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## Foreword

Joan Walton\*

# International Journal for Transformative Research – Foreword

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The creation of the International Journal for Transformative Research (IJTR) emerged from a belief that professionals in any work setting can research their own practice with transformative outcomes for themselves and others. In our ‘Aims and Scope’, we write: ‘The aim of transformative research is to challenge existing ways of seeing and doing things, and to generate a radical shift in our perception of social, political or educational theories, ideas and actions, creating different kinds of understanding that lead to new practices’.

With this special issue, we are certainly presenting a radical challenge to mainstream theorising about social and educational concerns. In our call for contributions, we invited academics, educators and professionals to consider ‘the implications of a postmaterialist worldview for education and the humanities’. This invitation was based on an assumption that many intellectual thinkers working within education and the humanities (which include religion, philosophy, history, literature and the arts) are often influenced by postmodern theorists and philosophers, who usually, if implicitly, assume a materialist ontology. This generally includes a taken-for-granted belief, passed on to them by a presupposition of Newtonian science, that matter is the foundational property of the universe; and that all aspects of conscious experience, including our experience of consciousness itself, are by-products of the brain. Despite the fact that there is a growing body of literature and research which challenges this presupposition, there is little evidence in peer reviewed journals concerned with education and the humanities, that serious consideration is being given to the possibility that consciousness may be a fundamental dimension of the universe. This is surprising, and I would suggest shocking, as the implications of this alternative understanding for who we are as human beings, and why we exist, are indeed transformative. For example, it opens up the prospect that there may

be a transcendent reality that exists beyond that which we can experience with the five senses, an option that is excluded within a scientific materialist paradigm.

The six papers that are included in the special issue are wide-ranging, representing a diversity of experiences and viewpoints, with considerable variation in terms of theoretical underpinnings and style of writing. Although every contribution is interesting in its own right, the depth of learning about the implications of a postmaterialist worldview for education and the humanities emerges from the collective. Each paper adds a particular perspective and contributes a new dimension of understanding, resulting in a rich tapestry of knowledge creation about what it means to be human in a postmaterialist world.

Professor Julian Stern, from Bishop Grosseteste University, UK, has the interesting title: ‘*You’re Alive*’: *on the ‘Livingness’ of Spirited Educational Research*. Julian is not arguing for any particular worldview or belief system. Rather, he explores the processes by which we may engage in transformative research that is educational. This, he suggests, can be achieved through a conversation that is dialogic rather than dialectic, and which enhances mutual learning. Rather than focus on what we can or should ‘know’, he suggests that we should approach our lives and research with curiosity, undertaken with an attitude of mutual care which allows for an ethical and open relationship.

Julian, although comfortable with the concept of spirituality, again does not attempt to over-intellectualise the term. Instead, he allows for a wide variety of interpretations, attending more to the idea that any meaning of spirituality includes the sense of being ‘spirited’ and ‘alive’. So he is further enhancing his overall principle of being able to engage with others in conversations that are receptive and amenable to surprise.

Julian’s paper sets an ethos for the others that follow. What we are aiming to achieve in this issue is contributions to a conversation that will encourage others to continue the dialogue beyond its publication. The values that Julian proposes in terms of a conversation that is dialogic,

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spirited, curious, and infused with an ethics of mutual caring provide sound guidelines for a dialogic educational process that is potentially transformative for our lives and our research.

Dr Donna Thomas, from the University of Central Lancashire, UK, has written about *Postmaterial Participatory Research: Exploring the nature of self with children*. Donna, transformed by an almost fatal car crash when she was 15, knows from her own experience what it means to have the boundaries of her sense of self dissolved, and to feel at one with the whole universe. This experience led her to have an interest in how children experience their sense of self, when what happens in their inner lives is taken seriously. Donna's paper, which challenges the dominant materialist paradigm, provides an account of a research project undertaken **with** children, who are responding to the question 'Who Am I?' Donna concludes that the children's accounts provide evidence to support the postmaterialist worldview that consciousness is primary.

Emeritus Professor Dave Pruet, of James Madison University, USA, spent the early part of his career working in aerospace for NASA, with awards for pioneering computational work, and was for many years a mathematics teacher. He also developed an interest in mysticism, and began to dream of creating a programme that brought together science and mythology. His paper *Finding the Axis Mundi in an Undergraduate Classroom* gives an account of his journey to this point, of the course that he finally taught, entitled 'From Black Elk to Black Holes – Shaping a Myth for a New Millennium', and of the impact this course had on undergraduates over many years. He offers his experience as an example of how science and spirituality can co-exist, with transformative outcomes for young people who are given the opportunity to learn about how they can enhance each other.

Laurel Waterman, a doctoral researcher, and a lecturer in creative non-fiction writing at the University of Toronto, Canada, offers a more personal account in *Stories of a Transformation in Consciousness: A self-study to ground narrative inquiry research in consciousness education*. Her spiritual journey started with the unexpected death of her husband, and father of her two children. She was motivated at that point to engage in an in-depth investigation of the evidence that existed to either support or negate the possibility that consciousness existed in some way beyond embodied experience. Having grown up with the assumption that consciousness was dependent on the brain for its existence, she remained somewhat sceptical of indications that this assumption may not be valid. In this paper, she provides an account of her own personal investigations, analysed and evaluated with reference to

empirical research, which – she argues – suggests there may indeed be more to reality than the materialist worldview would indicate.

Rahul Goswami is a UNESCO consultant in traditional knowledge systems, with an interest in sustaining the intangible cultural heritage of indigenous societies. In *Once there was a 'morung'* he writes about what this means in one setting: that is, in Nagaland, a rural state in India, where he experienced the *morung* as an educational portal that all young men passed through as the means of learning the living heritage of their tribe. This is not an academic essay. Yet, in reviewing papers for this issue, where the main focus is looking at the implications of a postmaterialist worldview for education and the humanities, there is a sense that there is also perhaps a 'prematerialist' worldview; that is, a time when social groups, including indigenous societies, had not experienced the hegemony that science came to have in terms of what counts as knowledge. Sometimes, I would contend, we learn more about the contested nature of knowledge by reading a narrative that tells the story of a different place and a different time, pre-colonisation, when ideas about knowledge were connected more directly to the lived experience of community members. This account by Rahul offers one such narrative, offering a different but complementary perspective of a world which does not privilege the material.

The sixth paper, written Dr James Lake, is a very different paper again. The most theoretical in this issue, he writes about *Implications of postmaterialist theories of consciousness for psychiatry: towards an integral paradigm*. It may be that readers, not familiar with different intellectual debates about consciousness, have had their curiosity stirred by the earlier articles, and are interested in knowing more. James investigates ideas about consciousness, but locates them within his professional role as a psychiatrist, and his commitment to help people experiencing mental health problems. Given that mental ill-health is a growing phenomenon in our society, there is, of course, great benefit in learning more about how professionals can help patients, and perhaps how we can help and understand each other. James' premise is that a paradigm shift, which challenges the materialist worldview, and has greater respect for a wide range of human experiences, which can include the paranormal, will be required if we are to achieve a reduction in the personal, social and financial consequences of mental illness.

I hope you enjoy the variety of articles, and that this special issue will make an active contribution to the expanding conversation about the implications of a postmaterialist worldview for education and the humanities.