Call for Proposals on a Special Issue on:

The Complementary Convergence of Science and Spirituality:

Expanding the Spectrum of Education in Theory and Practice

Worldviews and paradigms. A worldview is a constellation of beliefs about how the world works that shape human behavior. Worldviews come in different shapes and sizes and have the potential for different impacts; for example, conservative worldviews that value the past and seek to preserve traditions have different social impacts than progressive worldviews that embrace change and experimentation.

Worldviews can hold us in their grip for centuries. In the Western world, it was not until the European Renaissance that scientific exploration began to challenge the dogma and dictates of the Medieval Christian Church, and the battles fought over the emerging heresies were brutal. But science largely won the day (though religious dogma and superstition persist in our "modern" age). Since that period of the "Enlightenment," we have been in the grip of another set of beliefs about the world: the materialist dogmas that hold matter as inert and passive, governed by external forces (Francis Bacon); the metaphor of the Earth systems as mechanistic — the "clockwork universe" (Newton); and the irreconcilable separation of mind and matter (Descartes). The reductionism resulting from this paradigm had a number of effects, perhaps most importantly the idea that everything in the world could be explained by understanding the behaviors of the smallest parts, not in terms of wholes, a worldview that left us with a world of facts devoid of meaning. In a world devoid of meaning, a "disenchanted world," (Berman, 1984; Griffin, 1988) nature exists for humans to exploit, to serve the needs of humans without regard for the existential value of non-human others (Merchant, 1980). That perspective, coupled with the rapid advance of fossil energy mining, technological advancement, and an economic system committed to unlimited growth has brought us to the environmental tipping point at which we currently find ourselves.

The New Story. A new worldview has been on the horizon for some time now — sparked by developments in the early and mid-parts of the 20th century in Quantum Physics (Davies & Brown, 1986; Pagels, 1983); General and Special Relativity (Bohm, 1980); and Chaos/Complexity Theory (Bohm & Peat, 1987; Gleick, 1987; Hayles, 1991; Jantsch, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). The science behind these ideas sparked a profusion of books by physicists, philosophers, biologists, and other scholars that outlined the contours of an emerging convergence of science, mysticism, ecology, and consciousness (Bohm, 1980; Lemkow, 1990; Talbot, 1981; 1988; Zukav, 1979). The exploration of quantum physics, for example, defied a number of intuitions of classical physics with its investigations into indeterminate states, probabilistic measurements, and non-local effects. Relativity theory transformed classical notions with its concepts of a unified space/time field and the relativity of simultaneous events, and perhaps most importantly, it enabled extraordinary new levels of predictability in cosmology and astrophysics. Complexity theory has led to a number of new concepts about matter and energy: ideas about interconnectedness, the capacity of systems to self-organize, non-linearity (the notion that relatively small inputs can have large effects); and perhaps most importantly, the necessity to see "wholes" not

just discrete parts. Scholars in a wide range of fields have applied these ideas both empirically and metaphorically to generate new understandings of phenomena (Capra, 1982; Davies, 1983; Jones, 1982).

Late twentieth and early twenty-first century biological research has raised questions about cooperation, intelligence, and consciousness in both the plant and non-human animal worlds. In a system now known as the "wood-wide web," underground mycorrhizal fungi connected to root networks in forests exchange nutrients between trees—sometimes even different species—and between trees and fungi in a manner that helps both trees and fungi. These exchanges even adjust to environmental conditions (Simard, 2021; Wohlleben, 2015). Botanists are studying plant behavior and finding extensive communication and cooperation amongst many species of plants (Schlanger, 2024). Recent studies of animal perception and behavior in classes ranging from mammals to insects have revealed agency, consciousness, and intelligence previously unimaginable in Western science (Yong, 2022). Collectively, these studies are calling into question our understanding of agency, consciousness and intelligence as attributes primarily of humans.

The *new story* from Western science and contemporary philosophy parallels Indigenous and ancestral knowledge in multiple ways: in the recognition that there is no separation between humans and the whole of nature; that everything exists not as inert (mindless) matter, but in relationships and fluctuations at the boundaries of matter and energy; that nature is not a collection of objects but a flux of processes, and that everything is truly ALIVE, requiring a new ethics of the relationships between human and non-human entities. In short, the new "biocentric" story reminds us of the importance of attending to the basic interconnectedness of nature and to the sensitivity and complexity of natural systems. It really is a moment in time when East and West, ancient and modern, science and spirituality, may be meeting in a new synthesis (Davies, 1983; Smith, 1982; Wallace, 1989).

Unpacking Science, Religion, and Spirituality. While science and religion might be seen as "opposing ideologies," science and spirituality can be understood as complementary processes. The sciences—physical, geological, chemical, biological, and their many subsets—are powerful but limited approaches to understanding reality. The *objects* of science, the only realms in which it holds out the possibility of truth, are *matter* and *energy*. Information about matter and energy relies on the senses and their amplification through various technologies such as microscopes and telescopes. The pursuit of science relies heavily on certain forms of thinking: analyzing evidence based on empirical (sensory) data, inferences, logic, inductive and deductive reasoning. The success of scientific applications relies on mathematical precision. These forms of cognition, coupled with the very real achievements of scientific inquiry and technology, have led to a kind of "scientism," which holds that the scientific method and its related forms of thought are the best, really the *only* legitimate way to understand the world and reality (Kesson, 2024).

What lies beyond the pale of a materialist worldview are many of the intangible qualities that make us human: values, meaning, purpose, and aesthetics - pursuits often attributed to religion. At the risk of oversimplification, we suggest here some fundamental analytical differences between religion and spirituality. Religion tends to rely on the idea of God as a separate being, while spirituality tends to see "God" (divine intelligence) as both transcendent and immanent in creation; religion tends to rely on revealed (usually

scriptural) knowledge, spirituality on experiential knowledge; religion is usually embodied in institutional structures, spirituality is often mediated by personal beliefs and practices, and religion relies on supernatural explanations of mysterious phenomena, while spirituality tends towards naturalistic explanations of those aspects of reality we do not fully understand. While these categories may appear to be diametrically opposed, they should not be thought of as mutually impenetrable, as religion and spirituality do share a "transcendent impulse" (Kesson, 1994). Yet, it is the process of contemplative spirituality that holds the potential to complement the process of science, as unlike religion, they share a spirit of inquiry, exploration, openness to new ideas, and personal meaning-making.

Implications for Education. For good reasons, a firm wall stands between religion and public education in the U.S. Mindful of the brutal religious tyrannies that many of the early European settlers had fled, the Founding Fathers sought to ensure that the new government would neither seek to impose a religion on the people of this country, nor discriminate against anyone for the free practice of religion. The boundaries have held for much of the past two centuries; it is only recently that we are seeing serious efforts to establish a dominant religion in public schools with the required posting of Biblical "Commandments" and Bible reading in every classroom now legislated in some states.

In contrast to these efforts to institutionalize a dominant state religion, the holistic education movement has long advocated for an ecumenical approach to cultivating spirituality with emphases on helping young people develop a sense of meaning, identity and purpose through deepening connections to the community, to the natural world around them, and to the highest human values such as compassion and peace. These connections are believed to be fostered by helping young people access their "inner worlds" and to deepen awareness of the subtle human qualities of emotion, discernment, compassion, and aesthetics (Miller, 1990). Hundreds of studies on meditation and mindfulness have influenced the fields of consciousness research, the neurosciences, psychology, and philosophy, and science is coming to the understanding that transcendent experiences (of oneness with all creation, of awe, of being part of something larger than oneself, of creative "flow," of the sublime, and other states of consciousness formerly assumed to be the domain of religion), are in fact the birthright of humanity, the products of our "transcendent brain" (Lightman, 2023), accessible through contemplative practice. Theories about the connections between life, mind, and consciousness abound, and science has provided no final answer to these mysteries. So, for now, we can proceed with a sense of open inquiry in the dialogue between objective knowledge (science) and subjective knowledge (spiritual insight) to generate new understandings about such ultimate questions.

A deep understanding of this new narrative, or paradigm, exists only at the fringes of the popular imagination, but it has begun to impact various fields of study, as Fritjof Capra foresaw in his 1982 book, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture.* There have been occasional scholarly papers presented in the field of education that reference this emergent worldview, but to date, an in-depth exploration of its effects on teaching, learning, and schooling has not surfaced.

A Call for Abstracts for This Special Issue. To remedy this gap in educational theory and practice, we invite you to participate in a special issue of *The Journal of Contemplative and Holistic Education* that we have titled "The Complementary Convergence of Science and Spirituality: Expanding the Spectrum of Education in Theory and Practice."

We encourage scholars and educators to explore diverse contemplative, spiritual, holistic education traditions and practices at all age and grade levels that can assist the birth of this new way of perceiving and living in this reality. We suggest your consideration of a wide range of themes and questions including (but not limited to):

<u>Expanding our philosophies of education</u>

- How does the holistic paradigm affect the traditional educational philosophy categories such as Ontology, Epistemology, Ethics, and Aesthetics?
- What aspects of educational theory need to be reconceptualized to be consistent with the new paradigm?

<u>Spirituality and the neurosciences</u>

- How do the neurosciences inform the emerging paradigm?
- How might consciousness studies inform the theory and practice of education?
- What are the spiritual dimensions of the new paradigm?
- What is the role of contemplative practice in learning?

<u>Epistemological pluralism</u>

- How do "indigenous ways of knowing" and perennial spiritual wisdom traditions such as Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christian mysticism relate to the emergent worldview?
- What is the role of subjective knowledge (insight) in deep learning?

<u>Pedagogies of connection</u>

- How can we foster the reality of a "living world" in young people's minds?
- What are the best ways of teaching about evolution?
- What are some imaginative pedagogies to teach quantum physics?
- How can literature (science fiction, for example) bring these ideas to life?
- What is the role of the arts in cultivating the social imagination necessary for paradigmatic transformation?
- What concrete realities of schooling (classrooms, separate subjects, testing, grading) need to be rethought in light of the new paradigm?

<u>Connecting with non-human others</u>

- What is science teaching us about animal intelligence?
- What is "interspecies communication?" How can it be cultivated in young people?
- How might the new research on plant intelligence (intention, communication, agency) affect the teaching of the biological sciences?

<u>The future of education</u>

- What are some implications for educational research?
- What are some implications for teacher preparation and professional development?

The submission format is diverse, as we pursue both traditional (peer-reviewed academic research articles and reviews) as well as non-traditional or alternative formats, such as arts-based and multimedia essays, interviews with practitioners and spiritual teachers, and reviews of educational practices and events. We also welcome submissions in video and audio files that capture community voices, practitioner arts, and fieldnotes-based reflections (see below for details).

Submission Types
Peer reviewed section
1. Research articles (APA style; approx. 4,000-6,000 words excluding references)
2. Reflective essays (approx. 1,500-3,000 words)
3. Arts-based essays (including video, sound-based, and multimodal components)

Important Due Dates:
- **Abstract Submission**: April 10, 2025 (300-500 word abstracts). Submit your abstract via the journal portal: Submit article
- **Acceptance email**: April 29, 2025
- **Full manuscript/project submission**: August 1st, 2025
- **First review**: by Oct 25th, 2025 (authors may be asked to review a manuscript)
- **Revision due**: Nov. 25th, 2025
- **Publication**: December 2025 -March 2026

Special Issue Editors:

Kathleen Kesson, Emeritus, LIU-Brooklyn (kathleen.kesson@gmail.com)

Susan Edgerton, Emeritus, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (she7041@gmail.com)

Jing Lin, University of Maryland, College Park (jinglin@umd.edu)

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