

## EDITORIAL

### Wayfinding Conversations: rethinking education to disrupt marginality

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## Wayfinding Conversations: rethinking education to disrupt marginality (Editorial as House Ceilidh)

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Each of us comes to our work in education with a history of experiences, influences, teachings, and values. Educators bring myriad inspirations and aspirations to advancing the profession through ongoing reflection, learning, and dialogue. Beyond the individual efforts, formal education hold the dominant society's collective hopes and intentions for the next generations. Those with power and influence determine what is privileged in the education system: whose voices are heard, and whose values are silenced. Educators who take a Freirean approach—an emancipatory stance—seek to disrupt the hegemonic structures that perpetuate the status quo and normative functions of schooling. Working towards more socially just education practices, educators navigate colonized and colonizing spaces within the schooling systems to unsettle marginality in intentional ways.

By drawing on the wisdom of those who have come before us and those in practice now, we might create greater possibilities and potentialities for education that recognizes differences as strengths within the ecology of humanity. Education has existed long before the advent of schools and teachers. It is has been an integral part of communities and knowledge systems. Teachers have come in many forms; human, more-than-human (Abrams, 1996), metaphysical (Little Bear, 2000; Deloria Jr., 1979/2012), and beyond.

Ethnographer and author, Wade Davis (2009), describes the central lesson of anthropology as an answer to the question, “what does it mean to be human and alive?” where cultural differences reflect different people's ways of life from around the Earth. Wayfinding is a means of navigating the world that relies on teachings and knowledges passed down through generations and embodied connections with the more-than-human world. Wayfinding in education encompasses wisdom that his been passed down over generations, recognition of embodied knowledges, and attunement to the current educational places we are navigating.

As co-editors, Beth, Jennifer and Sabbir, drew inspiration from *Looking Back, Living Forward: Indigenous Research Rising Up* (Markides & Forsythe, 2018), an edited collection that brought together the work of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars whose research was shaped by their responsibilities to the generations past, present, and future. Similar to academic writing where scholars

reference the work of others who have come before them in the field and shaped their thinking and ideas around a topic, Indigenous people will recognize the generations who have come before them and passed on teachings that support life and shape sustainable relationships with self and others, including the more-than-human world.

In the wayfinding conversations shared within this issue, the contributors navigate the educational terrain in varying geographical, epistemological, and situational contexts. How the editors and authors have come to these places is explored in their contributions shared below. Together their stories resemble a celtic traditional way of sharing wisdom, the house ceilidh. We introduce them following the four ordinal directions, starting in the north and travelling east, south and back west:

## **Editors**

**Jennifer:** In my time as an elementary school teacher, I really struggled with the pressures of time that encroached on the meaningful learning that is intended to happen in the classroom. As a Montessori educator, I was afforded three-hour work periods that created space for the students to follow their interests and learn in ways that met their needs over time. While the programs of studies were mandated, the need for community building and relational teachings were ever present. Informed by my Métis worldview and intuitive knowledge gained from my teaching experience, I came to see that the curriculum of schools goes beyond the academic to the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of the youth. While I could feel this push and pull of responsibilities and often shielded the students from unnecessary or harmful time pressures where I could, I did not have the pedagogical tools to name the conflicts and constraints I was feeling in my work. It was my desire to find healthier more sustainable approaches to education that saw me leave my much-loved role in the classroom to pursue my doctorate and work with pre-service teachers. The continued pursuit of emancipatory and sustainable education practices are what influence my roles as an educator, author, and editor. In this work, I hope to lift up and support contextually specific and culturally responsive pedagogies and practices towards more socially just and sustainable ways of being in the world.

**Beth:** If I were to identify the touchstones that bring me to this work I would say, being confronted with the paucity of my text-centric education by a few well placed observations that Traditional Scottish Travellers made as they mentored me, has had me questioning assumptions ever since. Two years immersed in forum theatre taught me the power of working through such questions in embodied ways. The Altrum Voices Heard group who tutored me, again, taught me lessons that continue to have transformative effect as often as I let them. Both experiences mean that, now, looking forward I am working to understand how to live questioning conversations that connect me to communities of inquiry. Holding in tension aspirations and realities for Bangladeshi early years' educators is one of those communities of inquiry whose questions I'm travelling with.

**Sabbir:** After independence, education system of Bangladesh is highly enfolded by the shadow of British culture due to two centuries' colonial effect. Missionary based schools were treated as symbol of education for elite class. In addition, higher educational institutions were continuing to practice English as medium of instruction, though number of students were killed in the year 1952 for the

recognition of the Bengali language as an official language. Subsequently, during 90s our education system witnessed dramatic transitions like free primary education for all, empowerment of women in education as well as social perspective, increased movement of educators to developed countries for higher studies. In spite of all the above, there still exists lack of theorization in the education system of our country. My engineering, finance and social science academic skillset honed me to identify and analyze the problems in an objective way. I deeply realized that there is a huge void in every spheres of socio-economic activities in terms of technology integration and contextualization of educational philosophies in our country. It was my desire to find sustainable and student-centric instructional practices to enhance quality of education. The continued quest of sustainable education practices considering technological and financial constraints influence my roles as an educator. Contributing here as an editor, I am enthusiastic enough to rethink current educational scenarios and move forward being conscious about context and culture supported pedagogies and practices to achieve sustainable educational goal.

### **Authors:**

**Becky and Kathy:** We came to the work through friendship and through honest conversations about who we are, what we have experienced, the assumptions we make and what we fundamentally value. Canada has a complex history of Settler-Indigenous relationships that have left lasting marks on every aspect of Canadian society. In our work in this issue as well as our own processes of navigating schools and schooling in Canada we tried to embody *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit* principles through respectful relationships, inclusivity, service, resourcefulness, shared leadership and solutions seeking. As we sought to help youth better understand their position in the global world; between the traditional and the modern, we also explored ours. Ultimately, we think our article shares the story of a school system also in it's adolescence, with a positive future building upon successes of the past and the optimism of students, but that schools like adolescents, also need a network of supports, services and community to reach their full potential.

**Denise & Rob:** Having lived and taught on a remote northern Dene Nation in Canada, and with our current positions teaching (Denise) and serving as principal (Rob) in schools with high Indigenous student populations, we have substantial experience working with and for Indigenous people. We also have in-depth and experiential understanding of how Indigenous people are impacted by the Canadian education and justice systems. We both began our PhD research with the intention of looking at specific ways that we could provide culturally responsive pedagogy to increase the school engagement of Indigenous students (Denise in writing instruction, Rob in the trades). Having lived and worked with Indigenous people for much of our educational careers we assumed that we were culturally competent. What became evident to us was that we could not fully understand culturally responsive teaching/learning without first looking at our own privilege. In becoming cognizant of the tensions and challenges that exist when non-Indigenous and Indigenous people work together it was necessary that we came to the awareness of the ways we are implicated in colonial relations and the protections/privileges afforded by the dominant society, acknowledge unequal power relationships, and

understand the impact that a history of colonization has had on Indigenous people. This was life-changing and it transformed us from the inside out.

Our next step was to look at how we have been socialized to have these perspectives and how the dominant culture has imposed and maintained Eurocentric views of Indigenous people. Thus, we decided to examine the roles played by systems and policy. This paper was our endeavour to shift from looking at ourselves to looking at the systems/policy that created our perspectives; a wayfinding conversation to look and live forward. It is our hope that through understanding how systemic racism has been created and maintained that we will be able to recognize the oppressive systems in place so that we can take action towards reconciliation.

**Valerie:** Deeply passionate about education and Leadership, I have worked in the Further Education (FE) sector for over 20 years and for the most part, my role has involved developing and delivering leadership programmes and qualifications. This work has not only given me the opportunity to share my experience, knowledge and learning, but it has also given me the opportunity to learn from hundreds of leaders from across the private, public and third sectors in Scotland. For most of my time in FE, my experience of the sector was one where colleges worked in isolation, the system was dominated by bureaucracy and the leadership style was generally one of top down, command and control. In the last decade this has started to shift, and we are now witnessing a more collaborative, systems-based approach to college leadership. My own studies include working with [International Futures Forum](#), where I continue to develop insights on The Three Horizons of Change and 21st Century Literacies, [Theory U](#), a process that helps individuals, teams and organisations build the essential leadership capacities needed to address the root causes of today's challenges by drawing on other ways of knowing, Nora Bateson's [Warm Data Labs](#) and [Collective Leadership for Scotland](#). My work has also taken me to Ireland, my native country, where I co-facilitated at the [Creative Education Symposium](#). All this work has deepened my belief in the need each of us has to tap into our ancient collective wisdom in order to better meet the challenges of our lifetime. It has helped me develop programmes designed to empower our College Leaders to draw on their collective wisdom, and the wisdom of other communities from across the globe to bring the changes we really want to see in the Further Education Sector in Scotland.

**Andrew:** In my research, I follow up on my experiences both as a teacher in small rural schools in Northern Norway and as a teacher educator. For many parents and pupils in rural areas, the school is an unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcome part of their lives. Small rural schools, many with multi-age classes, stand out from larger urban schools in several ways, and experience challenges concerning teacher recruitment and retention, curriculum and teaching material. These challenges do not receive much attention in general teaching education. In their education and training teachers are prepared for work in urban schools and as disseminators of the national curriculum.

With my background, it was natural to study questions concerning justice and equity for underprivileged students in education. Fair distribution and redistribution of resources are important prerequisites. But,

as I argue in my article, relations, attitudes and prejudices are crucial for educational equity and equal opportunities for all independent of ethnicity, class, social background, gender or geography.

**Niclas & Kirk:** Last year I (Niclas) spent eight weeks observing two committed teachers and three of their Religious Education classes. This was the first time I had been back at secondary school, at any extended length of time after I left my teaching position to become a doctoral researcher over a decade ago. I was intrigued as I watched the teachers navigate difficult and controversial situations in their classrooms. One of these teachers displayed with a special sensibility that gave me a new perspective on my own university teaching practice. As during the COVID-19 pandemic Sweden did not lockdown but rather encouraged academics to work from home, few people were ever in the coffee shop. This encouraged interdisciplinary discussion in novel constellations of academics and students. Over morning coffee I ended up in a new constellation that included Kirk. He was excited by the way I was describing my classroom observations experiences and he suggested that we should interview more RE teachers to understand their role as navigators (wayfinders) in this challenging environment where traditional Swedish, new Swedish values, Indigenous values and various Religious values meet. As we analyzed this data we spontaneously saw ourselves and how we could improve how we navigated seminar discussions with undergraduate and taught postgraduates, and interestingly supervisory discussions with ours and others doctoral researchers.

**Tord:** I have, as a compulsory school teacher during many years been interested in how to "find ways" in education - how to inspire students and contribute to their development, as students, and as young citizens. I believe that I sometimes succeeded, but most likely, I did not always do. Since becoming a researcher this has been one important aspect in my research: How do teachers teach to get students to think a little longer, than just performing for their own sake? The social studies subjects (in Sweden: civics, geography, history, religious education) – have a lot in common. Some of what is in common should (according to me) be a goal for all education: To educate for being a good citizen in the world and to educate for being a part of something bigger - of a whole.

A wish to contribute to this special issue of *Education in the North* became obvious, in particular as I, at the time for reading the call, recently had visited a number of classrooms where exciting things happened - things that could be connected to this above formulated "goal for all education". Of course teaching towards this goal is not easy, considering all the (hundreds of?) conditions that may influence teaching and learning in classroom practice – but teachers and students I met in my research project, were filled with so much power and will: "We want to develop, we want to grow – as teachers, students and as human beings." In my contribution to this special issue, there are described a few examples of how to find educational ways, of how to navigate in our world, with its large contemporary and future challenges. The examples describe possibilities but also challenges with a more integrated, overall view of social studies teaching. These examples are a few, of many possible examples, on finding ways in educational practice.

**Rainer** works as teacher educator at University College of Teacher Education Vienna (Pädagogische Hochschule Wien) and University Vienna. He is head of the Competence Center for Multilingualism,

Migration, Human Rights Education (Ko.M.M.M.) at University College of Teacher Education Vienna, Austria (Pädagogische Hochschule Wien). The center is concerned with consulting, networking and initiating research development projects related to aspects of multilingualism and migration: [komm.phwien.ac.at](http://komm.phwien.ac.at)

**Maria:** My culture is that of the South of Italy: historically more rural, isolated, and poor than the North of Italy. A history of farmers, laborers, woodcutters, as well expressed in the title book “Formiche di Puglia” (The ants of Puglia) of the local author Tommaso Fiore (1951): the ants are the peasants, the workers of the countryside, the starving. The dignity and the daily works of the so-called “I cafoni” – the rough people working the earth and the stone - today attract tourists into the white and clean streets of Puglia. Valuing the diversity of intelligence and different forms of knowledge remains a modern challenge. I entered into the education world as a separate reality from mine, assuming the complex social role of “the student.” Staying in the educational system helps me bridge cultural and social gaps, overcoming monological perspectives and representations. Today, as a teacher-educator, I search for dialogic and collaborative possibilities between fields, territories, subjects, social status, cultural and racial artificial separations. Multiple wayfinding conversations are possible to be opened through education, so I repeat to myself: “I must remember at all times that the real leap is to bring the invention into existence. In the world I travel to, I create myself endlessly” (Franz Fanon, 1952).

**Amanda:** As a primary and early childhood teacher in a public school in Rio de Janeiro, I sought to deepen my studies motivated by the difficulties of the beginning of my career, in a constant search for better teacher education. This led me to be a professor at a public university in teacher education courses, which are the higher education courses that reach the popular classes in Brazil (which has difficulty entering other courses). My objective has always been to reflect on teacher education focused on pedagogical practice in public education in Brazil, aiming at a more Freirean public school, where the popular class manages to emancipate and be critical in society and, for this, I consider it crucial that there is an education of higher quality teachers accessible to all teachers in my country. However, in the paper I analyze questions about teacher education in Brazil, between the access of some to teacher education with higher quality and others not so much, with government insurgencies (motivated by international pressure and rankings) for there to be teacher education “only for show” and not focusing on true critical and reflective education.

## **Faring Forward**

There are many responsibilities to ancestors and gratitudes to allies, more than we can name and also a sense that in this issue we also need to serve generations to come. We dedicate this issue to a more socially justice, sustainable future we hope they will continue to find ways forward into.

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