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**YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY**

School of  
Education, Language  
and Psychology

# Consciousness and Education: Why Consciousness Matters for the Future of Education

With Federico Faggin, originator of the microprocessor,  
and Ronald Barnett, Professor in Higher Education

**Conference Programme**

**16–17 June 2026**



## Overview

There is growing evidence that mind is not generated by brain activity, and that consciousness is a fundamental aspect of reality. That throws a radically different light on what it means to be human. As acceptance of this new paradigm spreads, so it will impact all aspects of society. This two-day conference explores the implications of a new world view for education. Drawing on emerging post-materialist perspectives in science, philosophy and the humanities, the conference invites participants to reconsider long-standing assumptions about knowledge, learning, agency and meaning in educational theory and practice.

With a keynote from Dr Federico Faggin, whose work challenges reductionist models of mind and matter, and a conversation with Profesor Ron Barnett, renowned for his scholarship on the philosophy of higher education, the conference is designed to foster shared inquiry, critical reflection and collective sense-making. By the end of our time together, educators, researchers and practitioners will have had opportunity to reflect on curriculum design, research paradigms, and the purpose of education itself. Together we can begin the process of setting in place important principles and a new direction for education, encompassing an expanded vision of reality.

## Day 1 – Reframing Reality and Consciousness

*From materialist assumptions to post-materialist understandings*

9:30 – 10:00	Registration & Coffee
10:00 -10:20	Welcome & Opening Remarks
10:20 – 11:30	Keynote: Federico Faggin – ‘Consciousness and the Primacy of Inner Experience’ (including Q&A)
11:30 – 12:00	Coffee
12:00 – 13:00	Dialogue 1: Dr Federico Faggin & Dr Jonathan Allday – Physics, Consciousness & Scientific Frontiers (including Q&A)
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 14:45	Dr Iya Whiteley – Managing Intensity, Building Connection: Lessons from Space for Parents and Educators. (35 mins + 10 mins Q &A)
14:45 – 15:30	Prof Kate Adams & Dr Donna Thomas – Children’s Experiences, Spirituality & Wellbeing (35 mins + Q&A)
15:30 – 15:45	Break
15:45 – 16:45	Workshop Sessions
16:45 – 17:45	Film on Spiritual Awakenings
17:45 – 18:15	Plenary Panel – Q&A from audience
19: 00	Conference Dinner After Dinner Speaker: David Lorimer, Galileo Commission, Scientific & Medical Network





## Day 2 – The Implications of post-materialist ideas of Consciousness for Education

*Re-imagining education in light of expanded understandings of consciousness*

9:30 – 10:00	Arrival & Coffee
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome & Framing for Day 2
10:15 – 10:45	Introduction to the Consciousness Education Project Dr Laurel Waterman
10:45 – 11:45	Dialogue 2: Prof Ron Barnett & Dr Federico Faggin, chaired by Dr Joan Walton Why Consciousness Matters for the Future of Education? (Including Q&A)
11:45 – 12:00	Morning Break
12:00 – 12:45	Dialogue 2: Federico Faggin & Rachael Summerscales (doctoral student), Chaired by Dr Laurel Waterman Emerging Consciousness Paradigms in Educational Scholarship (including Q&A)
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:00	Workshop Sessions (Repeat of Day 1)
15:00 – 16:00	Where to for education about consciousness? A panel discussion of all presenters plus York St John academics.
16:00 – 16:15	Final Words & Thanks – Conference Close

Tea and coffee available for those who want to stay and chat following the close of the conference.

## Biographies of Presenters and Workshop Leaders

### Dr Federico Faggin



Federico Faggin is an Italian-American physicist and engineer best known for designing the first microprocessor, and leading the company that developed the first commercial touchpad and touchscreen. Being a pioneer at the forefront of modern computing, he put effort into creating a conscious computer. Eventually realizing this was not possible, and experiencing a transformative spiritual experience, he now supports research into consciousness through the Faggin Foundation. Having spent many years evolving sophisticated theories, explained in his books *Silicon* and *Irreducible*, he is interested in exploring the implications of his theories and model of reality for making a positive difference in the world, including through education.

### Professor Ronald Barnett



Professor Ronald Barnett is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at University College London Faculty of Education and Society, where he was a Pro-Director and Dean. He is the Secretary of the Global Forum for Re-humanizing Education (now being formed), past Chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education and Emeritus President of the Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society. He played a significant role in the life of the federal University of London, chairing its Research Degrees Committee, working across all the world-famous colleges and institutes of the University. He has been driven by 2 questions throughout his life: What is a University? What is 'higher education'? (He distinguishes between these two questions, and they continue to haunt him.) He is preoccupied with asking: "Just what might universities and higher education be in the C21? What should they be?"

### Dr Iya Whiteley



Dr. Iya Whiteley is a Space Psychologist with a PhD in Cognitive Engineering and MA in Clinical Psychology. For 25 years, she designed training for astronauts, advised the UK Space Agency, and collaborated internationally with space agencies including NASA, serving as Director of the Centre for Space Medicine at University College London. Her work integrates aerospace psychology with practices from cultures worldwide: Korean Medicine, breathwork, and martial arts. BBC Science presenter and author of "Born Knowing," Iya bridges scientific rigour with ancient wisdom for conscious parenting and education.

[www.linkedin.com/in/dr-iya-whiteley/?originalSubdomain=uk](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-iya-whiteley/?originalSubdomain=uk)

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## Dr Jonathan Allday



Dr Jonathan Allday is a physicist and science educator known for his accessible writing on quantum theory, particle physics and the philosophical implications of modern physics for consciousness. He is the Director of the Pari Center (<https://paricenter.com>) and presenter of an Armchair Guide to Quantum Theory: (<https://paricenter.com/event/an-armchair-guide-to-quantum-mechanics/>)

## Dr Donna Thomas



Dr Donna Thomas is Co-Director of ICreateS International Research Unit at the University of Lancashire and was recently awarded Perrot Warrick Senior Researcher, administered through Trinity College, Cambridge University. Donna has researched with children, young people and communities for over twenty years. Recent research areas Donna investigates are exploring consciousness through qualitative research, the nature of self and subjectivity and children's extra sensory experiences. Donna has published academic articles on these areas, published two books, is invited for press comments (The Daily Mail), and regularly appears on podcasts to discuss her research.

## Professor Kate Adams



Professor Kate Adams is Professor of Education at Leeds Trinity University, UK. She has over 30 years of experience in education, initially as a primary school teacher, before moving into academia. Her research focuses on children's spirituality, with a particular interest in childhood experiences which are perceived as real, but often dismissed by others as 'just imagination.' She has published extensively for almost three decades, including research papers, professional articles, and books such as *Unseen Worlds: Looking Through the Lens of Childhood*.

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## Rachael Summerscales



Rachael Summerscales is a doctoral researcher whose work investigates emerging paradigms of consciousness within education, with a particular interest in transformative learning, spiritual development, and holistic pedagogies. Her interest in consciousness emerged through extensive work in early years education, where participation in teacher-child encounters revealed learning as relational, embodied, and meaning-rich. These encounters prompted deeper inquiry into how education attends to inner ways of knowing and being. Her research draws on phenomenological and autoethnographic approaches to explore how consciousness and lived experience shape educational practice.

## Dr Jessica Bockler



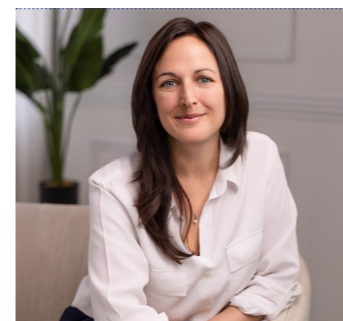
Dr Jessica Bockler is a transpersonal psychologist, applied artist, and co-founding director of [Alef Trust](#), a UK-based social enterprise active in higher education and focused on consciousness, spirituality, and transformative learning. Jessica's work integrates creative practice, research, and applied social initiatives - such as [Nurturing the Fields of Change](#) - exploring how inner development informs leadership, education, and responses to social and ecological crises. She teaches internationally and publishes on consciousness, transformation, and integrative approaches to education and change.

## David Lorimer



David Lorimer is a visionary polymath, spiritual activist, poet and writer, who is Founder of Character Education Scotland, Global Ambassador of the Scientific and Medical Network and former President of Wrekin Trust and the Swedenborg Society. He is the instigator of the Beyond the Brain conference series and has co-ordinated the Mystics and Scientists conferences every year since the late 1980s. David is also Chair of the Galileo Commission and is the author and editor of many books.

## Dr Laurel Waterman



Dr. Laurel Waterman holds a PhD in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning, Wellbeing Emphasis, from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, Canada. Laurel's research focuses on consciousness education, which explores perspectives on the source and nature of consciousness and their implications for ways of being, knowing, teaching, and learning. Laurel is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Toronto Mississauga's Department of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology and in the Alef Trust's MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality, and Transpersonal Psychology.



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## Workshop Sessions

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Dr Jonathan Allday

### Consciousness in popular culture: an educational opportunity

*"Tell me one last thing," said Harry. "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?"*

*Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry's ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.*

*"Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"*

– J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Despite the dominance of a materialist paradigm in society, popular culture often embraces broader perspectives. Science fiction and fantasy in film, television, and literature frequently explore themes of non-local mind. Superhero narratives, in particular, feature characters who manipulate matter with their minds, communicate telepathically, or move through space by sheer intention.

In this workshop, we examine such examples and consider how they can be used to prompt student inquiry and introduce alternative views of consciousness.

Warning: there will be clips shown from SciFi...

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Dr Iya Whiteley

### From Reactivity to Presence: A Breathwork Experience for Conscious Parenting and Educators

Following the presentation, this experiential workshop invites you to discover what astronauts and the sacred parenting journey both require from us: breath as your inner navigation system. Through guided breathwork, you'll dive into your own exploration journey of interacting with consciousness directly, not as a concept but as lived experience.

We'll work with a practical intention, for example, how to meet intensity with presence in daily parenting and educational moments. Rather than learning techniques to apply later, you'll experience the shift from reactivity to awareness, from managing symptoms to recognising the invitation beneath each challenge.

The workshop session includes personal reflection time to integrate your discoveries and practical approaches you can use immediately at home. Post-workshop, you'll receive a feedback form and invitation to a free follow-up online session where we'll reflect together, share experiences, and explore questions that emerge from practice.

This taster offers a window into the deeper explorations available through the "Born Knowing" book and the "Parenthood as a Spiritual Retreat" online course.

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Dr Donna Thomas & Professor Kate Adams

### Beyond the Five Senses: Exploring consciousness through creative inquiry

In this workshop, we will explore aspects of consciousness such as unusual or 'out of this world' experiences through qualitative and creative research methods. You will have the opportunity to select from a suite of sensory methods to enquire into either your own or another person's experience. Examples might include, but are not limited to: Near Death Experience, mystical experience, invisible companions, exceptional dreams, past life memories or After Death Communications. Alternatively, you might wish to reflect on your childhood memories of how you understood the world(s) as a child. We will close the session with a reflection on how effective your chosen method(s) were for exploring experiences beyond the five senses and the potential implications for education settings.

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Dr Laurel Waterman

### The Veil of Ignorance: Exploring the relationship between consciousness education and social and ecological justice

When I first started writing about consciousness education, I took care to distinguish what I meant by consciousness from how the influential critical pedagogy scholar Paulo Freire used the word. Freire coined the phrase "critical consciousness," which involves developing awareness of the causes of one's oppression, and it has become a vital tool for social justice and decolonization movements in education. However, I wanted to discover how we can teach about different perspectives on the source and nature of consciousness, not how to develop awareness of something. Five years on, I now think that consciousness education is an essential tool for developing critical consciousness in the Freirean sense. This workshop invites participants to play a game called "The Veil of Ignorance," an imaginative improvisational exercise that explores ideas about interconnected consciousness and its relationship to social and ecological justice.



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## Workshop Sessions

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Dr Jessica Bockler

### Inner work and social change: Understanding consciousness and its role in collective transformation

Post-material models of consciousness challenge education to move beyond the assumption that inner experience and inner practices are simply a private endeavour. They invite the integration of interiority, relationality, and social action. Drawing on transpersonal psychology and applied work in education and community contexts, this workshop explores how inner work is really at the root of collective transformation rather than an optional enrichment.

Participants will be invited to reflect on how a wide range of consciousness practices and how they influence values and ethical orientation, leadership, and collective norms guiding action. The workshop will integrate conceptual framing with reflective inquiry, honouring multiple ways of knowing to sense into and make sense of our roles and responsibilities in social change today.

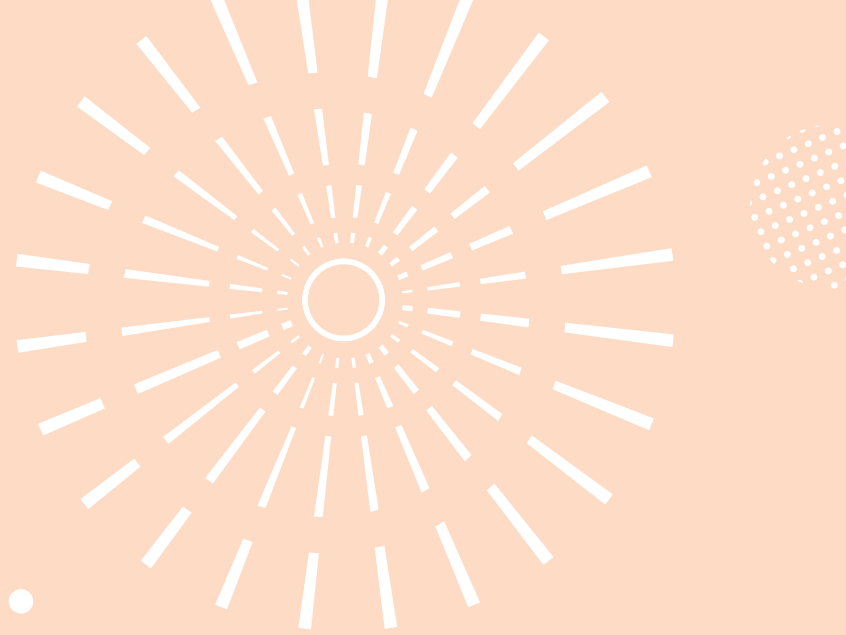
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Rachael Summerscales

### Encounters That Awaken: Why Young People Call for a Shift in Consciousness in Education

This workshop offers an autoethnographic inquiry into how encounters with young people can disrupt, unsettle, and awaken educators, revealing the limits of current educational structures. Drawing on adult lived experience, the session brings into view the gap between the inner life of the child and the structures designed to educate them, and invites participants to consider what becomes possible when this gap is met with greater presence rather than control. Beginning from the perspective of the educator, the workshop opens a collective inquiry into how curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and dominant research paradigms sustain this gap, and why a shift in consciousness may be needed, both for young people navigating a changing world and for educators grappling with the tensions between lived experience and institutional demands. Participants are invited to reflect on what this reframes about the purpose of education and the evolving role of the teacher if consciousness is understood as fundamental.





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