Editorial Statement: Volume 1, Issue 1

Carolyne J. White  
*Rutgers University, Newark*, whitecj@rutgers.edu

Margarida Garcia  
*University of Ottawa*, Margarida.Garcia@uottawa.ca

Drew Kopp  
*Rowan University*, kopp@rowan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://rdw.rowan.edu/joie](https://rdw.rowan.edu/joie)

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons, Education Commons, Law Commons, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

**Recommended Citation**

White, Carolyne J.; Garcia, Margarida; and Kopp, Drew (2023) "Editorial Statement: Volume 1, Issue 1," *Turning Toward Being: The Journal of Ontological Inquiry in Education*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1. DOI: 10.31986/issn.2995-8288_vol1iss1.1

Available at: [https://rdw.rowan.edu/joie/vol1/iss1/1](https://rdw.rowan.edu/joie/vol1/iss1/1)

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Rowan University Journals at Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Turning Toward Being: The Journal of Ontological Inquiry in Education by an authorized editor of Rowan Digital Works.
Editorial Statement: Volume 1, Issue 1

A disciple of Empedocles asked him:
What is the noblest thing to know?
He answered:
What people neglect the most.

SHAHRAZURI
(Kingsley, 2003/2020)

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Turning Toward Being: The Journal of Ontological Inquiry in Education. Within these pages you will be invited, provoked, and prodded to entertain that which has been neglected the most within our inherited modernist world: ontological inquiry. The question concerning ontology turns inquirers toward being: who we are with each other in the world. It brings us face to face with those concerns which are at the heart of the matter of being human, and impacts all areas of life, from the personal to the public, the individual to the family, the organization, and the wider social worlds that comprise the warp and woof of everyday life. One particular social world we are all having to deal with at some level is modernity. As explained by Ronald Barnett (2022), modernity’s
dawn was tacitly launched by Descartes in 1637, in his declaration of Cogito, ergo sum and in the implication that he drew out that the thinking ‘I’ was ‘entirely distinct’ not only from the world but even from his own body. In these thoughts were announced the separation of thinking from being, and it is the aftermath of such ideas that has seen emerge the state of the Earth today, with humanity separated from Nature. The end of this modernity was signaled on 18 August 2019, at a ceremony in Iceland to mark the shrinking and then the complete loss of the Okjökull glacier, generally held to be a result of climate change. (245)

The crisis we face, which Barnett asserts is certainly resulting from something larger than the university “is the inevitable outcome of an instrumental conception of knowledge deep within modernity—in which Nature has come to constitute a resource—and it is a conception of knowledge that is now deep, too, within the universities” (245). Barnett invites us to revisit, rethink, and re-imagine the “whole set of relationships within humanity, the world, and knowledge” given that “sheer being as such is at stake” (246).

While several scholars have written about and argued for the inclusion of ontological inquiry in education,¹ there has been minimal scholarship that illuminates the phenomenological, as-lived, pedagogical practice for evoking ontological inquiry,² nor has there been longitudinal research into the consequences experienced by scholars engaging such practice and its impact upon their participation with their scholarly disciplines that for the most part valorize

epistemological approaches over ontological inquiry. This online, open access journal is designed to provide a space for such scholarship to be generated, valued, and made widely available.

The first of the peer reviewed articles is by Drew Kopp who addresses questions many readers may have: What is ontological inquiry? If it is worthy of a new journal, why aren’t we already familiar with it, why has it been neglected? Appropriating a hidden dancing singing frog as a metaphor for the 2,000+ years of institutional marginalization of this form of inquiry, Kopp illuminates his as-lived encounters with this form of inquiry as well as the challenges one faces when attempting to explain this kind of inquiry within a world encased within modernity’s epistemological emphasis, which has sustained a stubborn skepticism and suspicion of a form of inquiry that cannot meet our inherited standard of third-person verification. He then links us with his discipline of rhetoric and writing studies, and more broadly, rhetorical education, as he demonstrates its importance, especially at this historical moment of human precarity with the very real possibility that human life may disappear from the planet.

Hailing from the field of women and gender studies, Fatemeh Moghaddam invites readers into a richly textured poetic text that provokes consideration of how ontological inquiry may contribute to decolonization and facilitate the creation of new knowledge production for disrupting the normalization of human entitlement over the planet. She illuminates her argument with autoethnographic reflections drawn from eighteen years of practicing ontological inquiry that granted her access to living life as empty and meaningless or lacking in any innate significance—opening space of freedom, choice, liberation, love, and possible decolonized futures.

Drawing upon his discipline of criminology, Richard Dubé drops readers into multiple provocative historical contexts--from the burning of witches to the fate of indigenous students in Canadian residential schools designed for cultural genocide--and we begin to discover for ourselves the contribution of ontological constructivism, carefully distinguished from the commonly practiced epistemological constructivism. Once we are present to how “is” labels have run historical actors, he turns us toward today and our intimate relationships with loved ones--father, mother, spouse, friend, etc.—to encounter how whatever is constructed in language can be reconstructed. In learning how to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct worlds with ontological constructivism, we access more than mere knowledge; we access the possibility of changing hearts. Dubé ends with a turn toward the call of conscience, the call that speaks in silence, calls for and calls forth an authentic potentiality for being in resonance with the world, others, and oneself.

Ryan Derby-Talbot provides another encounter with that which people neglect the most when his former student, Omar, confesses that he can recall little of what he thought he learned in his calculus course. This shocking revelation that Derby-Talbot’s popular and award-winning teaching could leave students with minimal learning, generates a conundrum that leads him to discover the unfortunate reality that explanation via information transfer teaching not only creates short-term learning, it cheats students out of the ontological dimension of learning that becomes available when they are given opportunities to work out new understandings for

3 A critical outlier is the scholarly community Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education Society.
themselves. While such opportunities are initially challenging as they provoke discomfort, confusion, and frustration, if students stick with the process—make their way through the mess—they experience a shift from anguish into curiosity, reverence and ultimately satisfaction. This is the marked difference between third-person learning—the Cartesian conflation of teaching and learning with explanation—that leads the learner to overestimate their learning without realizing anything is amiss—and first-person learning that equips students to discover new ways of disclosing the world. Derby-Talbot deepens our appreciation of this difference as he describes experiments with learning-as-discovery at three international universities.

What follows next are two entries from colleagues who chose to publish their contributions in the Notes From the Field section of the journal. Miriam Carey argues for the importance of ontological inquiry for faculty development. Drawing upon rich encounters with pursuing this nexus at her former university, she invites us to journey with her and discover what shows up when she turns from an epistemological approach to faculty development to work with faculty on who they are in the world or who they most desire to be in the world. We witness her movement from a default context of overwhelm, resignation, and survival to a newly created enlivened context that over time and with ongoing practice expands to include creating new possibilities with her family, community, and other aspects of her life beyond the university.

Kaustuv Roy’s essay provokes a deeper consideration of the articles we have read thus far, reminding us of our habituation to reduce everything to mental representation while ontological phenomenology requires ongoing practice if we are to cultivate contact with ‘what is.’ As we read his essay we may find ourselves re-visiting what we have read in the foregoing articles, to encounter again and again, to perhaps discover anew that ‘a kind of recuperation’ is needed for us to be able to ‘bring thought and affect together in ontological rethinking’ and recover that which has been deeply forgotten; discover terrain beyond.

Issue one of this inaugural volume concludes with a podcast with Professor Emeritus Michael E. Zimmerman (University of Colorado, Boulder). In this conversation, Zimmerman, a member of the editorial board, journal editors Carolyne White and Drew Kopp, as well as co-host Curt Hill, share our encounters with ontological inquiry. We intend these podcasts to be informal and free ranging conversations among colleagues and welcome your suggestions for future participants.

Works Cited


---. Imagining the University. London: Routledge, 2013.


