between self and the world. I believe such perspectives are synonymous with the *Eco-Relational Paradigm* focus of this special edition. Such exploration allows for the environment, and thus the harm being caused to it, to be central in discussions about peace with what Kester and Misiaszek (2025) note as a 'deepening and widening' level of analysis. This should shift our responses, or *response-abilities,* to the ecological crises and our roles in it, as we are interconnected, not separate. In particular, these worldviews place a pedagogical power on spending secluded silent time in/with nature; where the boundaries of separation between the self and the interconnected whole begin to dissolve, towards the emergence of a new and integrated Self. Such onto-ethico-epistemologies position nature not as a 'thing' to be used, but as an interconnected inseparable part of ourselves, as a mother, and as a teacher. I believe such perspectives carry powerful affective potentials to shift our way of interacting with the world towards environmental sustainability and regeneration; where to heal ourselves means we must heal our relationship with nature (Wall-Kimmerer 2013).

Edward, Josefina, Rossanna, how did different traditions inform your idea of peace and in particular our relationships with nature? How and why did you start the practices you did?

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Edward

Thanks Tim, I resonated with your points about growing up in a culture where nature is seen as something 'out there' (Rust & Totton 2012, Brito et al. 2021b, Aspey et al. 2023), something to be 'accessed', a place of recreation or escape. Several other themes relating to our eco-relational disconnection and separation from each other are stimulated by your opening reflection for me. Weller (2015) argues we come into the world expecting a deep connection with nature as a birthright alongside attunement with a village community and we feel this lack as an elusive emptiness and yearning. Absence of ritual and rites-of-passage, especially into adulthood for communities in the West (Han 2020; Watts 1961), compound this sense of alienation and leave young people to internalise the zeitgeist of dominant cultural norms that are largely shaped by commercial and political interest rather than the hard-earned wisdom of elders. Although initiatives I've witnessed such as peace and positive education, alongside mindfulness-based interventions in schools, offer the veneer of potential, these are so easily co-opted into the Neoliberal apparatus that frames educational policy and practice to such an extent that they actually seem to assist the reproduction and perpetuation of the status-quo. Rather than disrupt educational spaces they collude with unconscious commitments to unending growth and ever-increasing standards of living that propel violence to one another and to the planet.

In recent years, I've become fascinated by the pedagogy of spaces where psychedelic substances are consciously taken, ceremonially or therapeutically, often as a rite-of-passage. Spaces where participants report being able to seemingly work with the intelligence of various plants, as our ancestors have surely done throughout the world. In fact Grof (1998, 2000) highlights that it is only Western societies, and only during modern times, that have not worked with non-ordinary states of consciousness accessible in such ways. In such states, participants also report having greater access to their own healing-intelligence with considerable insight about their own personal experience, but also about the nature of reality including our intimate relationship with nature and each other.

I'll share a little bit more about my views about rites-of-passage. My own journey as a peace educator was almost certainly a response to early exposure to domestic violence and witnessing the damaging impact of bullying at school. For a period I internalised the message that the only way to survive school was to fight, until I had a 'spiritual-opening' aged 15, bizarrely watching a fight after school. I recall the fake bravado, the masks, the personas, worn by the protagonists as the fight brewed and escalated. In fact, I left just before the fight began. The lyrics of

‘Hey Jude’ reverberated in my mind (“for well you know it’s a fool who plays it cool by making his world a little colder”) and as I walked home I felt something was just not ‘cool’ about pretending to be someone other than who you are, and I vowed to be authentic to my true self from that moment on, which included an early commitment to nonviolence and vegetarianism. As someone who now identifies as a ‘transpersonal’ (beyond the person/mask) researcher/practitioner, I hope the reader can sense how pivotal this moment was for me.

Something about Tim’s opening reflection stirred up this memory and as I reflect on it here it brings up several pertinent issues. Neufeld and Maté (2019) argue, in the West, parents, mentors and communities abdicate their child-rearing to the state leaving young people vulnerable to the osmosis of the dominant cultural values of the time. Hence, the self most young people are able to construct is a fiction, it’s the type of person their peers, teachers, politicians and cultural leaders wish to perpetuate (Frankel 1998). This, Gatto (2017) argues, is far from an oversight but an intentional part of the design and maintenance of Western education systems. Rather than being sites of liberation, the balance is far more skewed to sites of oppression; educating an individual just enough and into a position where they reproduce the system for the benefit of the wealthy and powerful. In this sense, the insidious purpose of education is state-dependence and limited self-knowledge compared to those engrained in wisdom traditions, rather than any opportunity to genuinely, or fully, individuate. Peace education and mindfulness-based interventions offered to schools have in my experience done little to liberate people from these conditions and seem to be overly instrumentalized (Brito et al. 2021a; Sellman & Buttarazzi 2020), who’s byproducts (better behaviour, greater concentration) serve the hidden-curriculum of Western education, which is much more about social control.

My prior reflection also reminds me of the absence of ritual and rites-of-passage for adolescents into adulthood (Frankel 1998, Han 2020), common to wisdom traditions but lacking in the west to such an extent that adolescents turn to unhelpful norms and means to initiate themselves (Neufeld & Maté 2019). Interestingly, Frankel (1998) describes a group of students who break into their US-based school to dance and jump over a ring of chairs they set alight only later to discover that this was precisely such a ritual that would have occurred on such land when inhabited by First Nations people. Such an account testifies to the need of young people for initiation into something bigger than themselves, so much so, it leaks through the collective unconscious. When such passage is assisted, it is usually provided by a non-family member who would guide a young person through an ordeal, sometimes involving psychedelic plants, many of which would be unpalatable if not unacceptable to a Western palate, but the fruits of which would

be a deeper connection with place and nature, deeper understanding concerning the unity and connectedness of things alongside radical self-responsibility (Grof 2000). A question I often ask myself is what have we lost in trade for greater comfort and safety? One answer to my own question is that education systematically teaches a form of 'mistaken identity' (Levy 2018), that of being separate from nature and each other whereas rites-of-passage, and psychedelic spaces, commonly teach interconnectedness, consciousness first models of reality and with it an identification with a Self we all have in common (Sellman 2020). I may come back to these topics but I'll pause here, I wonder what others make of these themes?

Josefina

Many of the ideas already expressed resonate deeply. Tim, just as you felt a disconnect from the worldview in which you were raised, I too experienced a profound discomfort regarding my place in the world. Despite growing-up in a home filled with love, openness and the freedom to be whoever I wanted to be there was something deeper – something about the way the world functioned – that did not sit right with me. I struggled to understand why everything seemed externally oriented rather than the other way around. Something felt fundamentally misaligned for me, a discomfort that evoked resistance to the societal 'mould' I felt engulfed me, even though I somehow fulfilled all its expectations. I was an 'ideal student', excelling academically and socially; I was seen as well-rounded and complete - yet, within that completeness, I knew there was something missing.

By the age of 14 I hence developed a fascination for understanding human beings, including myself. I felt compelled to dedicate my life to exploring different ways of being and helping society develop a higher level of consciousness. I realised that the first and most essential step in achieving this was to transform my inner-world (The Mother 1999; Krishnamurti 2006). A ceaseless journey commenced, a quest to explore the meaning of life, my true identity and my purpose.

This search inevitably led me to seek answers within the wisdom traditions, particularly Yoga and Kabbalah. These traditions first revealed to me the idea that reality is 1% material and 99% spiritual, or, as I would describe it now; 1% dualistic and 99% non-dualistic (Loy 2019). Intuitively, perhaps I had been feeling this 99%, the vast reality enveloping the material world (Kastrup 2019) that no one had ever informed me about. Furthermore, both traditions reaffirmed that personal transformation is the first-step toward any meaningful change. External transformation occurs only to the extent that we embody what we stand for

(Krishnamurti 2006), and this for me is central to our conversation, as you noted, Tim. To address the multiple crises affecting our planet and moving towards more peaceful ways of being in the world, requires a deep engagement with our own processes of integration - a process that is fundamentally both internal and interrelational, shaping how we experience and relate to the world. Sri Aurobindo (2006, p. 4) suggests that 'all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony', arising from the tension between fragmentation and our instinct for unity. Thus, integration is about reconciling apparent contradictions between the dual and non-dual: spirit and matter, organism and environment, body and mind, the self and the shadow – not as opposing forces, but as different expressions of a unified reality (Aurobindo, 2006; Wilber, 2024).

This search for integration led me to deeply question the education system of my home country (Chile), rooted in market performativity (Inostroza & Falabella, 2021), shaped by state control, standardisation, competition, and accountability (Falabella, 2015). I remember being at school and wondering why no spaces were dedicated to self-knowledge and the development of our inner-being. I could not comprehend how we spent so many years, cage-like, absorbing vast amounts of information that held little relevance to our lives. Then, upon entering the 'real-world,' we found ourselves utterly unequipped to navigate our own existence (Maturana, 1999). Why were we not encouraged to discover who we really are, understand our feelings and learn how to regulate them? In short, education seemed designed to mould us to fit a system dictated by the market (Gatto 2017, Neufeld & Maté 2019), rather than to help us uncover our true essence and purpose (Aurobindo & The Mother, 2001; The Mother, 1999; Sellman, 2020; Partho, 2021).

This lack of space for inner-growth and integration within education led me to seek alternative approaches – ones that prioritized being over doing. Yet, it was only during my university years, as I studied psychology, that I encountered what had been absent from my early formal-education: the profound transformative power of genuine human connection, what Buber (2000) refers to as the 'I-*Thou*' relationship, where through encounters of true presence, we come into authenticity.

Although I had experienced the power of authentic encounters within my home and through social-service work, it was through my clinical practice that I was able to engage in these encounters more directly. Becoming a psychotherapist granted me the opportunity to open profound spaces – spaces that, much like Buber (2000), I regard as sacred – where another unveils their vulnerability and their pure-being, inviting me to be part of the vastness of their existence. When these spaces open, I experienced precisely what you describe, Edward, in the context of

psychedelic experiences (and perhaps you could say more about these in your second entry): interconnectedness, consciousness, and an identification with a shared Self, something Levinas (2002, p. 9) refers to as 'leaving oneself towards being', a movement beyond the confines of the self, where the encounter with the Other calls us into a profound relationship that transcends individual existence and demands ethical responsibility.

And yet, we are deprived of these spaces – spaces that are essential for human life – both in formal education and in most social contexts (Maturana, 1999, Weller 2015). This deprivation is further exacerbated by a world increasingly shaped by technology and virtual-realities, which further alienate us from the embodied and felt experience of opening ourselves to another, and consequently, to ourselves (Kastrup 2019). Without these encounters, we are denied the opportunity to learn how to love and be loved, deprived of transcending, and remembering the oneness that constitutes us (Krishnamurti, 2013). This lack of capacity for love has devastating consequences (Noddings 1984, 2012; Naranjo 2016; Culshaw & Kurian 2021), fragmenting, alienating, and disconnecting us from our true essence or common Self and our relationship with the world around us (Krishnamurti, 1994).

I wonder how you all perceive and approach the fragmented self? Personally, I have found many answers to this in the Integral Education of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, which emphasises the balanced development of all dimensions of the human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual (The Mother, 1999).

Rosanna

Reading your reflections brings up the sense of conflict I felt as a new teacher, which I now understand as a perplexion with an individualist conception of 'doing well' and a mechanistic/extractive view of education which overlooked that all true 'doing well' rests upon 'being well' and specifically, 'interbeing well'. Yet, attention to the nature of our interbeing is almost totally lacking in schools I have known. In my experience, schools facing behavioural challenges often strengthen whole-school behaviourist approaches, characterised by high expectations, token economies and sending students who are persistently difficult to manage into isolation. This paralleled a time in which the curriculum became more restrictive and competitive in the UK. I wondered, and still wonder, why new teachers are introduced to these behaviourist practices as exemplifying 'good-practice' rather than relational practices (Kohn 2006). Edward, I'm sure you'll have something to say about this.

Growing up with a sister with autism, my parents had adopted a radical, home-education approach called Son Rise (Kaufman 1976), which was informed by East-Asian wisdom perspectives, some of which we refer to in this article. In childhood I learned to accept my sister, to make her feel safe and not punish her when her behaviour did not match the accepted way. We learned in our house that an accepting and non-judgmental attitude, similar to unconditional positive regard in the humanistic approach (Rogers & Freiberg 1994), was crucial to us building relationships and the confidence for my sister to socially relate and want to speak to us. We understood this had to come before any emphasis on numeracy and literacy. For me, this worldview challenged any ego-based preoccupation with who may be socially superior – at school or elsewhere - as something superficial. Underneath lay a yearning to discover and know one another more deeply through connection.

It was hence hard to come into the teaching profession with the expectation to accept an overly-simplistic behaviourist 'reward-and-punish' approach to classroom management. Perhaps subversively, I explored with colleagues and sought to develop the skills of self-awareness, relationship building, boundary affirming, co-regulation, de-escalation and participation as more peaceful alternatives. Acknowledging that it is much harder with thirty or more in a classroom than with one, I ask myself why behaviourism is so dominant rather than the practice of care (Noddings 2012). Surely, more humanistic and care-based approaches afford greater community building, connection and deeper self-knowledge? Existing structures seem to be ultimately designed in favour of cognitive advancement and the sustaining of 'business as usual' for those with status and power (Macy & Johnstone 2020).

I hence come to this dialogue in solidarity with colleagues and the young people I teach; committed to transformative/participatory approaches, a deliberative democracy and youth-voice advocate. Through my research and practice, I have come to see what Edward and Josefina identify as an 'educational-entitlement' to inner-work and having a voice in decision-making, as interconnected. Aspiration for education oriented toward both being and doing well means unlocking our deeper instinctual selves, and our capacity for connection through synchronous, embodied attunement with each other, the natural world, the realities of deep-time, and the specificity of places in which we live and cohabit. As Haraway (2016) remarks, our work is to learn to 'stay with the trouble' and 'kin-make'. Wall-Kimmerer (2013) writes of learning as a fundamental rhythm and reciprocity with the natural world; rather than taking individual success regardless of the harm done to others. 'Doing well' in alignment with 'being well' builds on a

rhythm of reciprocity, of respect and care, of eco-relationality, and a subjectivity grown from this worldview. Yet this shift requires radical unlearning.

Say you are lucky enough to fit the model for learning in the dominant schooling system, to find yourself in books, in the subject disciplines, in 'sitting-in-rows', in relationships with your teachers. This is a gift? - not necessarily. You are one of the lucky ones for whom schooling is not something simply to be 'endured' (McPherson et al. 2023 p 20), as recent research with young people found is so common an experience (McPherson et al. 2023). Though at what cost? The world of academia is one in which 'the student that emerges…is a disembodied one: a student capable of producing rational arguments…yet detached from her own bodily feelings…' (O'Toole & Simovska 2022, p25). This is the subjectifying byproduct of an education that drives us towards 'cognitive advancement' (O'Toole & Simovska 2022, p25). Without care, it detaches us from our instincts and our intimate relationship with nature rather than enabling us to know them.

In describing an educational experience where students were encouraged to engage with pigeons, a bird common to the UK generally condemned as vermin, Haraway (2016, pp. 24-25) highlights how young participants became 'astute observers and advocates of beings who they had not known how to see or respect.' This parallels my own observations in youth social action work. Perhaps this learning might go inward as well as out? From an attraction to spiritual and nature-based practices as a teenager, followed by a period of environmental activism in the late 2010s and early 2020s, I came to deliberative democracy and citizens assemblies as a focal-point for my educational and political attention. Then,whilst exploring wellbeing and sustainability in schools during the covid-19 pandemic, I came to see intergenerational justice as a necessary redress for the immovability of educational power structures, especially if they are ever to serve 'being well'.

I have written elsewhere (Wilson et al. 2023, 2024a/b/c) about the lack of avenues for proper multi-way dialogue and decision-making between adults and young people. This is especially important when considering decisions made about community resources in local areas, planning, nature protection and access. Yet our education system does not normalise or give the tools to most young people as students, or to adults in the community, to have these conversations, to speak and listen from the heart, and to think and decide from perspectives other than their own, as underlined by a quote from Nottingham's youth climate manifesto (Nottingham Youth Climate Assembly 2022, p. 1):

> 'we're not sure how to talk to you so that you will really listen. We don't want to have to shout, even though many of us are angry, because that doesn't seem to have worked. Perhaps we should act politely, even though

> we are furious, but that doesn't seem to have worked either. We hope that you are waiting for us to speak, that you need us to speak, that without our voices you understand that there is something fundamentally missing.'

Here we see a glimpse of the darkness, the hard edges, the way in which young people can be understandably 'furious' – and this energy is much needed vitality, it raises consciousness of events and injustices, of relationships about which we care, and which are threatened. As Edward and Josefina raise, the integration of these emotions needs support, in order to avoid splitting and unconscious life practices which perpetuate harm (Greenspan 2003). How can education make space for these emotions and their role in helping make important decisions about what matters for our futures, without shutting down the other participants in the learning and discussion?

Tim

Edward, your reflections on education strikes to my concerns that we are not learning how to be with ourselves or be in the world. That even good intended programmes can become co-opted by the language of assessment and outcomes. It was precisely the desire for rites-of-passage and developing my authentic Self that stirred my curiosity to explore alternative philosophies (and a school fight as well). Josefina, your quest towards the non-dual succinctly vocalises my aspirations to move beyond what Koppenstiener (2020) discusses as *this container,* the material self, which he places as central to peace educational endeavors. Thankyou for mentioning Martin Buber as I believe when we surrender in solitude and silence in nature we come into authentic I/Thou relations with ourselves, each other, and the natural world. Sri Aurobindo's educational approach connects with Dr Spence's teachings of the Medicine Wheel, an integrative philosophy shared by many North American First Nations. This too conceptualizes a balanced education, and healthy existence, between the mind, heart, body, and spirit. Experiences in nature bring such elements to the fore as we sit and be with our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual parts of ourselves. Rosanna, your comments of interbeing, co-regulation, and attunement all resonate and connect to the *affective* quality I feel being in nature has upon us. Thank you for bringing Donna Haraway's work on kinship to this dialogue as ways to move beyond the human-centric onto-epistemologies we reside within. It is her and others' ideas of *response-ability* that guide my work as a peace educator. All three of you mentioned the domination of behavioral or cognitive ideals of education, and I too feel that this is one of the key issues fracturing us from our fully embodied and eco-relational selves.

Your comments connect to my beliefs regarding the importance of nature-based education and how it is a form of peace education. However, similar to you Edward, I feel such pedagogies must resist becoming co-opted by the Neoliberal machine or else lose its essence and affective quality. A corpus of literature exists on the varied benefits of nature-based pedagogies (Twohig-Bennett & Jones 2018; Norwood et al. 2019; Shuda et al. 2020; Jimenez et al. 2021; Yao et al. 2021; Moll et al. 2022; Vella-Brodrick & Gilowska 2022; Nguyen & Walters 2024). While these studies are important for our understanding of the educational role nature plays, for me, they can still speak the language of Western paradigms of measurable research and 'effects'. They therefore potentially reinforce the same paradigms they originate from: Western Modernist fragmented interpretations of being. As Kester and Cremin (2017) note there is a requirement to reflect deeply on how our impacts as educators may do more harm than good. I have therefore been interested in how (or whether) we can truly reflect outside of our own onto-ethico-epistemologies and learn from a dislocated position. How can we move beyond effects to affects? Diffraction has provided a lens that I have explored (Archer 2021), where I was invited to participate in a First Nations Vision Quest as a different learning and research paradigm. The purpose was that by bringing together different onto-epistemologies we become *affected* and our understanding of our-self diffracted, or changed, out of one's original perspective. Spending time in/with nature under the tutelage of a First Nations worldview provided this diffractive method where nature becomes the educator and affected my-self interpretation beyond Western Modernist perspectives towards a more eco-relational way of be-ing: What I call a *diffractive autoethnographic methodology* (Archer 20221). It has allowed me to see and feel things anew, and is something I believe is key to changing our interpretations of our-selves, and our relational ways of being, towards more eco-relationally responsible existences.

Such perspectives are not new with many indigenous writers commenting on the importance of indigenous onto-epistemological education (Sun Bear & Wind 1980; Mcgaa 1990; Brokenleg 1998; Cajete 2000; Absolon 2010; Wenger-Nabigon 2010; Little Bear 2012; Wall-Kimmerer 2013; Four Arrows 2016; Bartmes & Shukla 2020; Passmore & Krause 2023). Within such pedagogical approaches, solitude, silence, gratitude, mindful presence, and reflection are central to one's educational journey beyond any preset curriculum of generalised learning outcomes. Listening to one's self and to the natural world become our greatest teachers that bring us into alignment with our place in the world. Such pedagogies aim to affect beyond an overemphasis on the mind or attainment of skills (Kester 2018) towards affect across the layers of the head, heart, body and spirit - towards an integrated 'be-ing' - one in harmony with oneself and with the world around us; one where wisdom is honoured.

I am interested how such perspectives align with learning a response-ability (Barad 2007; Haraway 2016; Baan Hofman 2023), an 'ability to respond, to respond to the world beyond oneself, as well as a willingness to recognize its existence' (Kuokkanen 2007 p. 39). For me such educational paradigms of being in/with nature implicitly and viscerally affects one's inner states that resonate outward to how one is in/with the world (outer states), towards eco-relational states of being. Such affective qualities, for me, are at the heart of notions of peace and align with peace education aspirations. The importance for peace education to be a key site for how we learn to perceive and interact with nature has been acknowledged elsewhere (e.g., Reardon 1988; Weil 1994; Wenden 2004; Brantmeier 2018; Ardizzone 2024; Gittins 2024; Abura et al. 2025; Ress & Brantmeier 2025). Two colleagues eloquently discussed how nature in their research was a 'peace educator' and called for an 'eco-peace-based education' grounded in interconnectedness and interdependence (Patel & Ehrenzeller 2023; Ehrenzeller & Patel 2024). This understanding can ground our conception of eco-relationality. I believe such paradigms foster both a deep response-ability for all relationships who are seen as direct relations to ourselves (Haraway 2016) and ethics of care (Noddings 1984, 2011) through the focus on wisdom over intelligence. I believe such aspects align pedagogical paradigms of nature with that of peace education, and also align to calls for affective educational spaces for peace to overwrite over-reliance on cognitive and critical ones (Hyland 2011; Zembylas 2018, 2020; Kester 2018).

Incorporating non-Western onto-epistemologies *diffract* our understanding of the purpose of education away from Neoliberal overemphasis on accreditation and social placement based upon 'intelligence', to those of fostering wisdom, service, stewardship, and eldership to care for all life. Such pedagogies dissolve the egoic self into a larger Self: one where I am intimately connected to all things, humans, and other-than-humans. Here I draw from the Oglala-Sioux phrase shared by Mcgaa (1990) of "Mitakuye Oyasin", or "all my relations", as a way that, to me, epitomises Dr Doreen's teachings that we are often "being too human" and forgetting our interconnection. It is being in/with nature within such onto-epistemological framings that takes us out of our-selves and reminds us that we are more than our physical containers. I feel this carries the 'deepening and widening' reflexivity of peace pedagogies aforementioned (Kester & Misiaszek 2025) that are able to disrupt current peace pedagogies reproducing the social conditions they seek to dismantle. Integrating pedagogical paradigms from onto-epistemologies such as the First Nations' is, for me, peace education, where I am brought into peace by/with/for the natural world, disrupting illusions of separation or hierarchy over the natural world and instead instilling deep care and responsibility.

Edward

Josefina, I want to pick up on the careful consideration you've given to nonduality (Loy 2019) and your invitation to say more. I consider myself blessed to have experienced this state in several psychedelic ceremonies using plant medicines that have been used for thousands of years by a variety of wisdom traditions (Ball 2009, Grof 1998). These profound experiences, also accessible through disciplined yoga, meditation and I/Thou moments Josefina, and also through vision quests, Tim, underline consciousness as an ontological primitive (Kastrup 2016, 2019; Spira 2017; Levy 2018) leading me to conclude that the idea of a separate self is false; as it is the same Self experiencing itself through what Kastrup (2019) calls 'localisations of consciousness'. Such experiences also indicate that we are also deeply interconnected through love, which is synonymous with the feeling of complete unity. Although we need to identify with our body and mind to move through time and space, I see over-identification with the individual self, the aforementioned 'mistaken identity', as underpinning our alienation from nature and each other; something that is promulgated by our education system's focus on attainment and our economy's incessant obsession with unending growth at all costs.

It's also my sense that many in the teaching profession, me/us included, were attracted to teaching as a vocation because we cared deeply about other people and learning (Palmer 1998). Tim, I appreciate your challenge to all educators and peace educators in particular to embrace the maxim of *do no harm*. Hence to find ourselves in institutions where undoubtable harm is being conducted, in the form of a very restrictive view of knowledge, then reinforced through the domination of classroom management styles by behaviorism as Rosanna highlights is a form of *moral-injury* (Kohn 2011; Papadopulos 2020). I have always found Western education systems' unbending adherence to behaviourism truly shocking, partly because its theoretical genesis starts with animal experiments over 100 years ago and also because of its (and more broadly society's) obsession with reward and punishment as a form of motivation. It's generally considered 'good practice' to use token-economies to this effect in classrooms (well critiqued by Kohn 2006), which I argue teaches a fundamental lie about life: 'good things will happen to you if you behave well'. Clearly, we need to teach students to behave in ways that are intrinsically motivated, ethical and community oriented because they are the right things to do, as is frequently the case with wisdom traditions' emphasis on restorative and transformative approaches to justice (Sellman et al. 2014).

I often return to the emphasis peace educator David Hicks (1988) made between education *about* peace, and education *for* peace, which had a profound impact on me whilst training to be a teacher and during my own PhD research into teaching young people conflict resolution skills. This point underlines the necessity for me of coherence and synergy between the *medium* and the *message* (Sellman & Amrhein 2022), the need to teach peacefully as well as about topics essential to understanding and behaving peacefully. Incidentally, my PhD research encountered much resistance to such a stance in schools, teachers were generally unwilling to moderate their pre-existing notions of power and authority sufficiently to allow students the opportunity to resolve conflicts for themselves (Sellman 2011).

Whether it is teaching students to mediate or meditate I've become increasingly aware how ideas with their origin in wisdom traditions, restorative approaches to conflict being rooted in tribal culture (e.g. Ubuntu, see van Ness 2014) and mindfulness in East-Asian philosophy/spirituality (see Watts 1961), are co-opted, re-packaged and sold back to us by Neoliberal educational policy (Purser 2019). It seems Neoliberalism must have its next thing, its new product, something that could be the answer but inevitably has to make way for something more promising. At the same time, the gaze is diverted from asking deeper and more probing questions about the viability of the premises upon which education is built (principally late-capitalism), including its inherent views of the world and each other as objects for exploitation.

Like you Josefina, I welcome what Ergas (2018) calls a 'contemplative turn' in education and with it greater intentionality to connect with the Self. The recent willingness and openness of some schools to introduce Mindfulness, something with colleagues I've both encouraged and critiqued (Brito et al. 2021a), acts as both a good, and cautionary, case in point. In the literature there has been appropriate discussion of mindfulness as a tool and as a path, which both myself (Sellman & Buttarazzi 2020) and Oren Ergas (Ergas & Hadar 2019, Ergas 2019) have described as mindfulness in/as education. I see mindfulness as a sound way to develop deep self-awareness, even awareness of the non-dual Self if taken to extremis, which in and of itself is something with educational merit to say the least, if not entitlement (Sellman 2020). The development of such self-awareness has 'side-effects' (Brito et al. 2021a, 2022) and it is actually many of these (e.g. concentration, wellbeing) that are desired by education and others (e.g. awareness of patriarchy and leanings toward social justice) perhaps less so (Berila 2016). Mindfulness in education, or mindfulness as a tool, as an instrumentalised approach, subtracted from its ethical roots in wisdom traditions, is generally favoured by education; whereas I and others have argued for a more integral and holistic approach (Brito et al. 2022), similar to that which Josefina advocates and I invite her to elaborate upon. Such an approach,

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more in keeping with its roots in wisdom traditions, reminds us again that the medium and the message need to be coherent, characterised in this case by places of education where mindfulness permeates ways of being rather than being consigned to a single lesson a week for a short period of time. Rosanna, given your interest in eco-psychology, I wonder what practical suggestions you may have for fostering deeper connections with nature? And Josefina, what suggestions might you have for fostering more integrated selves and inter-relationality within Western education? This feels urgent to me, in Sellman & Buttarazzi (2020) I asked, can we really have an education system like the one we have 10, 30, 50 years from now and survive? I wonder what your thoughts on this might be?

Rosanna

In dialogue with each other here, I become particularly mindful of those who have impoverished eco-relationality with little or no access to nature, as is the case for many in urban parts of the UK (State of Nature Partnership, 2020, 2023). I also think of philosopher Arne Naess who said that our ethical and experiential sphere of reference can and must reconnect with our ecology; with the web of life in which, as Haraway (2016) would put it, we are both woven and weaving as emergent stories and storytellers. Gibson and Gibson's ecological psychology (Gibson & Gibson, 1955; Gibson & Pick, 2000) holds that in learning to see and know the world and our potential for action within it, we are shaped with and by our environments. Our environment (our world) teaches us to perceive; thus we see; we interact (identifying affordances for (inter)action); we see differently (growing, developing, cycling through again). Such understanding coheres with the longstanding indigenous perspective Tim shares that nature is a teacher. The lens through which we interact with the world matters, in whether we develop an awareness of our eco-relationality or remain asleep to it. Haraway (2016) would call this being '*of* the world' as opposed to '*in* the world'.

In many wisdom traditions this eco-awareness is a given, but it is nonetheless learned and practised; it does not happen by accident, it requires nurturing by teachers and elders. These ideas are here in Tim's explorations of 'nature as teacher' in indigenous traditions, and as Edward and Josefina explore through pointing out the propensity of the false experience of duality. Yet we all see the challenge of Neoliberal educational norms, their linearity, emphasis on production and consumption, of cognitive advancement and command over nature, the desire for products and experiences over meaning and connection that split us from both ourselves and the living world.

At a recent Climate Change Forum I attended , a speaker emphasised a simple message from the natural historian and television presenter David

Attenborough, essentially: ‘no one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced’ (Attenborough in A Life on Our Planet, 2020; Fothergill, Hughes & Scholey 2020). I was heartened by the number of school and community members at this event and the desire to support each other moving towards ‘net zero’ and tackling biodiversity loss. The event recognised that our current predicament calls for us to hone our ‘response-ability’ and to begin to see beyond organisational silos. Yet in spite of some interest and support, on returning to the school where I worked, I met familiar resistance; the perceived necessity of attainment in external performative measures, and in tandem; hesitation and reluctance to take learning outdoors and link curriculum with the spaces and nature around us, and with the community on our doorstep. All this is largely driven by the dominating Neoliberal logic of importance of exam outcomes.

Yet in spite of the dominance of the Neoliberal ‘education as usual’ that Edward critiques, levers emerge from the necessity of the moment for us teachers to think differently, to see education in and as nature as essential to survival, peace and human flourishing in the 21st century. Research from De Walshe and colleagues (2024) highlights the absence of nature from young people’s educational experience; whilst connection to nature is undoubtedly linked to essential health and wellbeing, never mind their entitlement to individuation, deep self-knowledge, and care for the eco-relational more-than-human to which we all refer in this article.

Yet I also worry about the inevitable inequalities and injustices in the way participation in what I want to call ‘nature-as-teacher’ work exists. Environmental issues and education are known for an over-representation of those from more affluent middle-class upbringings, those from communities with far lower prevalence of adverse childhood experiences including poverty. And moving the lens wider, to global communities most affected by climate and/ or geopolitical breakdown, these young people’s experiences are crucial to any peace education, and the work to address the healing required - still more needed. Yet schooling and education’s role in these matters tends to screen out or eliminate such trauma, violence or adversity from the educational space. Where nature and peace education becomes a pleasurable bonus, available to the more privileged. There is an urgent need for schools to enable full-participation so all young people can develop connections with nature and their communities and build enduring peaceful futures for all. This brings up issues of resources. Josefina, how does this connect with your work In challenging areas of Chile?

Josefina

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I strongly relate to the need to connect with nature and our true-essence or Self in particular as an antidote to the challenges facing Western Modernity and its education systems, as discussed by all of us. According to Krishnamurti (2006), awareness of unity arises through the integration of the duality between the observer and observed, a division rooted in the ego and in thought itself, which lies at the heart of all human conflict, fear and suffering. It is the ability to transcend this duality – whether, as we have discussed here, through nature, meditation, psychedelics, or other means – that leads us to the experience of Oneness.

However, I always return to a perplexing question: what happens to those whose lives are filled with pain and violence and those less privileged? How truly accessible are these experiences we are discussing for them? To respond to this point, I want to share an experience that profoundly helped me understand that the path to inner and outer peace – our journey toward interconnection – goes beyond having the experience of Oneness. While such experiences are undoubtedly beneficial, even desirable, they are not sufficient (Maté 2018; Wilber 2024), particularly for those of us raised in Western cultures, where we are overidentified with the ego. The integration of experiences of Oneness appears to be more complex than it is sometimes portrayed, especially when we carry deep wounds or patterns of dissociation (Wilber 2007, 2024).

As a clinical psychologist, I worked with one of the most vulnerable and violence-ridden populations in the Chilean capital, a neighbourhood dominated by drug-trafficking and crime. Abuse, in all its forms, was endemic, compounded by extreme poverty. Each day felt like preparing for battle, though it was an emotional and spiritual battle, where I immersed myself in the darkest dimensions of the human soul. I witnessed violence not only as external conflicts between individuals but also as an internal-war raging within each person – against oneself, against unintegrated trauma, and within fractured relationships (Van der Kolk 2020). The external fragmentation mirrored an internal rupture, revealing how violence is profoundly embedded both in social structures (Maturana & Verden Zöller, 1993) and in the individual psyche (Naranjo 1993). I came to understand that these individuals were profoundly dissociated from their essence because of the violence and lack of love – they were complete strangers to themselves, unable to engage in authentic encounters with themselves or the world around them.

This experience made me realise that before embarking on a journey of inner and inter-connection, one must first be in an emotionally safe and supportive environment – one where love mediates our encounter with the Other (Buber 2000; Levinas 2002; Maturana & Verden Zöller, 1993) and, as a consequence, with ourselves. It is within such a space that relationships, community, and the presence

of others play a crucial role, for the process of self-awareness, connection, and integration is fundamentally interrelational (Maturana 1999; Aurobindo & The Mother 2001). We can only truly open ourselves to a deeper connection with both our inner and outer-world when we are held in an environment that provides emotional security, only then is it possible to embody our nature as inter-beings and fully integrated selves (Maturana 1999; Naranjo, 2016; Maté & Maté 2024). Without love, we become fragmented, and this fragmentation inevitably leads to isolation, disconnection, and the objectification of the other, ultimately resulting in the rejection of difference and the drive for domination over them/it. (Brito et al. 2021b, Krishnamurti 2006).

Hence, with the realisation that we were already *late* in providing spaces for love and authentic encounters, I often found myself asking: how do we move towards integration rather than further fragmentation when the psychotherapeutic space is no longer sufficient? When the healthcare system itself seems to offer a 'cure' that is worse than the disease? It was then that life led me to encounter Integral Education (The Mother, 1999; Partho, 2021), revealing that education is not only capable but also responsible for being the space where this transformation is cultivated.

This educational approach differs from conventional models, as I mentioned earlier, by emphasising the balanced development of all dimensions of the human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual (The Mother, 1999; Aurobindo & The Mother, 2001; Partho 2021). Integral Education recognises learning as a process that serves a higher purpose: "to help the soul to come forward, to assert its mastery over its instruments, gain experience and grow, and eventually manifest the powers it has to set forth in life" (Saint Hilaire 1991, p. 48). In this sense, the goal goes beyond intellectual formation to the unfolding of the individual's deepest potential.

A few years ago, I had the blessing of visiting a school in India that follows the principles of Integral Education, and there, I found living answers to all the questions I have shared with you. For the first time, I entered an educational space designed entirely around connection, love, and deep awareness. It was an environment dedicated to the holistic development of human beings, with the purpose of maximising each individual's potential and facilitating the unfolding of their true Self and their place in the world. For the first time, I witnessed a place where people did not merely preach values but embodied them, where they were the message they conveyed. As you mentioned, Edward, in this space, the medium and the message were fully aligned, and mindfulness was seamlessly woven into

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the way each individual existed. At that moment, all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place for me.

My experience at this school in India showed me how everything changes when daily life is lived with full awareness. It also confirmed that behind such an open, loving, and non-judgemental environment, there lies the profound inner-work of each adult and child integrating their own shadows, engaging in continuous self-inquiry, and taking full responsibility for themselves and the world around them. This intense inner-work, referred to in Integral Education as vital-work (Partho 2021, p. 52), is essential for the integration of the ego – a necessary step before it can be transcended, allowing for the evolution towards more integral and transpersonal states of being (Wilber 2011, 2024). And more importantly, it showed me that these processes are truly possibly when they are supported by a collective environment that holds and accompanies you through it. When education is approached in this way, it becomes a space where individual and collective development intertwine in an ongoing process of learning and expansion, where peace emerges as the natural outcome of integration and connection across all dimensions of our being.

The Self rather than 'mistaken identity' - Yearning for Integration - Nature as Teacher - Integral Education - Ethics - Love/Care - Space - Response-ability…
weaving a tapestry from our strands

Reflecting upon our dialogue, what emerges for you? How do these strands affect or conjure you to respond? Looking back, how can we look forward to what this might mean for education: an education for peace; an education that embraces eco-relational paradigms to offset the Modernist Neoliberal machinery we inhabit? As we sit with the words and seek to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) we acknowledge that challenges inevitably remain: challenges in opportunity, challenges to change, and challenges in meaning. We acknowledge that opportunities within the current pervasive and insidious education system leave little room for alternatives and that those who are most disenfranchised by the current system are often the least able to access such. Fisher (2022) argues that it is easier for some people to imagine the end of the world than imagine the end of capitalism! So pernicious is the current education system and so connected with sociopolitical apparatus, it also seems easier to imagine the end of the world than a different education system, but imagine it we must and more so bring it into being or we simply may not be here to debate such. So, how can we change such a monolith? Maybe it needs to collapse before it can be rebuilt and all we can do is bear witness and help rebuild something more sustainable from its ashes, affected

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to such an extent that we finally mean it when we say ‘never again’. Surely we’d all rather avoid such an eventuality? So how can we resist our well-intentioned endeavours simply becoming consumed and co-opted, subservient to the self-preservation of the dominant/dominator culture? It seems futile sometimes but we are in a period of time where we need to hold the hope (Aspey et al 2023). Should a new-dawn emerge, what should be the meaning or purpose of education and how should it support its patrons to find meaning in themselves? Meaning that is defined beyond participation in market economies by competing individuals, who are desensitized to cause harm to the very nature to which we belong, seeing it merely as a resource to be stripped. The future is difficult, nigh impossible, to predict, so how can we prepare readiness for what is to come as well as the moral imagination of what we wish for?

But within these challenges we are infused that it is perhaps the sitting with these challenges that weave our strands together. Sitting in the discomfort and using it as pedagogy (Zembylas 2015) might be the essential missing part for peace pedagogies to move beyond its potential for doing more harm than good (Kester & Cremin 2017) and only reproducing the conditions it seeks to transform. Without the space, the awareness, or the imagination of what we have and what else can be, we are negated to be complicit with, to maintain and reinforce the system we seek to dismantle. And in that, we have taken very seriously that is exactly what the current system might want (Gatto 2017) - our current way of being in/with the world is tantamount to ecocide, and although nature does not discriminate, inevitably the impact of any collapse will be felt far more acutely by those already without.

Uniting our strands is a deep yearning: a yearning arising from feelings that something is missing from shared senses of disconnection. Yet, inspired and invigorated that there awaits opportunity for looking toward alternative onto-epistemologies, those built from wisdom traditions around the world, traditions that have lived in greater harmony with the natural world than we currently do. Also uniting these strands is a desire for transformative, transpersonal learning spaces: where we can encounter our authentic Self, one’s place in the world with others, and develop an intrinsic meaning for our ‘be-ing’ in/with/of the world. Meaning based upon wisdom, affect, and holistic integration, an approach that transcends and includes the cognitive and affective (Wilber 2011, 2024; Kester 2018). Our vision for a more integral education may seem radical to some, however, we position that this is less a radical endeavor than facing extinction. Instead, we hope embracing Wisdom-Informed Traditions is more of a returning: a returning to ourselves and a returning to models of education that have existed in cultures around the world for millennia that (re-)place eco-relational perspectives as central

to the educational endeavor. Acknowledging the complexities of this is key to the pedagogical encounters where safe, loving, spaces encourage the encounters with our-selves, others, and the beyond-human world. Here the teacher becomes more of a space holder, an elder promoting full participation from those present. And on occasions nature is the teacher directly. It is through these encounters and dialogical spaces with wisdom passed on generation by generation that we are brought into relations with ourselves, each other, our environment, and thus our response-able place with(-in) them. Where we are recalibrated towards a life beyond our own self and towards a larger interconnected Self, encompassing the natural world and all within its embrace: an inter-being where response-abilities are fostered. Only then may the harms of our education system be rectified.

But what does this look like? This paper seeks not to offer the last word, let alone provide definitive answers or panaceas, as to do so would not 'walk its talk' or offer coherence between the medium and the message. Any answers will lie in the fostering and opening of ongoing conducive dialogical spaces; about keeping the conversation going…

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