

Book Review

Ecological Pedagogy, Buddhist Pedagogy, Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Experiments in a Curriculum for Miracles

Jackie Seidel and David W. Jardine
New York: Peter Lang, 2014

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Seidel and Jardine's collection of reflections is the result of many years of research and K-12 classroom teaching experience. Seidel, a recipient of several teaching awards, has research interests that center in contemplative pedagogy, teacher education, ecopedagogy, children's literature, and curriculum studies.¹ Jardine's admirable academic career involves research in ecological thinking, classroom practice, and hermeneutics. They come together for *Ecological Pedagogy, Buddhist Pedagogy, Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Experiments in a Curriculum for Miracles* to explore and examine three frameworks of instruction for inspiring and inquiring about the engaged classroom and an authentic experience within it. The authors examine ecological consciousness, Buddhist epistemologies, and hermeneutic interpretive inquiry and offer ways for both teachers and students to renew joy and passion in the classroom. They lay the groundwork for this reflection in the classroom saying that "so many teachers and students that we have worked with over many years have done beautiful work that calls out, over and over, 'we are here, we are here'" (p. 1).

Seidel and Jardine begin with a lovely dedication to both David G. Smith and Peter Rilstone. Smith is a Professor of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta with more than 20 years of research in the areas of curriculum and teacher education. The dedication Seidel and Jardine write for him indicate deep respect and gratitude. Both authors dedicate the book to Rilstone, an Alberta teacher, for the many years he taught them. The authors continue with an introduction outlining the motivating factor for the book, "to elaborate beautiful classroom work that we have witnessed over and over again, in every grade and every sort of school circumstance, over the past several years" (p. 2). They go on to explain how the use of the three disciplines—ecology, Buddhism, and hermeneutics—can be beneficial and act as an "opening in the concert between teacher and student" (p. 3).² As a higher education music educator and performer, this notion and image resonate deeply with me and offer meaning and clarity for the rationale of merging these three disciplines. Seidel and Jardine explain that these three roots can extend beyond the more traditional education literature. Perhaps if one is open to these ideas, they can "help break the discourse that has become moribund and stuck, and worse, dangerous" (p. 2). Moving beyond the very clear and concise introduction, the authors divide the book into 16 chapters. Some of the chapters are written collaboratively, and others by

the individual authors. Each chapter begins with a reflection of sorts; a definition, quotation, dedication, poem, or hymn, for example. These I believe offer an opening, or unearthing, for readers as they make their way through the exploration of the three disciplines. It is also of interest to note the cover illustration, which is a painting by the artist Connie Geerts called “The Aviator.” It depicts a magpie with its wings opened and extended, appearing to be in flight. This image can offer readers an aesthetic experience and perhaps the sensation of what a re-examination or reflection of the student-teacher relationship can inspire and what this relationship can perhaps become. The notions of freedom, adventure, flexibility, boundlessness, and exploration may come to mind. The fluid way in which the authors decide to lay out the collection can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the ideas of flexibility and fluidity in the view of curriculum and the creativity that already exists within students and teachers. The chapters move effortlessly through the three principles of ecology, Buddhism, and interpretive hermeneutics without being bound section by section, offering readers seemingly limitless ways to explore and contemplate practice in the classroom.

Each chapter offers inspiring ways to view the student-teacher relationship in the classroom with a unique grounding in the pedagogical disciplines or roots. Educators looking for renewal, motivation, and a way to think beyond the routine of outcomes and testing may find some of the experiences relayed by the authors encouraging. Readers can see a view of how one can be more creative in the classroom. The parallels drawn between the three roots and nature, the earth, poetic verse, and the writers’ reminiscences of classroom experiences, can guide educators to find more joy in their teaching practices.

Of note are several chapters that resonate with me as an educator, musician, and educational philosopher. Seidel’s chapter, *A Curriculum for Miracles*, evokes deep contemplation. In particular, her organic notions of breath—as it relates to slowing down, taking time, and living more compassionately—offer ways for readers to reflect, to take a moment to observe and “create space for miracles to happen” (p. 7). Seidel explores ideas such as the earth, one breath, and the cosmic miracle of life. She ponders how she might sustain these thoughts, and the emotions triggered by them, and how they can be effective in the classroom. Educators may experience the classroom as a place that can often be confined to goals and perhaps restricted by those who impose boundaries on how to reach these goals. She writes, “A Curriculum for Miracles is not a deficit curriculum. It is broad and wide and deep, holding the whole of life generously without crowding” (p. 8). Perhaps the educator able to maintain this view of not crowding, of giving space for students to show the miracles of their creativity, may find release from a sensation of restriction and narrow ideas. He or she may discover ways to meet goals while allowing for individualistic interpretations of curriculum. This *breathing* may guide and reveal ways to offer a curriculum of “passion, creativity, happiness, spontaneity” (p. 9). Seidel reflects upon the discovery that she learned most from children who were outside the boundaries of what is considered normal, and she argues positively for diversity and integration in the classroom. Readers may experience the following statement in a very liberating manner; it can inspire reflection, “a Curriculum for Miracles understands that life can be opened from this place called a classroom or school, or it can be closed” (p. 13).

The collaborative chapter written by Seidel and Jardine reflecting upon *Wabi Sabi* titled *Wabi Sabi and the Pedagogical Countenance of Names* is also quite inspiring and can evoke contemplation in readers. *Wabi Sabi* is defined as a way to view the world through the eyes of Japanese culture, “It finds beauty and harmony in what is simple, imperfect, natural, modest, and mysterious” (p. 15). This can be considered as how one views or perceives a condition or

experience, which can be relevant to the classroom. This chapter offers stories that will be of interest to readers as they present an idea of how to view and interpret an experience. Further, it offers a way to perceive students' ways of viewing the world in perhaps a more open-minded manner. For example, a student may offer an answer or observation that may be viewed as wrong or as not understanding a very definitive expected outcome. By interpreting a student's words or views not simply as wrong but rather as a way to explore other possibilities, teachers might find this flexibility quite liberating. Seidel and Jardine write, "It is the impetus to find out what is called by *all those things* seemingly simply named in what was meant, from its name, to be a curriculum *guide*" (p. 17, emphases in the original). This offers a way or opportunity to view something that at first glance might appear imperfect or wrong as a way to guide a new interpretation.

The fifth chapter, written by Jardine, *Translating Water*, among the many inspirational chapters in the book, is also notable. It offers a view of the individual and the self as they relate to learning how to read. For me, the chapter inspires reflection about how one can teach the student in the most effective and individualized manner. In this chapter Jardine examines teaching young children reading and learning words and the idea of reading in silence or out-loud. It will be interesting for readers unfamiliar with early approaches to education to read about which schools of thought promote silent or out-loud reading in the elementary school classroom. Jardine speaks of the transition to reading becoming "interior" (p. 46). As the prevalence of out-loud reading diminished, texts had to adapt with more punctuation, such as adding spaces where one might breathe into a word if reading out-loud. This style can cause reflection or a reconsideration of the idea of reading in silence or out-loud in the classroom curriculum. Perhaps reading out-loud offers the opportunity to be expressive and spontaneous. It can offer the student the opportunity to have inflection in the voice and bring life to the text, or, to refer to Seidel's chapter, *A Curriculum for Miracles*, the opportunity to use breath and find creativity from this out-loud utterance of words. On the other hand, readers may reflect and discover that the idea of reading in silence can inspire an internal or very individual and private interpretation of words or the ability for one to discover or uncover "the self" in another way. I believe each chapter will inspire readers to take a breath, slow down, and reflect upon his or her ideas of the student-teacher relationship in the classroom.

Ecological Pedagogy, Buddhist Pedagogy, Hermeneutic Pedagogy offers readers opportunities to reflect on teaching and curriculum, the classroom, and students and their possibilities. As well, it can spark debate, discussion, or a reconsideration of curriculum and teaching practice. From this, a change in perspective may occur; or perhaps a validation of one's current view of curriculum or the classroom. In offering some insight into several of the chapters, it is my hope to inspire and evoke curiosity in readers to explore and discover the book in its entirety. Seidel and Jardine considered the opportunity to write this book a gift, stating

For this wee little gift, we are most grateful, and the promise to write this book, now fulfilled, will hopefully provide a wee gift to those who read it and a wee sense of engaging readers, then, in an unspoken promise of their own with such reading. After all, as a wise woman once insisted, don't tell me it's not possible. If it actually *exists*, it must be possible. (p. 5, emphasis in the original)

I believe the book to be quite valuable and a wonderful addition to current educational literature in the fields of curriculum, contemplative pedagogy, teacher education, classroom practice, hermeneutics, and ecopedagogy. Through clear, moving, and engaging stories,

interpretations, reminiscences, and poems, the authors stir imagination of what the classroom, curriculum, and student-teacher relationship can be.

Notes

1 Contemplative pedagogy is teaching philosophy that incorporates meditative practice, self-awareness, and mindfulness. It can be considered a blend of Eastern and Western traditions centered on the goal of becoming a more compassionate educator. Ecopedagogy is an approach to education influenced by the work of the philosopher Paulo Freire. The premise of this approach is to educate with a deep respect for the individual and to believe in his or her potential. As well, it is a mindset that promotes respect for social justice as well as care and preservation of the planet.

2 I believe the authors call these disciplines, as part of an approach influenced by contemplative practice and pedagogy, as one might view meditation or t'ai chi as disciplines.

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