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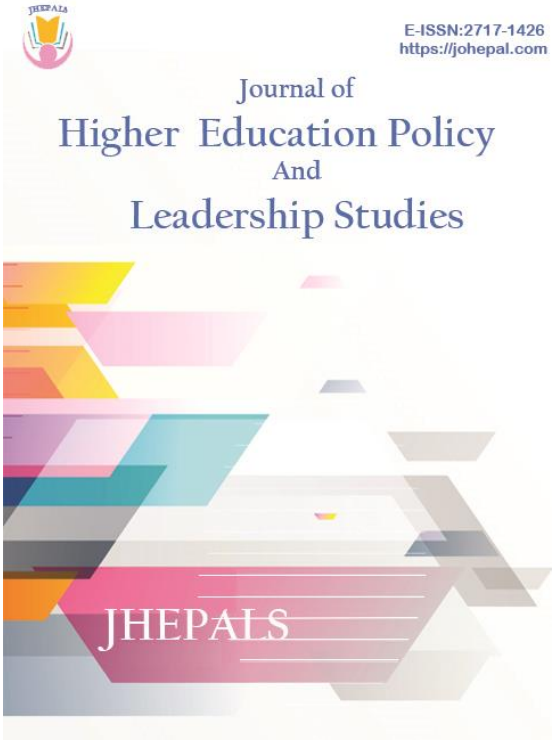

Book Review: **Re/Humanizing Education**

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Re/humanizing Education

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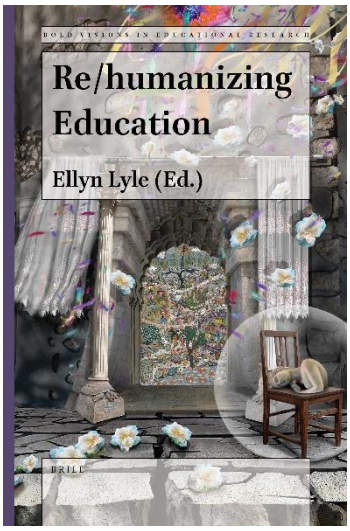

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Melissa Bishop

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> *Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That's the trick of it really, to open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you.*
> — Richard Wagamese, Embers

I was incredibly humbled when Sean asked if I would like to collaborate in writing a review. He greatly impacted my educational experience, bringing humanness to my graduate studies. Through Ellen Lyle's carefully curated collection, we weave our stories exposing bits of ourselves and our pilgrimage(s) in re/humanizing education.

As I (Melissa) read Lyle's Re/humanizing Education, I contemplate and find myself entangled with the words as they flow from the page to the depths of my mind. My dehumanized educational experiences awaken, provoked by a phrase, a word, a clue,

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imagery, and subtleties in the text as my thoughts linger between the lines. Absorbed in the text, provocative questions begin gnawing at my consciousness in waking hours and evoking sleepless nights. I contemplate, questioning how we have arrived at this space and place in time where curricula have become dehumanized. In what ways have (are) we dehumaniz(ed)ing the educational landscape? Did dehumanization come with the permeation of technology in our daily lives? Or is technology the scapegoat for something more nefarious embedded in the structure of education and its systems? Is it colonization? Or is it, as Grant and Radcliffe (2015) suggest, curricula have become products, packaged and commodified as a collection of competencies? An educational system in alignment with capitalist society. Perhaps it is all of the above entangled with each other?

Sean writes, it is said that we are in history and that history is inside of us. Shannon Leddy reminds us that we are all implicated in the history of residential schools, the last one closing in 1997. Sadly, schools are still designed to work with the raw material of our being and improve upon it, meaning that the preconceived curriculum is a mould that we are to be shaped into. The moulding and shaping metaphor of schooling has been harmful. Leddy writes, "The intention of these schools to civilize and prepare Indigenous children for modern colonial life was facilitated by removing them from their homes, families, and the context of the lands on which they were already growing and learning" (p. 54).

When Leddy asks, "What is it that we [educators] can do to honour the humanity of our students?" (p. 52), it is to set up the broader context of the four questions that have guided her life work in Indigenous teacher education: "Where have we been; where are we now; where are we going; and how will we get there?" (p. 52). Leddy's call and response has a similar echo to the ethical question of, "Who is my neighbour?" One that wisdom traditions often ask to set up the response of how to ethically encounter one another. In the parable that I am familiar with, there are similar orientations to history: I am on my way from somewhere; I have a destination; my present humanity is engaged along the way when I encounter another. Without an encounter with another, Leddy's final question, "How will we get there?" is repetitive. Namely, we continue travelling as we have been, and we will arrive at the destination. A responsive curriculum, a curriculum that responds to an opportunity to care, humanizes the question of how we will get there: we will get there together, and there will be times when we carry one another.

“Re/humanizing Education” takes us on a journey, posing difficult questions, and unearthing the complexities of educational systems. Embarking into the depths of Re/humanizing Education, we are invited into a space steeped in relationality, an invitation to find bits of ourselves in each chapter. Pieces of our lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) entangled with authors far removed from the spaces we inhabit. The collection of narratives moves us towards/through/within (re)imagining education and exploring the re/humanization of educational landscapes.

Silos

Silos have followed me (Melissa) throughout my life. The farmhouse where I grew up, with its faded white siding, forest green shutters, and small porch protruding from a background of bright green cornfields, had one silo amongst an eclectic collection of reddish-coloured outbuildings. The silo, the most intriguing of outbuildings, always elicited a sense of wonder.

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Its' height and form obscenely thrust into the sky above. The silo stands parallel to other buildings, incapable of reciprocity—a stark contrast to the closely-knit neighbours in the small farming community.

Sean asks, "who is my neighbour?" It is not the easiest question we can pose in a time of globalization. Following ethical wisdom traditions, those who are our neighbours, those we are called to have an ethical relationship with, are those we encounter daily. My friend Herb, who lives in my memory as an exemplary human being, lived in the world as a wonderful neighbour when I was in Vancouver and first moved into the 400 block. He saw the moving truck, and within a couple of hours, there was a huge pot of chilli for supper. I'm so glad for that pot of chilli because it began a relationship where I was cared for and one that continues to this day. As I think about this wonderful collection that Ellyn Lyle has put together, as I am called to various ways and means of re/humanizing education by the chapter authors, I will also be remembering my friend Herb who has been a neighbour. As Leddy says, "teaching is not really about the lesson plans—it is about the relationships, the materials, the learning situation, and how we work to engage the learning of our students in attending to these things" (p. 59).

Threaded throughout Lyle's book is the metaphorical silo. A collection of authors' storying their educational experiences of containment, fragmentation, and siloed curricula laced with imperialism and colonialism. They convey messages of global dehumanization and a yearning for relationality and connection in education. From the earliest of learners to post-secondary education, we are invited into the liv(ed)ing experiences of students and teachers' frustrations of "[I]nherent disconnections evident when education is approached in a siloed subject area approach" (Leddy, p. 54).

The parallels between the silo, an initially empty cylinder waiting to be filled with grains from the year's harvest, and the student as an empty vessel (silo) to be filled with the teacher's knowledge (grains) are not lost on the reader. The archaism of the siloed educational experience is at odds with how students learn. Perhaps intercurricular thinking/teaching and the liv(ed)ing experience will reframe education as an experiential journey. A much-needed *risk* will re/humanize education, preparing students to become good neighbours, step into the present, and look towards a future rather than preparing them for a world as it once was (Leddy, 2022).

Transformation and Impermanence

I (Melissa) find myself at odds. The potential of the globally connected world and global education contrasted with the tremendous disconnect between learners and school. I find myself at the crossroads, pushing boundaries and bending the rules, yearning for educational transformation. I long to move beyond the norm of conventional schooling and into an experience of school that ignites passion in students. Like many of the authors in Lyle's book, I crave opportunities to "[V]enture outside the comfort zone of my disciplinary boundaries and collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines to resist being limited by an academy that values working in disciplinary silos for surveillance and control purposes". (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2022, p. 37).

In the early days of my (Sean) life as a scholar, having met Carl Leggo in 1992, taking a Bachelor of Education degree at the University of British Columbia, and sticking with Carl through my master's degree and PhD, I was (through Carl) eventually introduced to Rita

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Irwin, Peter Gouzouasis, and Kit Grauer--at that time, the first a/r/tographers in the world. With love and encouragement from Carl, I had recently named myself as a poet; not all that surprising, then, that I also named myself an a/r/tographer. Not such a great leap either, since the Greek word *poiesis* means, among other things, art-making.

When I think of *transformation*, I think of Bill Pinar's (2012) argument that art can be the catalyst. I have reviewed Pinar's notion of art and self shattering before (Wiebe, 2016), and here I would like to try out a similar but slightly new idea: In *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, a book by George Saunders (2022) wrote to give the world access to some of the conversations from his highly sought after writers workshops; he says, quoting an English translation of Tolstoy, that "the aim of the artist is not to solve a problem irrefutably" (p. 377).

I find the creative practices of art-making hold so much in common with the knowledge-making practices of research. Even today, whenever I read the word artist, I also add the word researcher, and to the word researcher, I also add the word artist. So when George Saunders teaches us, through Tolstoy, that it is not the aim of the artist to solve problems irrefutably, I am well-practiced in my thinking and translating to apply his words to the research context: Thus, in my brain, I read that it is not the aim of the *researcher* to solve problems irrefutably, but, back to Saunders, "to make people love life in all its countless, inexhaustible manifestations" (p. 377).

Supposing artmaking, which is research, which is teaching, were a process of loving life. It seems to me that antagonistic to loving life is solving problems irrefutably. Perhaps this is a clue for how education becomes dehumanized?

Each morning, Lucy and I (Sean) greet the day, walking through the neighbourhood, enjoying the spring smells of the Charlottetown harbour in Prince Edward Island. I'm thankful for the birdsong and the breeze that animates new buds. In their introductory chapter, Lyle and Snowber (2022) encourage readers to be dazzled by the world. They are taking heed of beloved poet Mary Oliver's advice, who says that after we are bedazzled, we can return to our private places and reflect. When Snowber returns to her private reflection space, what she thinks about is impermanence. She feels the inhalation and exhalation of time in the ebb between land and sea. I recognize in myself a resistance to impermanence. I am scared of it. What comforts me is irrefutability. What if loving life depends on impermanence?

As I (Melissa) contemplate educational transformation, a change that understands the relational entanglement between student, teacher, and the environment—animate and inanimate—I am reminded of the opportunity we have been given through the global pandemic. I was required to quickly pivot to virtual learning, not an easy task as a teacher of 4 and 5-year-olds. However, many of the dehumanizing practices that infiltrate the bricks and mortar classroom made their way to the virtual space—digital photocopies. We were gifted an opportunity and have yet to unpack all the possibilities of that gift. Drawing from Sean's thoughts of impermanence, we were reminded of the temporary nature of the bricks and mortar model of schooling.

However, glimmers of hope poked their way through the digital entanglement as educators came to terms with a rapidly changing landscape. These glimmers, along with a

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desire to *pivot* away from a digital carbon copy of bricks and mortar schools, are where we find ourselves optimistic about the promise of change.

Hope

> *My only wish is that we leave room for hope. There is good and bad in all things. We find what we expect to find. We see what we expect to see. I have learned that if I tilt my head just right and squint, the world outside is beautiful. The future is bright. There are good things to come.*
>
> — Hugh Howey, Dust

"Re/humanizing Education" requires a critical analysis of the educational system that values productivity over relationality. For those invested in education and educational inquiry, Lyle opens a space for hope. A space that moves beyond standardized and mathematically measurable *legitimate* ways of knowing and being toward a space of connection. A movement from anthropocentrism towards a reconnection with "all our relations" (King, 1990)—an act of re/humanizing.

I (Sean) write these words on Mother's Day. My daughter and I use her iPhone 11 to initiate a FaceTime call to my mother, who, in the hospital, has been living with dementia these past years: She has moments of recognition, moments of confusion, moments of isolation, even in a short call of 20 minutes there is an ebb and flow of time passing, time remembered, time not remembered. It is a tearful reminder of impermanence.

Ruth Ozeki (2021), in her book, *The Book of Form and Emptiness*, reminds her readers that there is a kind of sadness that we can look forward to; it is a sadness that comes from wounds deep enough and exposed enough that we feel reality working inside us, that we feel the motions of the world alive within us. Such sadnesses need not be avoided. Tears have open arms.

As we reflect, allowing the storied experiences of hopefulness and impermanence shared in Lyle's book to percolate, I (Melissa) am reminded of Aoki's (1993) lived curriculum, Pinar's (1975) work on *currere*, and Chambers (1999) writing on finding the path with heart. I mull over what education could be and ponder the possibilities for education if we let go; let go of the silos, containment, hegemonic, and Westernized concepts of what education *should* look like and move towards hope. A hope brewing in those who cry for transformation, who cry out for a human experience and a release from the positivist stronghold towards embracing students' storied experiences. Hope lies in re/humanizing education, transcending silos, and releasing students from isolation. Ellen Lyle's collection, beautifully curated, lights the path, offering us a space to envision such hope.

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Book Review

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Ms. Melissa Bishop is a PhD student at the University of Prince Edward Island. She brings over 15 years of experience as a teacher, child and youth counsellor, and foster parent. She is particularly interested in the entanglements of the liv(ed)ing curriculum, environmental education, sustainability, and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) in Indigenous early learning contexts. As a settler ally, Melissa is committed to engaging in research that is relational and reciprocal.

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