

# AN ARTS-BASED CONTEMPLATIVE PAUSE

## INTRODUCTION TO PART 1: SHARING RADICAL CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES

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### BIOS:

Barbara Bickel is an artist, researcher, and educator currently practicing in Calgary, Alberta Canada where she co-founded Studio M\*: A Research Creation Lab Intersecting Arts, Culture and Healing in 2017. She is an Associate Professor of Art Education Emeritus at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA. To view her art portfolio and arts-based research on-line visit <http://www.barbarabickel.com>

Susan Walsh is a writer/poet, arts-based researcher, and student of Tibetan Buddhism and contemplative photography. She is also a Professor

of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Susan wrote *Contemplative and artful openings: Researching women and teaching* (Routledge, 2018) and co-edited *Arts-based and contemplative practices in research and teaching: Honoring presence* (Routledge, 2015) with Barbara Bickel and Carl Leggo.

Diane Conrad is Professor of Drama/Theatre Education at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She is passionate about the arts as ways of knowing and being.



We are delighted to introduce the first part of a two-part special issue of *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal*; our special issue attends to arts-based and contemplative practices in inquiry and teaching. We share this first part with you

as a larger invitation to all people to experience the radical healing that the combination of arts and contemplative practices can bring to our teaching, research, and personal lives. Also, we offer this two-part special issue of *Artizein* as a

gift within the framework of a healing gift economy. The foundation of a gift economy is a reciprocal circle of care that is other-focused rather than ego-focused and based on a maternal paradigm of unconditional m/othering (Vaughan, 1997, 2007), a paradigm based on love, care and abundance—not fear, mistrust and scarcity. Communities that operate today in a love-based circle of care form a stark contrast to the dominant “imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal capitalist” exchange economy that sent the world and its inhabitants, human and more-than-human, spiraling out of ecological harmony and into ecological, cultural and political destruction. We, as artists, researchers, and teachers, are impacted by the

neoliberal institutions of education that we teach and research within, institutions that have adapted the fear-based values of the dominant competitive exchange economy which, in its scarcity mentality, too often exploits the gift-givers by taking their offerings to enable an unsustainable economy that expands itself to the detriment of all.

Within this destructive global context, the idea for a special journal issue arose from the collective yearnings of a group of about 50 artists, researchers, and teachers who gathered for a pre-conference day-long event in May 2017 in Toronto, Canada, as part of the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). The pre-conference was commissioned by the executive of the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS) as an opportunity to open wider conversations among diverse scholar-artists who are living and/or working in the Canadian context – and who are drawn to contemplative arts practices. Diane Conrad, ARTS pre-conference organizer for that year, initiated an innovative approach to the event. Having attended many conferences over the years, she believed that the pre-conference space could offer a unique opportunity

to engage with colleagues and their scholarly passions in ways more responsive to ARTS members' collective aesthetic sensibilities. She envisioned a day of sharing, conversing about, and doing creative work together as a gift for all (Hyde, 2007; Kimmerer, 2015). Her colleagues Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel, and Carl Leggo – and seven other arts-based researchers working in the area of contemplative arts inquiry – had just published their edited book *Arts-based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence*. Diane invited Barbara, Susan, and Carl to work together to facilitate a day of contemplative arts-based activities with attendees. The innovative, community-centered, collaborative workspace in Toronto that they rented for the event had a fully equipped kitchen facility. This accommodated Diane's desire for the day to share food together . . . as an arts-based contemplative practice in itself. With help from friends, she created a menu, shopped for, and prepared fresh and healthy food for the group. While she regretted not being fully involved in the sessions throughout the day, she was delighted to spend time in the kitchen seeing to the physical nourishment of her dear colleagues as they

explored contemplative arts-based practices together.

Diane's desire to nurture the arts-based and contemplative focus for the pre-conference event through all moments of the day, including food sharing, became foundational in terms of setting the context for gift-giving in an overall sense. As the planning conversations among Susan, Barbara, Carl, and Diane unfolded over several months, they realized that the tone, atmosphere and format of the day would have to be something different from the usual presentation fare of conferences; a vision of a restorative retreat-like environment emerged. They labelled their call for proposals a "Call for Collaborators," and asked people to consider their thoughts about and experiences of "contemplation" and "contemplative arts practices" as they framed their proposals. In the call, they also indicated their intention that the retreat be an opportunity to "open up space and time for conversation, creation, and contemplation" and that the day be "a creative gathering where everyone's offerings and presence . . . contributes to a collaborative engagement with the arts and contemplative practices": a day of gift offerings and shared whole group practic-

es—nourishing and restorative experiences in a slow rhythm. They accepted all proposals and invited participants to share their proposals with one another in advance of the conference through a group Google drive folder. In this way, participants were able to become familiar with one another's work and attend to potential new connections in advance of the retreat.

In Part Two of this two-part special issue of *Artizein* (which will appear in 2019), Susan and Barbara will share their reflections on the planning process for the pre-conference retreat. They do so in response to requests from those who found the pre-conference retreat restorative and generative, and who wanted to know more about how the planning and facilitation process evolved so that it could be shared forward into future gatherings. In the introduction to Part Two, they will also share an appendix that includes the day's outline developed by Carl, Susan, and Barbara as co-facilitators. Further, Susan and Barbara will offer, in the form of a found poem, some of the collective wisdom gathered in the closing circle of participants: ideas, words and phrases that arrived as we wondered together about

several questions, both in advance of the retreat day and also during it. Part Two will also include an overall closing response by artist, educator and therapist Peter London who reflects on his reading—and dwelling with—the pieces in both Parts One and Two of the special issue.

This issue, Part One, features pieces by author-artists who attended the pre-conference retreat as well as Carl Leggo's poetic reflections as co-facilitator.



We invite you, as a reader, to pause and reflect on each of these remarkable contributions: a diverse collection of art forms, including music, visual art, poetry, and a variety of other written

genres. Below, we also share a glimpse of the collaborative peer editing process that took place among contributors and editors, a process that reinforces our intentions of creating a circle of care. Finally, we include a heartfelt dedication of this two part special issue on arts-based and contemplative practices in inquiry and teaching.

### *Part One: An Arts-Based and Contemplative Pause—Contributions*

We are honoured to open Part One of our two-part special issue of *Artizein* with a prayer by Indigenous flute artist **Vicki Kelly**. Vicki's breath sends the messages contained in this journal issue to the four directions, to the sky above and earth below, and into the center spiral of all. Vicki's prayer is followed by poetry and contemplations by **Carl Leggo**, whose writing is a way to "slow down and linger with memories, experiences and emotions" and also to "hold out [his] hands in both gratitude and invitation, always seeking to make connections."

**Robert Nellis** gently re-enters the contemplative practice of *Lectio Divina*, introduced to participants during the pre-conference; Robert inquires poetically and reflectively through memories into the moment “togetherness or being with move[s] from presence to absence.” **George Belliveau** poignantly delves into the experience of male military veterans through a creative self-reflective monologue, bringing forward for questioning cultural masculinist-based understandings of “what it means to be a man in today’s society.” A poem by **Janice Valdez** flows from her experience of deep listening to First Nations peoples during a research study, of their relations with water treatment systems in their communities. **Annemarie Cuculiza-Brunke**, with vulnerable honesty, then enters the uncharted waters of “challenges that siblings of people with disabilities face” through autobiographical, poetic, and letter writing in a healing-recovery process. Poetic moments of wonder are revealed by **Morgan Gardner** as she shares the (re)visioning of her academic life through meditations on nature. **Jennifer Markides** follows, writing of a challenging experience with a natural disaster in

her contemplative visual essay into how she made peace with the “river that overflowed its banks and besieged her community.” Lastly, **Michelle Searle** and **Lynn Fels** offer a found poem based on their co-inquiry as artist and teachers into the oft avoided “landscape of the arts in relation to assessment and evaluation.”



### *Collaborative Peer Revision and Editing*

The process of co-editing this special issue stepped outside of the competitive-based peer review process of academic journals and instead walked into a collaborative peer revision/editing process modelled on the way that the book, *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Re-*

*search and Teaching* unfolded (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015). We share our peer revision/editing process as a gift-sharing model for future use by other editors of journals and books.

To begin, the co-editors (Susan and Barbara) of this special issue (Parts One and Two) formed four groups of authors who then read each other’s articles. Each group of peer editors included a range of writers from Master’s level graduate students to full professors. After reading the articles, the authors in each group reviewed each other’s articles using guidelines provided by the co-editors. This was followed by an on-line real-time conversation within each small group to discuss the articles in more de-

tail. After this conversation, the authors revised their articles and sent them back to the group for review again. Upon receiving feedback from their peer group and making additional revisions, the articles were sent to the issue co-editors (Susan and Barbara) who co-reviewed them. At this point there were numerous back and forth communications between the co-editors and the

authors to bring the articles to completion. Through this peer revision/editing process the articles have been engaged with carefully by up to six different reviewers, including the two main guest editors.

The peer revision/editing process, although perhaps seemingly complex, was a smooth process of coming to a whole. In this way this special issue carries on the relational co-evolving model of generative peer dialogue that contributed to the successful collection of writings in the book that inspired the pre-conference. The intent, both of the book and this special issue, is to contemplatively and creatively respond in supportive caring relationships to/with each other's ideas and writing. This reciprocal relational practice contradicts the dominant academic model of anonymous peer review based in an individualistic,

competitive, survival model of scholarship, while retaining rigour, in line with contemplative practices, through compassionate criticality.

### *Dedication of this Special Two-Part Issue*

Finally, during the process of co-editing this special issue, we, as editors, have supported each other's journeys through retirement, medical leaves, and life obstacles. At the start of our work, Carl Leggo, as

co-facilitator of the pre-conference, was part of the early stages of the journal editing process. Not long after, he was diagnosed with cancer and stepped back from co-editing. This special two-part issue of *Artizein* is dedicated to Carl as a heartfelt thank you prayer for his passionate and tireless gift of teaching, research, editing, and ever poetic writing, so firmly grounded in the regenerative gifting cycle of love for the other.



### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The five Miksang (contemplative photography) images in this introduction are the artwork of Susan Walsh, who has been studying and practicing Miksang as a contemplative art practice for five years. Each of these photos was taken in downtown Toronto during walks with friends and colleagues during the 2017 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference, of which the ARTS pre-conference was a part. Miksang is but one example of the rich array of contemplative arts that were explored in collaborative ways during the pre-conference retreat.

<sup>2</sup>A gift-giving paradigm flourished (and still does today in some communities) in pre-colonial contact in the Americas in Indigenous communities worldwide (Mann, 2000) and in Matriarchal cultures worldwide (Geottner-Abendroth, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>This descriptive list is taken from hooks (2003, p. 10).

<sup>4</sup>Please see a brief description of the book (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015) found on the Routledge publishing webpage <https://www.routledge.com/Arts-based-and-Contemplative-Practices-in-Research-and-Teaching-Honoring/Walsh-Bickel-Leggo/p/book/9780415743877>

“This volume presents a scholarly investigation of the ways educators engage in artistic and contemplative practices – and why this matters in education. Arts-based learning and inquiry can function as a powerful catalyst for change by allowing spiritual practices to be present within educational settings, but too often the relationship between art, education and spirituality is ignored. Exploring artistic disciplines such as dance, drama, visual art, music, and writing, and forms such as writing-witnessing, freestyle rap, queer performative autoethnography, and poetic imagination, this book develops a transformational educational paradigm. Its unique integration of spirituality in and through the arts addresses the contemplative needs of learners and educators in diverse educational and community settings.”

<sup>5</sup>Please see the Introduction to *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Researching and Teaching: Honoring Presence* (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015) for a discussion about the series of retreats that facilitated the evolution of the edited collection. The latter process influenced the vision for the pre-conference retreat.

<sup>6</sup>Please see the Introduction to *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Researching and Teaching: Honoring Presence* (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015) for a discussion of the peer revision/editing process that facilitated the evolution of the edited collection – and that has influenced our process of editing this two-part special issue of *Artizein*.

## References

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