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Book review: Relational pedagogies: Connections and mattering in higher education

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Book review: Relational pedagogies: Connections and mattering in higher education

Abstract

This book review of *Relational Pedagogies: Connections and Mattering in Higher Education* by Karen Gravett aims to offer a compelling analysis that enhances the scholarly conversations around the importance of building relationships and connections in higher education, particularly in complex and uncertain times. By situating the book's arguments within the wider academic discourse, the review strives to provide valuable insights, meaningful connections and an assessment of the book's impact on advancing relational pedagogies in higher education. By centering the perspectives of Black women and other marginalised groups, the review offers an intersectional critique that strives to expand the discourse on posthumanism and sociomateriality. This critical review of the book may serve as a valuable resource for scholars, educators, administrators and activists interested in advancing intersectional approaches to post-anthropocentric teaching and learning. *Relational Pedagogies* provides a means for resurfacing often forgotten questions, thinking with different theories and encouraging us to engage various others as we work to address issues of relationality, connection and mattering in contemporary and meaningful ways.

Practitioner Notes

1. Highlights the growing importance of building relationships and connections in higher education, particularly in complex and uncertain times.
2. Emphasises the need to move beyond a solely human-centred perspective toward a consideration of the role of spaces, objects, and matter in teaching and learning.
3. Adopts a sociomaterial and posthuman theoretical framework which educators and researchers can use to challenge the idea of a self-governing individual toward prioritising values of connectedness, entanglement and mattering.
4. Offers a valuable framework for educators and researchers to explore the ways in which relationships impact student-staff dynamics, collaborations among colleagues, and personal growth within the context of higher education.
5. Encourages a deepened consideration of the union of critical praxis and critical posthuman thinking in teaching practice.

Keywords

challenging neoliberalism, entangled pedagogy, post-anthropocentric pedagogies, posthumanism, sociomateriality

Introduction

As the tides of academia continue to ebb and flow, new paradigms emerge, and old ones are challenged. One such wave of change has been the increasing importance placed on relationality in higher education. Other changes can be seen in the shifting discourses in higher education toward theoretical perspectives such as sociomateriality and posthumanism (Fenwick, 2016; Fenwick et al., 2011). In *Relational Pedagogies: Connections and Mattering in Higher Education*, Dr. Karen Gravett explores the significance of relationships, connections and matter in facilitating opportunities for educators and researchers to examine the interplay between self, society and social change. Gravett contends that relational pedagogies are increasingly important in times that are “chaotic, emergent, and multi-faceted” (Fenwick, 2016, p. 249). Higher education literature has begun to emphasise the importance of rapport-building to counter the uncaring neoliberal, competitive and individualising higher education system (Fenwick, 2016; Graham & Moir, 2022; Gravett et al., 2021). This shift also emphasises alternative ways of thinking, more creative modes of assessment (Austin, 2023; Gravett et al., 2021) and an embrace of the conflict between expertise and openness (Molloy & Bearman, 2019). Sociomateriality and posthumanism illuminate the need to examine the ways in which we build and sustain relationships and partnerships. *Relational Pedagogies* reflects these shifts in teaching, learning and research which may reflect a broader cultural wave of transformation — presenting a sea of possibility towards the valuing of diverse perspectives and plurality as praxis. Furthermore, these shifts reflect a deepened recognition of the importance of relationships in shaping our understanding of the concept of mattering — our perception of how much others value us — as well as matter as a materiality and materialising force that possesses “thing power”. Crucially, and perhaps unknowingly, Gravett echoes the question posed by N. Katherine Hayles who asked, “how should these relationships go forward?” (McInerney & Drage, 2021, 03:42). As such, Gravett writes *Relational Pedagogies* with a diverse audience of practitioners, teachers, and scholars in mind.

Gravett’s posthuman pedagogy of mattering forces readers outside an anthropocentric imaginary, whereby spaces, objects and things are foregrounded. Throughout the book, Gravett contends with the problems of a purely humanist perspective. She argues that humanism tends to be anthropocentric, or overly focused on humans, and a solely humanist perspective may also uphold a society consumed by “a competitive struggle for existence and success” (Pendleton-Jullian & Seely Brown, 2018, p. 41), individualism and instrumentalism; such a society promotes self-interest over collective concerns, rhizomatic research, slow scholarship and social responsibility. Further, humanism has been critiqued by feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern theorists for its reliance on an individualistic, paternalistic, rationalistic, universalistic Enlightenment notion of the person (Hayles, 1999; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Taylor & Robinson, 2009) which may overlook the importance of emotions, intuition and other non-rational aspects of human experience such as the ramifications of students’ and educators’ gender, race and socioeconomic status (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Humanism, for Gravett, often excludes

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so much of what is essential to teaching and learning: spaces, objects and material aspects. In *Relational Pedagogies*, it is argued that *posthumanism* challenges and disassembles “an Enlightenment inheritance that emphasize[s] autonomy, rationality, [and] individuality” (Hayles, 1999, p. 321).

Deviating from a sole focus on human-centred approaches to education, the sociomaterial and posthuman perspectives offered in *Relational Pedagogies* may provide readers with an opportunity to challenge the idea of a self-governing individual that often ignores the importance of creating space for others to be valued and have fulfilling experiences in academia. Gravett maintains that it has become increasingly important to recognize the interconnectedness of all matter as it impacts on student-staff relationships, relationships between colleagues, other educators and with ourselves as we consider the role of the non-human in our educational praxis. *Relational Pedagogies* comprises eleven chapters organised into three interlinked parts. Our review aims to provide a nuanced analysis that adds value by contextualising the book's premises within the broader academic discourse. Through this synthesis, our review endeavours to deliver insightful critiques, connections and a clear statement about the book's significance in advancing the understanding and practice of relational pedagogies in higher education.

Exploring the interconnectedness of posthumanist, relational pedagogy

Relational Pedagogies attends to three interlaced concepts shaping the landscape: education as a product, the student experience and the notion of the individual. These themes are expertly interwoven to celebrate a web of relations that integrates some past discourses and perspectives. The foundation of the book rests on the assertion that “both human-to-human and human-nonhuman interactions matter” (p. 3). Central to Gravett's relational pedagogy is dialogue. As key themes of the book, relationality, connections and mattering are considered through the notions of intra-action and micro-moments. The notion of ‘intra-action’, as opposed to interaction, suggests the concepts of reciprocity as operationalised by Bergum (2003); in Bergum's (2003) view, our experiences are always embedded in-the-world, “the world of structures, cultures, expectations, and history” (Bergum, 2003, p. 126). Similarly, Gravett affirms “that the ‘self’ comes into being in relation with, and through the entanglement of, oneself with others” (p. 2).

Part 1: Relationships with Students

Gravett begins the book highlighting the importance of student-staff partnerships in higher education and the dialogic process involved in the co-creating these partnerships. Within Part 1, *Relationships with Students*, Gravett explores the possibilities (and challenges) of student-staff partnerships through the concept of co-creation. Like co-creation, community-based assessment pedagogy encourages learning environments where students are empowered to manage all aspects of their assignments, including the types of assessment as well as assessment criteria (Inoue, 2004). Co-creation and community-based assessment pedagogy aim to transform power paradigms, empower students through shared decision-making and foster a community of writers and a sense of collective writing where everyone is involved and invested in each other's work (Inoue, 2004). Co-creation and community-based assessment pedagogy align with posthuman

pedagogy, as foundational to these concepts is the idea that students are positioned as not only consumers of knowledge but *producers* of knowledge (Yan et al., 2020).

Gravett also highlights the underlying belief of sociomaterial theorists and approaches that experiences are embodied and “are seen as socially and materially situated in assemblages of human and non human actors” (p. 14). We believe this illuminates the need for understanding *all* kinds of emotions as embodied and inherent to our everyday experiences of learning (Wescott, 2021a); we turn to Higheagle Strong & McMMain (2020) who emphasise the importance of providing space to legitimise emotions “in ways that do not (as dominant models of social emotional learning often do) view such ‘negative’ affect as energies to ‘deal with’ in order to return to academics” (p. 7), underscoring the significance of connections, mattering, materialities and relationships. A great example of connections with students resides in Chapter 5, which features interview data from students and staff who have engaged in authentic, ethical and inclusive (rather than instrumentally adopted) partnership; in this relational space of student-staff partnership, “power loses its power” (Bergum, 2003, p. 126).

We believe that positive student-teacher relationships require improvisation, a “sensitivity to the ongoing life experiences of others” as well as a “respond[ing] not only to each other, but also to whatever calls upon them in that situational moment” (Bergum, 2003, p. 124); in improvisation, “each person is encouraged to find their own voice rather than merely learning to play the ‘right’ notes” (Bergum, 2003; pp. 124-125). Sidorkin (2002), argues that educational theory must overcome the limitations of associating teaching and learning solely with behaviours and activities. Like Holloway (2021), Gravett asserts that instrumental rationality pervades education cultures. Such rationality tends to interrupt the knowledges and autonomy of teachers (Holloway, 2021; Wescott, 2021b) and can overlook the intricate ways in which knowledge shapes our understanding of reality and constructs power relations; it is argued that improvisation allows one to subvert instrumentalism (Bergum, 2003). Thus, it could be suggested that the concept of improvisation may be a way forward for more connected, generative and transformative educational possibilities.

Part 2: Relationships with Others

As Gravett notes, higher education is often “permeated by a strong academic loneliness” which can leave no time “for community spirit or thinking about things together” (p. 83), creating “artificial reefs of disconnection” (Costello, 2022, p. 14). Additionally, relationships are not always easy, and Sidorkin (2002) argues that social harmony and peace are not always feasible. Bergum (2003) declares that it is often the fragile and difficult relations that “teach us even more about ourselves as well as about others” (p. 125). Bergum (2003, p. 125) asks, “How can we find the time or more significantly how can we create the space that is needed for relationships to develop?” To this, Gravett provides an unintentional response in Part 2, *Relationships with Others*; this section of the book explains how mobile networked technologies have constructed spaces for learning and connection through the concept of embodied virtuality (Gourlay, 2012; Hayles, 1999). Gravett maintains that the possibilities for connections exist in the fissures of our daily work-lives and explores how these opportunities may be navigated and preserved through dialogues, networks and alliances. Such possibilities can be seen in the experience of Dawn Grant-Skiba (2022), a Black doctoral candidate, full-time secondary school teacher, a middle

leader, wife and mother. For Grant-Skiba (2022), participating in online spaces for Black women higher degree researchers provided an outlet for “racial battle fatigue and race-based trauma” (p. 98). Engaging in a virtual group created for and by Black women scholars helped Grant-Skiba foster her well-being, counter feelings of isolation and acted as a source of support and mutual understanding (Grant-Skiba, 2022); this virtual community space provided her an opportunity to be vulnerable and have her full humanity affirmed (Beasy et al., 2020; Grant-Skiba, 2022).

Critical posthumanism emphasises the non-human elements of learning which include physical space, resources available, school routines and socio-historical conditions (Strom & Martin, 2020; Martin, 2019). Given the social hierarchies that often exist in education, Gravett discusses the importance of teachers’ considerations of their own and others’ identities — “as political beings who make constant parallels between schooling and society, school practices and social reality” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 77). Like Grant-Skiba, (2022), Kinchin et al. (2023) and Tuinamuana & Yoo (2020), Gravett illuminates, in Chapter 6, how we may support ourselves and others through alternative/creative forms of writing, such as reflective journaling, (speculative) autoethnography and poetry that immerse us in a reflexive experience (Austin, 2023; Costello, 2022; Tuinamuana & Yoo, 2020); for instance, Grant-Skiba (2022) details how poetry allowed her to better express herself during a time of uncertainty and political upheaval. Bergum (2003) describes the pedagogical activity of nurse-educator Gweneth A. Hartrick Doane who encouraged her student-nurses to develop the relational space with their patients through re-enactment and role-taking; this activity provided students with an opportunity to reveal the constrained areas of practice in a “radically transformed way” (p. 125). Correspondingly, Gravett argues that creative writing enables vulnerability and can foster a sense of connection with others and toward our own identity formation; creative narratives can also facilitate dialogue with ourselves and with the larger world (Tuinamuana & Yoo 2020) which can enrich our own learning and develop a greater awareness of teaching practice from a critical perspective (Kinchin et al., 2023).

Part 3: Relationality and the Sociomaterial

In Part 3, *Relationality and the Sociomaterial*, Gravett experiments with the entanglements of the human and the non-human — the spaces, places and things of education like laptops, classrooms, pens, desks, textbooks, teaching resources, assessment briefs, worksheets, buildings — as well as bodily materialities. This section immediately brought to mind the imaginative storytelling of one of the first Black American and female science fiction writers, Octavia Butler, whose narratives also encourage readers to critically examine the role of technology, power structures, and material artefacts in shaping our collective lives. This is apt as Gravett draws on the work of Donna Haraway who is noted to have drawn from Butler and American literary critic and Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers (Penley et al., 1990). The development of technology and postdigital perspectives have emphasised the need for, what Fawns (2022) calls, an entangled pedagogy model, where the relationship between technology and pedagogy are reciprocal and where “agency is negotiated between teachers, students and other stakeholders” (p. 711).

It is in this section that Gravett explicitly prompts readers to unbind themselves from humanistic thinking and consider what a focus on materialities can offer. Although sociomateriality can arguably be traced back to Huber’s (1990) influential work on the role of computer-mediated

communication and decision-making technologies on shaping design and human actions, Gravett's discussions of posthumanism and feminist sociomaterial theory (Gravett et al., 2021) focus on what Bavdaz (2022) refers to as the breakthrough contributions of Karen Barad's relational ontology. In Barad's intra-active relational ontology, human-object existence is treated as a [historical-] material-discursive practice (Bavdaz, 2022). However, as mentioned by J. Crawford (personal communication, June 26, 2023)

The stories of constitutive entanglement of objects and humans comes from sociologists (like Levi-Strauss on structuralism, although more focused on intangible objects, or Pierre Bourdieu's response to Levi-Strauss that focused on habitus and the relationships like objects and their effects on human motivation), organisational theorists like Wanda Orlikowski who writes of recursive relationships that occur between human and objects (particularly technology), of which Huber extends. Perhaps even earlier, people like Irving Trilling provide interesting narratives on object authenticity and comments on unfalsified objects and perceived sincerity of objects. Reisinger and Steiner (2006), while certainly not the first, provide some useful context about the issues of relating to objects that existentialists once described.

In an interview, Haraway stated, "Too much of Anglo feminist theory has started out from Freud, Levi-Strauss, and Lacan. And I think that's unfortunate." (Penley et al., 1990, p. 17). Incidentally, none of the thinkers mentioned above by Crawford are present in Gravett's work. As Gravett draws heavily from Haraway and Barad, it is unclear if these are intentional omissions. Although Gravett does not refer to N. Katherine Hayles, it appears that her conceptualisation of posthumanism may also stem from Hayles (1999), who is widely regarded as being one of the leading feminist theorists of the posthuman; Hayles' perspective of posthumanism is not through the route of genetics and biology but by the path of cybernetics (Hayles, 2010). If our assumption is correct, it may explain some of the genealogical omissions from the sociologists and organisational theorists mentioned above.

While building, sustaining and participating in a community is a crucial aspect of higher education, Gravett speaks to how many of us have experienced the ways in which digital spaces have allowed us to connect and, arguably, become more fully human in solidarity with others, akin to the notion of embodied virtuality and affirming Grant-Skida's (2022) anecdote. Throughout her book, Gravett draws upon the work of bell hooks, regarded for her discussions of engaged pedagogy and theories on transgressing the hegemonic notions of space and power in education. hooks, like other feminist and womanist scholars, brought attention to the lack of care in academic settings, where care and competence are sometimes positioned as in opposition (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). The notions of belonging, care and creating meaningful connections with others through community are deeply ingrained in Black pedagogy (Foster, 1998; Henry, 2005). This can be seen in, for example, the creation and participation in alternative office hours and counterspaces (see Roberts, 2023). Counterspaces were originally created in response to racialised microaggressions that students of colour experience in academic environments. Counterspaces act as support networks outside the limits of formal support services and office hours (Payne et al., 2021); they are spaces where students can show up authentically. Counterspaces have been key in helping students gain perspective, rebuild confidence and for emotional support (Luedke, 2023). Thus, as Gravett affirms, spaces, objects and matter are

significant for student engagement; these examples make it easier to understand how nonhuman actors can be conceived as agentic entities that should no longer be viewed as passive instruments or background elements.

Chapter 9 discusses the topics of assessment as it relates to feelings, objects and other things such as texts and digital devices. Empirically grounded research has shown that dialogue and positive relationships can create momentum to help students find and nurture a sense of belonging in their higher education experience (Luedke, 2023). However, “direct and indirect forms of violence” have been invented and used by educators at all schooling levels to force learning (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 128); in particular, a pedagogy of mattering allows us to “notice and consider the impact of a broader range of actors upon learning and teaching” (Gravett et al., 2021, p. 6). Then, we are then better equipped to “tune into objects...that constitute the material matters of learning and teaching as an in situ practice of relationality” (Gravett et al., 2021, p. 6). For example, classroom objects like closed and locked doors (Payne & Clemons, forthcoming) play a role in the carceral logics of schooling, such as discipline through humiliation and exclusion (Rudolph, 2023). Conversely, Black feminist pedagogies are strongly rooted in the concepts of membership, nurturing, and establishing significant relationships with others via welcoming spaces and communal discourse (Payne & Clemons, forthcoming) and can be engaged as a radical act of engagement to confront and undermine oppressive practices in education (hooks, 2015). As scholars whose epistemologies are rooted in Black feminism, we also position emotions as appropriate, embodied and part of knowledge validation (Hill Collins, 1990); we adopt the idea that a pedagogy that supports emotions as embodied can also “remind us that objects [and things] are embodied all the time” (Bergum, 2003, p. 122).

The things of education also include feedback tools like rubrics, feedback sheets and audio/video files (Forsyth, 2023) and may even include the digital footprints in virtual learning environments (Payne et al., in press). However, as Bergum (2003) notes, we tend to “become forgetful of things as we use them” (p. 122); Gravett et al. (2021) posit that a posthuman relational pedagogy seeks to address our forgetfulness. We believe in the importance of problematising such objects and technologies as they are often embedded in racialised “activities, processes, judgments, or decisions of assessment” (Inoue 2015, p. 15). Objects like rubrics and feedback sheets can be used to perpetuate linguistic hegemony and accentism (Inoue, 2015; Payne & McArthur, 2023), and other things like learning analytics can be used to perpetuate surveillance culture, inequity and deficit narratives (Payne et al., in press). Thus, it is through these examples that we understand Gravett’s assertion that objects possess “thing power”.

We explore the need for administrators, educators and researchers to attend to the tools and technologies of assessment not only as objects and things but to engage in conversations about how these are used in every aspect of teaching and learning; as Gravett repeats, “things act as ‘reminders’ as to what matters” (p. 93). For administrators, educators and researchers, it is always important to consider what we intend with these tools and technologies, who has influenced our conceptions of them and who benefits (or does not benefit) from the ways in which we use these things.

Uncovering the challenges of posthumanist pedagogy and looking ahead

It is important to acknowledge that while posthumanist pedagogy offers a valuable perspective, it is not without limitations. Moving beyond a black or white binary, we strive to be post-oppositional which can bring forth issues of political clarity and “prod us to become expansive and imaginative” (Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 18). We wish to consider the interconnections of different ideas and embrace the shades of grey of emerging posthuman pedagogy. Thus, we seek to surface the often othered perspectives to posthumanism, endeavouring to engage “from a position of love and de/coloniality” (Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 18). Whilst the author has made the concepts of posthumanism and relational pedagogy easy to understand, one of the critiques of this work is the need for the author to make the implicit, explicit. By that we mean that the author at times alludes to topics such as ability status, culture, or race, but we believe she could have been more explicit in discussing those topics and how they relate to posthumanism and relational pedagogies.

Gravett draws upon Indigenous scholars and scholarships and acknowledges that “living reciprocally” (Bergum, 2003, p. 126) “has long been absolutely fundamental to ways and thinking and being within Indigenous cultures” (p. 15). Gravett also highlights substantial concerns relating to the fact that Euro-Western “framings of post-humanism have a tendency to erase Indigenous epistemes” (Todd, 2016, p. 9). For example, Indigenous peoples in “Australia” have been practising ecological wisdom as Traditional Owners of their local lands for thousands of years, before humanism or posthumanism emerged (Rey, 2019). Gravett emphasises, as Todd (2016) also flags, that the focus of posthumanism continues to be centred around European perspectives. Gravett appears to position posthumanism as a hopeful method toward achieving decolonial education (Todd, 2016); this is a point we wish she had made more explicit.

Intersectional posthumanism is still yet to be done well, and “there’s a lot of work to do there theoretically and in terms of praxis” (C. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2023). As such, future adoptions of posthumanism in higher education may seek to work through an intersectional lens. To create a posthumanist approach to education that is just and equitable for all, it may be necessary to be in conversation with and centre the experiences and perspectives of historically marginalised groups, particularly Black, Indigenous, disabled and queer students, administrators, educators, researchers and community members who continue to face systemic oppression and symbolic violence within higher education and society at large. We also implore future work to heed Henry’s (2005) advice to draw upon varied and multifaceted Black feminists as “white academic feminists often acknowledge the same one or two Black-feminist authors” (p. 90).

Critics from Black feminist, Indigenous and queer perspectives have pointed out that a posthumanist approach can overlook the ways in which power operates within human-human relationships and how these dynamics might be intensified for historically marginalised groups (Birhane & van Dijk, 2020). These scholars have questioned “what and crucially *whose* conception of humanity are we moving beyond?” (Jackson, 2015, p. 215). Birhane & van Dijk (2020), for example, reject the positioning of humans and objects as (agentic) equals and instead “see technologies as building on and further sustaining (embodied, embedded, extended) human beings” (p. 2); this is similar to Hayles who argues that “a good human-technology relationship is

one that foregrounds human values, what's beneficial for humans, what fosters human welfare, and equity and is also good for the planet" (McInerney & Drage, 2021, 03:42). Others have warned that appeals to move beyond the human may marginalise cultures and ways of knowing by reinstating the Eurocentric transcendentalism this movement claims to negate (Todd, 2016; Jackson, 2015). Building on critiques put forth, future work extending Gravett's ideas may consider a union of critical praxis and critical posthuman thinking.

Some argue that posthumanism does not adequately consider where authors come from or the historical context of their ideas (Sundberg, 2014). This speaks to some of our perceived limitations of Gravett's work, whereby the historical context of how humans begin to relate to, and with, objects is not fully attended to. Relatedly, we feel it is important to acknowledge positionalities and disrupt the notion of an omniscient observer, who occupies an objective and detached position; this is a notion that we believe Gravett alludes to. Thus, we feel Gravett could have been more explicit in locating *herself* within the pages of *Relational Pedagogies*. For example, if Gravett explicitly located herself, we would not need to make assumptions about whether she considers herself a feminist theorist; it may have also allowed us better insight into who she chose to bring into her conceptualisations of and conversation about posthumanism, relationality and sociomateriality. On this note, we aim to bring attention to the need to detach ourselves from the "view from above, from nowhere" (Gravett & Ajjawi 2022, p. 1388), we hope that future conversations remain cognisant that "humanist dogmas represent a particular, indeed provincial, body of thought on the question of the human" (Sundberg, 2014, p. 36). Relatedly, we believe positionalities are particularly important in these perpetually unprecedented times.

The aim of positionalities is to provide a transparent social and epistemic location of individuals, which seeks to foster awareness, accountability and critical understanding in navigating challenges. Together, our experiences as Black women scholars and our epistemological stances, rooted in Black feminist thought, critical inquiry, intersectionality and social constructivism, have brought us together and shaped our perspectives on teaching and learning. We felt it important to make our shared positionality known as it may allow readers of this review to better understand the time, context, people and cultures in which this review has been constructed. In doing so we seek to offer readers a nuanced and inclusive understanding of our discussion of the book and those we chose to bring into the conversation, considering diversity and social justice. Future scholarship should continue efforts whereby scholars locate themselves and challenge the notion that Eurocentric theory is the only valid and universal knowledge system and question the nature of who has been historically deemed as human. An intersectional lens may, more fully, recognise the entangled web of relations of social, political, historical and cultural contexts and acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of human experiences, what and who matters and the material forces at play. Scholars interested in this thinking may wish to consider crafting a critical piece on relational pedagogy.

Posthumanism and sociomateriality are not new concepts to higher education literature. However, *Relational Pedagogies* offers an alternative to most higher education narratives that have upheld a self-centred and individualistic view of the world that often undermines the entanglement of social and cultural contexts, emotions, situational factors and the things around us. Again, Gravett's positioning of posthumanism does not completely reject the role of the human, but it challenges some ideas about humanity. The concepts of posthumanism and sociomateriality

encourage us to question traditional assumptions and explore new possibilities. This is important as there is a growing interest in fostering connections within higher education institutions, partnerships which have become increasingly intercultural (Austin, 2023; Wilson et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). *Relational Pedagogies* is a rousing book that provides a means for resurfacing often forgotten questions, thinking with different theories and encouraging us to engage various others as we work to address issues of relationality, connection and mattering in meaningful ways. Whilst intending to be applicable for multiple academic audiences, we believe the book reads more for the education researcher.

Gravett presents posthumanism and sociomateriality as approaches that “bridge matter and technologies with dense social processes” (Pendleton-Jullian & Seely Brown, 2018, p. 160). The current shift towards a more relational approach in academia represents an important reckoning as we deepen our process of becoming and our own understanding of selfhood and wholeness as we participate in and shape hybrid, digital and post-Covid learning environments. *Relational Pedagogies* set out to push boundaries, think beyond and experiment for the purpose of generating more connected and considerate futures in higher education — futures that account for “dynamic context[s] in which things change and emerge” (Pendleton-Jullian & Seely Brown, 2018, p. vi) like the constant movement and fluidity of water, with its ability to shape and reshape landscapes over time, and, often, providing a trove of insights. Within *Relational Pedagogies*, Gravett has presented and brought to the fore the concepts of sociomateriality and posthumanism for the higher education landscape, with the aim of enabling us to “live more liveable lives” (p. 30). Sidorkin, when speaking on the pedagogy of relation, suggests that education institutions would “be more viable as hybrid institutions” that combine “the functions of school proper” with community-building (2002, p. 6) - grounded in community and engaging the community (peoples, spaces and other things) as allies (Payne & Clemons, forthcoming). After all, we are intricately interconnected with the material environment, and the actions and well-being of one can profoundly impact the other (Bergum, 2003); the crux of education lies primarily in enhancing our collective quality of life (Sidorkin, 2002). We feel *Relational Pedagogies* is a valuable contribution to and point of departure from the global field of mainstream higher education literature, offering a refreshing and revitalising perspective.

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