

**A Review of *Engaging With Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning and Research: Realizing Transformative Potential in Diverse Contexts***

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Inquiring into the role that education may play in shaping an individual and thus the larger society is an ongoing quest. Being aware of the epistemological and ontological violence that is continued through past and present modes of colonized, neo-liberalized, materialistic education, educators often strive to invite education that may create spaces for healing and holistic learning for diverse students. However, such efforts towards transformation could be personally taxing and difficult amidst the ongoing demands of teaching, learning, and research. The challenge also lies in exploring one's understandings of self-in-relation—this requires a reflexive, dialogical inquiry into how one engages with/in education, and larger world.<sup>1</sup>

The question arises: Can the transformation of self and society be imposed externally, or does it require change in one's own consciousness as a relational human being?

Ashwani Kumar posits meditative inquiry as one way that may help educators in reconnecting with the(ir) selves and empower them to engage in transforming consciousness (of self and hopefully of others) by embodying this practice with/in education and life. The edited collection entitled "*Engaging With Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning and Research: Realizing Transformative Potential in Diverse Contexts*," weaves Kumar's theory of meditative inquiry with thought provoking illustrations by Adam Garry Podolski and with the beautiful poetic and aesthetic expressions that are rooted in diverse cultures including ancient Indian traditions and Indigenous ways of knowing.

This book is published as part of the Studies in Curriculum Theory Series. In the Foreword to this book, William F. Pinar, the series editor and a key curriculum theorist, notes that this book is an authentic and important source intended to inform scholars and doctoral and master's students about the increasingly complex field of curriculum theory. Pinar highlights various forms of Kumar's meditative inquiry and characterizes its "personal" form as a "conceptual cousin" of his method of *currere* (p. xii). He illuminates this connection by quoting Kumar who states that meditative inquiry "promotes existential investigation into the deeper layers of one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions . . . [that] are never isolated from the people and world around us" (p. xxi).

In the Introduction, Kumar expands on the scope and holistic nature of meditative inquiry by stating that meditative inquiry encourages us to "go beyond . . . meditation practices and mindfulness-based activities" (xxi). He characterizes such approaches to promote mental health and well-being as superficial and influenced by capitalistic culture as they merely focus on reducing stress to enhance one's performance to fit into social and economic systems. In contrast, meditative inquiry, as Kumar claims, is a deeper, existential and dialogical inquiry, that encompasses "a range of questions and themes that touch philosophical, psychological, spiritual, cultural, ecological, aesthetic, and political dimensions of exploration" (xxi). The expansive

dimensions of meditative inquiry are further evident in its methodological span that, as Kumar explains, shares grounds with theoretical orientations and discourses that are informed by Indigenous philosophies, critical theory and pedagogy, postmodernism and poststructuralism, autobiography, existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and more (xxiii-xxiv).

The richness of diverse perspectives through which one can engage with meditative inquiry is reflected in the scholarly essays of contributing authors from African, Asian, Buddhist, Indigenous, and Western contexts. The book is comprised largely of three parts: the first includes 16 chapters, each of which present authors' understandings of Kumar's meditative inquiry and its embodiment in their practices of learning, teaching, research, and living life across various disciplinary and philosophical orientations that range from law, dialogic research and teaching in university and K-12 contexts, Africentricity in adult education, martial arts, music, arts, positive psychology, teacher education, critical discourse analysis to synergies with hermeneutics, Buddhist praxis, Indigenous ways of knowing, and exploration of poststructuralism, cultural and intergenerational trauma and more. In the second part of the book, five renowned educational researchers namely, Ardra L. Cole, Michael Corbett, Anne M. Phelan, E. Wayne Ross, and John J. Guiney Yallop have responded to the collected essays presented in the first part. Their responses highlight the value this book brings as they identify meditative inquiry as a "way forward" (Cole, this volume) by connecting it with their scholarly pursuits in the fields of educational research, Queer education, teacher education, and critical education. The third part of book includes reflections by contributing authors, an epilogue by Kumar, and a poem by Emiyah Simmonds, one of Kumar's students, who highlights the centrality of welcoming lived experiences and "focus on the learner as a whole" (p. 295) in meditative inquiry in her poem, "An Ode to Meditative Inquiry and Dialogue."

Emphasizing social and relational connectedness through raising epistemological, ontological and axiological dimensions of meditative inquiry, the collected works in this book invite non-Eurocentric perspectives that challenge colonialist, neoliberal and capitalist pursuits, and offer ways to decolonize, Indigenize, and reconcile our ways of being in the world as we engage in teaching, learning, and research. Showcasing the contributions by scholars from multiple educational contexts and multi/inter-disciplinary areas, this book presents harmonizing insights that may create dialogical spaces to inquire into one's intentions of engaging in teaching, learning and research and rejuvenate one's relationship with self and other(ed) to reimagine and recreate a socially and ecologically just world!

You are also welcomed to engage in dialogical meditative inquiry through viewing the recordings of a 2-day virtual conference of meditative inquiry that was hosted in August 2022. It is through this conference that I came to know about this book. Some of the themes that were reverberated through presentations by contributing authors and by the editors of various educational journals, reaffirmed the potential of meditative inquiry for therapeutic and spiritual endeavours that are critical to invite holistic education into educational institutions. These passionate presentations that transpired through each contributor's unique explorations with meditative inquiry were diverse, yet all echoed the significance of meditative inquiry. Engaging in meditative inquiry opened up spaces for these educators to inquire into difficult issues that may

require unlearning and listening with purpose—in stillness, in silence—to engage in reflection and dialogical inquiry that ensures awareness, promotes critical thinking, values vulnerability, questions all discriminatory -isms without any fear, and calls for action with/in moments of teaching, learning, and research to reimagine *just education* that may lead to empowerment of self and other(ed). The video recording of this conference can be accessed through this link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqVoziiuD3E&list=PLfVjDB\\_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqVoziiuD3E&list=PLfVjDB_dQhEomgiYYmBJKj1nvD1oGBwaf)

Though my own introduction to Kumar’s meditative inquiry is relatively new, I see that the key insights resonate well with my own scholarship of (trans-multi)culturally responsive education that amalgamates critical and transformational education perspectives with culturally responsive teaching (Raisinghani, 2019). Meditative inquiry focuses on dialogical, existential inquiry and lived experiences to bring holistic education by transforming one’s consciousness. In the same vein, a (trans-multi)cultural education emphasizes relational caring, critical cultural consciousness, and empathetic relationships to invite socially and ecologically just, responsive education that may empower one as a (trans-multi)cultural being who is able to relate with self and others as a member of one human kin, and who values relational connectedness with more than human world. Although meditative inquiry and (trans-multi)culturally responsive education are guided by different educational discourses, I realize that Pinar’s *currere*, Ted Aoki’s lived experiences, and the insights of Indigenous and diverse cultural ways of knowing are common threads that conceptually intertwine both of these. Thus, I feel that as Kumar mentions, “The way of meditative inquiry is not new; it has always existed” (p. xix). You may also see its parallels within your own teaching, learning and research. Through this book review, I extend Ashwani Kumar’s invitation to experience and embrace the transformative potential of meditative inquiry to all readers as it “is an exploration within oneself and of how one is connected to life [and education] relationally, ecologically, economically, politically, and culturally” (xxix).

### References

- Kumar, A. (Ed.). (2022). *Engaging with meditative inquiry in teaching, learning, and research: Realizing transformative potentials in diverse contexts* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003128441>
- Raisinghani, L. (2019). (Trans-multi)culturally responsive education: A critical framework for responding to student diversity. *Education Canada*, 59(3), 26–31. EdCan Network. <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/trans-multiculturally-responsive-education/>

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<sup>1</sup>The play of word/world as wor(l)d is my own thought as I feel that many times, we just rely on the written words rather than experiencing the world so it's an invitation to see that they inform each other. And I think that meditative inquiry may offer one such opportunity.