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Book Review for IJCS:

**Holistic Education and Embodied Learning.**

John P. Miller & Kelli Nigh (Eds), 2017

Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.

\$39.09 (pbk), 345pages.

ISBN: 978-1-68123-840-1

(Book four in IAP, *Current Perspectives in Holistic Education* series, all edited by John P Miller, University of Toronto, and Kelli Nigh, The Living Institute, Toronto.)

I embraced the challenge of reviewing this book with great enthusiasm: to me, our British education system seems depressingly disjointed and atomised, and this volume offered hope for personal and institutional refreshment. Among the 330 pages of text I did find much of what I was looking for, although some articles did not engage me as fully as I'd hoped.

The volume consists of fourteen chapters by almost as many authors, sub-divided into four sections: psychological perspectives, school examples, examples from the meditation & contemplation movement, and 'visions' for a brighter future. Nearly all of the authors and their examples are from the Toronto, Canada context, and many of them have connections with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto where Jack Miller (the lead editor) is based. Several of the authors are also Miller's former PhD students, and so, unfortunately, sometimes the work does seem a little too self-referencing. This geographical focus was interesting from a contextual perspective, but results in a volume which lacks international breadth and experiential variety: the forest schools of Scandinavia for example, scientific programmes exploring embodied cognition, uses of technology to enhance whole-body learning, etc.

Tobin Hart's chapter, *Embodying the Mind*, makes the book worth buying of itself however. In this short paper (pp. 299-318) Hart shows how and why physicality has been removed from the school classroom and the impact that this has since had on learning. He then argues a case for its return - from history, philosophy, science and literature - before giving practical anecdotes and evidence to show how we can put things right again. My brief summary does not do justice to the article; it really is a well-argued and concisely structured polemic for embodied learning.

The four sections of this volume do hang together as a whole, although they are not all as schools or children-based as I had hoped for or was expecting. The first three chapters for instance provide a comparison of the psychological frameworks of Freud, Jung and Wilhelm Reich (Ch. 1), an outline of the Living Institute's *Existential Integrative Psychotherapy* Diploma (LIEIPD), and their *Holistic Experiential Process Method* of psychotherapy and spiritual counselling (Ch. 2), and finally, a call by Joanna Krop for teachers to reclaim their 'wild feminine' (Ch. 3). Krop's message is clear and hard-hitting:

*Heart-centered teachers align with their heart-centered values to deliver caring, intelligent, passionate and high quality instruction to students... When this source is drained and suppressed, or forced to be suppressed by a dysfunctional educational system that overworks and under-supports teachers and then expects them to be complicit in their own disempowerment by aligning with such a system, the result is emotional misalignment and anguish. (p. 59-60)*

Krop's chapter contains some very pertinent and compelling material, and is definitely worth reading, even if you are not so compelled by her particular archetypal and metaphorical emphases.

Section two offers three descriptions of schools and school practice, and then a fourth 'vision' for a holistic secondary school. All of these are from the Canadian context, although they do include Waldorf Steiner education (Ch. 4), a Buddhist practitioner's emphasis on compassion in the classroom (Ch. 5), the Equinox *alternative* school (Ch. 6), and Abarbanel's vision for a school based on lessons drawn from Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Tolstoy, Alcott, Neill, Ferrer, Horton, Steiner, Montessori and others (Ch. 7).

Section three provides three considerations of the impact of mindfulness and contemplation in practice: a study of the effects of Loving Kindness Meditation on four practicing teachers (Ch. 8), consideration of the impact on primary school classroom atmosphere and pedagogy of a specific Buddhist Meditation practice (Ch. 9), and a study of Dalcroze's Eurythmics pedagogy on a group of adult musicians, including both music teachers and artistic practitioners (Ch. 10).

The final section, *Visions*, was for me the most engaging: it includes a helpful exploration of the use and impact of different metaphors for education (Ch. 11), a (less helpful) reflection on creativity, spiritual intelligence and the development of 'spiritual wings' (Ch. 12), Tobin Hart's excellent article referred to above (Ch. 13), and a final chapter by Miller on the use of mindfulness practices with trainee teachers (Ch.14).

For seasoned scholars and academics this is a book worth knowing about and reading, particularly in order to be aware of the significant impact of Jack Miller's teaching and writing in the Toronto region of Canada. More generally however, from the perspective of classroom teachers or lay-persons who specialise in SMSC or children's spirituality, the volume contains some helpful articles, but readers should select carefully. In my view, chapters three, four, eleven and thirteen are the best places to start.

**Mark Plater**, Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, UK.  
Email: [mark.plater@bishopg.ac.uk](mailto:mark.plater@bishopg.ac.uk)

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