

**LOVED INTO LEARNING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HOW LOVE HAS
INFLUENCED ME AS A TEACHER**

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**HOW HAS LOVE INFLUENCED ME AS A TEACHER, RESEARCHER, AND
LEARNER? A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO A TEACHER'S ABRUPT AWAKENINGS**

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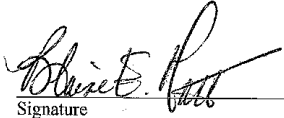
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Abstract

Educational sustainability (the freedom to think *and* act holistically based on the assumption that everyone and everything is connected) requires a holistic approach to learning that honours the whole student—including mind, body, spirit, and emotion. Within this approach there is a space and place to acknowledge teachers' and students' autonomous values and unique being. My interpretive qualitative study explores the generation of my living educational theory as I introduce love into my practice and discover the obstacles and challenges to living more fully according to my values of love, hope, and joy. Using a narrative inquiry methodology and methodological inventiveness, I draw on 6 years of data collection from my personal journals and lived experiences to make the process of living narratively explicit.

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I dedicate this work to my children, Daniel, Dylan, and Michaela and to my grandchildren, Hannah, Avah, Parker, Baby Apricot, and the grandchildren yet to come. I know you are going to make the world a better place.

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Prologue

...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.

Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. Perhaps you do carry within you the possibility of creating and forming, as an especially blessed and pure way of living; train yourself for that—but take whatever comes, with great trust, and as long as it comes out of your will, out of some need of your innermost self, then take it upon yourself.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Letters to a Young Poet* (1934)

My initial intention was to get on the inside of how love influenced me as a teacher, researcher, and learner by examining the data I had accumulated over 6 years but as I remained open to what would emerge, I ended up taking a different path part way through my study. I wrote the key pieces for chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 more or less as I had intended although even in the midst of writing I ventured off in other directions as I explain throughout. I had spent over 6 months writing at this point and I was not satisfied with what I had produced. I explain this further in the rationale for my study. This is where my narrative takes a drastic turn and I step outside of myself as I look back at what I have written and ask myself some difficult questions. O'Donohue (1999) writes that “We are privileged, and the duty of privilege is absolute integrity” (p. 101). I have never been hungry or gone without shelter and I do not know what it means to live in a country that is under attack. When I decided to return to school to obtain a university degree, I did not encounter any obstacles I could not overcome. And most

importantly, I am loved by many. I acknowledge my privileged position but my integrity was in jeopardy as I recognized that I was not as faithful as I could have been as I wrote my narratives. My desire to honour myself and the generation of a valuable narrative forced me to review the narratives I wrote and to add an additional layer. Initially, I allowed fear and discomfort to prevent me from delving deeper into the unknown and possibly tumultuous space of uncertainty and vulnerability. I also knew that entering this dark place came with the great risk of feeling such overwhelming despair I might not find my way back out again.

I decided to take the plunge as I know that when I have done so in the past I return to the light more informed and authentic. Brown (2012) states that “Not only can we not deeply love, we cannot know the truth of who we are without experiencing vulnerability” (p. 32). I embrace Peck’s (1978) definition of love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth” (p. 85). My aim is to love more fully, to love deeply, and I know from experience that embracing my vulnerable self allows me to research with greater integrity. The six interludes I wrote (which are set in an *italicized blue font* to delineate them from the original text) and chapter 7, my conclusion, are the naked, vulnerable me I uncovered after revisiting the story I told myself and shared with my reader.

How Did I Get the Courage to Take the Plunge?

John Holt, former teacher and renowned education critic, spent years observing how children learn and dedicated his life to liberating children. Holt had a vision of a more meaningful and sustainable way of learning and/or living and came to realize that compulsory schooling was part of the problem and not part of the solution. In her Introduction to Farenga and Ricci’s *The Legacy of John Holt*, Kirsten Olson (2013) writes:

Holt is among the great philosophers of education in the 20th century: moving beyond

Dewey and more accessible. ... Holt explicitly moved away from a belief in conventional schooling and establishment of schools per se. An inspired observer of teaching and learning—a truth teller and a truth seeker. ... A defender of the inherent rights, dignity, and brilliance of children. ... Playful, observant, fierce, tender, freethinking A pragmatic philosopher of learning, a generous and farseeing mentor, a political strategist, and a passionately keen observer of the human mind in the act of learning. ... His brilliance of observation, his eloquence, his simple belief in the human mind, and his fascination with the journey of learning made Holt, in his time, profoundly popular and influential. Within the pantheon of important radical education writers of the 1960s and early 1970s, John Holt and Ivan Illich were perhaps the most significant, because of the clarity, boldness, and profundity of their vision of a more ideal human culture, a self-sustaining, courageous, convivial human society more explicitly in balance with the larger physical and spiritual ecosystem. (pp. xv-xvi)

Initially, when I first encountered the work of Holt during my PhD studies, I was astounded that I had not heard of him or read any of his writings during my teacher education preparation or continued professional development. However, I am no longer astonished and believe that the ideas and insights of Holt were intentionally excluded from my teacher training because they challenged everything conventional schooling, including postsecondary schooling, was designed to enforce—like compliance and control. What did astonish me is that even after reading several of his books and completely agreeing with his philosophy, I still tried to rationalize my teaching practice. I was still naïve enough to think that my radical and subversive approaches were exceptional enough to make a difference. Holt (2004) writes:

People who call themselves “radical teachers” are fooling themselves. As part of their

job, they will take attendance every day, report late and absent students, enforce the S-school rules, and give test and grades—or they will be fired. But in doing these things they help the S-schools carry out their fundamental and status quo preserving tasks. Doing the S-schools work, they teach the S-schools message, and all their talk, however Radical or Subversive, will not outweigh or undo that teaching. The idea of a “radical teacher” is absurd. (p. 206)

Eventually, not unlike Holt (1969) experienced after writing his first book, *How Children Fail*, I came to the conclusion that I was mistaken. Holt (1967) wrote *How Children Learn*, where he recounts examples of optimal learning. The book was published again in 1982, 1983, and 2017. In the 3rd edition, Holt added notations to his original text where he highlighted the new insights he gleaned over the years and he humbly, boldly, and explicitly pointed out his own erroneous thinking. Holt’s layered reflections became a model for me as I returned to what I had written and added interludes to share new insights and my erroneous thinking. These interludes (written in *blue italics*) are the second layer of my thinking.

I have retained both parts of the journey here, including the bits and pieces that could be considered disjointed, contradictory, or irrelevant. As I write, I embrace a stream-of-consciousness writing style to enhance my ability to unveil embodied knowledge. Focusing on my thoughts and ideas, insights, and contradictions without being preoccupied with structure or specific theories resembles a poststructuralist style of writing that allows me to bounce around from topic to topic and capture thoughts as they emerge and unfold. Lemert (1997), explaining writing, describes writing from this perspective as an “an inscrutable style of writing and argumentation” (p. 104). Although incomprehensible and nonsensical at times, my narratives, written in a stream-of-consciousness style reflecting and mirroring my internal

thoughts as they occur, enable me to generate a text that I can return to (in my layered reflections) and examine for insights that enable me to locate and articulate my truths that lay just beneath the surface. Writing in this way depicts my narrative thinking process “allowing the ‘mind’ of the exploration to express through words on the page...the collected writings become a treasure chest of sorts, giving me gifts of insight into the research process, revealing my own discovery process” (Sargent-Wishart, 2016, p. 13). My writing is full of contradictions, irregularities, more questions than answers, but this was my process as it unfolded and it is valuable to capture this coming and going, the questioning, avoiding, and eventually confronting as it makes the research process explicit. I wanted to write something that would be valuable for teachers and help them to unveil and articulate their process and the most truthful way I could do this is by sharing my process as it emerged, including all the bumps, turns, pauses, re-routing and obstacles. Mine is not a smooth story but it is a real one.

Chapters 1,2, 3, and 4 are what I felt compelled to write to meet dissertation criteria. The remaining chapters are my stories as I lived them for many years and the interludes within these chapters and my conclusion are the insights I gleaned after revisiting my stories with a heightened sense of integrity and an unrelenting desire to confront my fears and inhibitions. Plotkin (2008) writes: “Remember that self-doubt is as self-centered as self-inflation. Your obligation is to reach as deeply as you can and offer your unique and authentic gifts as bravely and beautifully as you're able” (p. 376). At this point in my life, I can reach no deeper than what I offer here.

In addition to listing my references, I have also included a bibliography that includes sources I did not reference but read and was influenced by as the reading I did along the way was very much a part of my process and informed my thinking both consciously and

subconsciously. I find it useful to explore the bibliographies in the books I read and offer one here to assist the reader and to acknowledge the authors who influenced me. This is not an exhaustive list but does include much of the work that: provided the language for me to express my ideas; validated my instincts, including my questions; challenged my beliefs and ideas; and moved my thinking forward.

I recognize that my style of writing is sometimes difficult to follow for some readers, so in an attempt to make the reading of this dissertation more clear, I include a timeline and a list of key terms below.

Major Events Timeline

- September 1965 – Immigrated to Toronto, Canada at the age of 5
- September 1970 – Moved to Brampton, Ontario
- January 1976 – Moved to Southampton, Ontario
- June 1976–Ungraduated from high school
- September 1983 – Entered B.Ed program at University of Alberta
- April 1986 – Got married and moved to Ontario from Alberta due to the crash in the oil field industry where my husband was employed
- October 1986 – My 17-year-old sister is killed in a tragic car accident
- April 1987 – Our first son was born and I became a “stay at home” mom
- August 1988 – Our second son was born
- June 1990 – Our daughter was born
- September 1996 – I returned to Alberta with my two sons to finish a B.Ed degree
- June 1997 – Moved back to Ontario
- September 1997 – Started substitute teaching
- January 1998 – Secured a permanent teaching contract
- April 2005 – My brother is electrocuted at work one day after his 43rd birthday
- September 2008 – Accepted a lead teacher position for the school board
- September 2009 – Enrolled in Master’s degree at Brock University
- October 2011 – Completed Master’s Degree
- January 2011 – My Father died of a heart attack at the age of 78
- September 2012 – Requested a return to the classroom from lead teacher job
- May 2013 – First grandchild born
- July 2012 – Enrolled in PhD Program at Nipissing University
- October 2013 – Second grandchild born
- October 2014 – Third grandchild born
- September 2017 – Took early retirement from teaching and moved to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

Key Terms

- *Educational sustainability*: the freedom to think *and* act holistically and includes the underlying assumption that everyone and everything is connected
- *Love*: I refer to Peck's (1978) definition of love to explain to my students what I mean by love: "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (p. 85).
- *Spirituality*: I refer to Griffith and Griffith (2002) for a definition of spirituality that describes how my values based relational experiences guide my actions and choices: "a commitment to choose, as the primary context for understanding and acting, one's relatedness with all that is" (p. 15).
- *Holistic education*: Generally, holistic theorists and practitioners do agree that holistic education is a philosophy that endeavours to embrace the whole child—mind, body, spirit, and emotion—and seeks to provide educational opportunities for self-discovery through an integrated and interconnected unfolding of lived experiences (J. Miller, 2006, 2007, 2010; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006).
- *Living Educational Theory*: Living Educational Theory (Living Theory, set in upper case) research refers to a lexical definition of meaning which distinguishes Living Theory research, whereas living-educational-theory (living-theory, set in lower case) refers to the unique embodied and ostensive expressions of meaning in explanations of an individual's educational influence in learning (*Educational Journal of Living Theorists* homepage; see <https://ejolts.net/node/220>).

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” ~ Aristotle

What Is the Background of My Study?

While completing graduate studies, I experienced the merits of a holistic approach to learning. More specifically, I discovered that love played a significant role in my ability to have a meaningful learning experience. These experiences and ideas are what has informed my understanding of educational sustainability and are the impetus for the question that frames my research: “How has love influenced me as a learner, researcher, and teacher?”

In 2012 when I completed a Master of Education degree (M.Ed.), I discovered I was a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989). For 20 years I have been reading and attending conferences and workshops, all in an attempt to improve my practice and meet the needs of the learners in my care; however, my efforts were tainted by my mechanistic education and my extensive teacher preparation to be an ontological reductionist (R. Miller, 1991, p. 55). Mann (2008) recounts her struggle with her ingrained cultural approach and the conflicting expectations of academia to develop and defend a single thesis; eventually, she came to understand that:

Euro-Americans cannot see two of anything without immediately assuming that one of them must be the deadly enemy of the other. Only one can be legitimate for them; the other is flawed, an imposter that must be rooted out. This “ONE-thinking,” as I call it is a direct reflection of the Manicheanism rampant in European and Euro-derived monotheisms. It is in profound conflict with the cooperative binaries of Native American cultures. ... The dissonance between Native and European ways of seeing is only compounded by the very unilinear Puritan sermon format shoved down the throats of American academics as the one, true form of discourse. (p. 42)

I realized I too was guilty of “ONE–thinking” as I tried to discover the absolute formula to frame my pedagogical approach.

Although I attempted to live a holistic life, this concept did not directly transfer to my practice and this was my conundrum. Completing a self-study action research project for a M.Ed. enabled me to unveil embodied knowledge and discover and articulate the values that guide my life (love and joy). I also became acutely aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the many roles I lived. This discovery revealed my living contradictions; that is, the times that my values did not align with my actions. For example, I knew that many of my evaluation practices did not provide the best opportunities for my students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding but I felt obliged to comply to the traditional testing methods embraced by our school norms. I value alternative ways of knowing and representing knowledge but did not trust myself enough to abandon traditional methods. However, the tension created by my living contradictions provided a possible way forward as I began to contemplate how I could directly apply the learning from my research to my daily practice. My M.Ed. experience, particularly the idea of being “loved into learning” (Campbell, 2012, p. 69), was transformative. Krishnamurti (1953) claims that “self-knowledge is the beginning of freedom, and it is only when we know ourselves that we can bring about order and peace” (p. 52). My next challenge, in an attempt to bring about some order and peace in my life, to reduce the living contradictions in my practice and life, is to investigate how I have extended the experience of being loved into learning into my daily life. The question that will guide my research is: “How has love influenced me as a learner, researcher, and teacher?”

What Is the Rationale for My Study?

I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man’s life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change.

They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience. (Buber, as cited in Hodes, 1973, p. 56)

Many theorists and educational practitioners claim that education has not done enough to keep up with the changing demands of our world and the needs of our students (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2000; Gardner, 1993). Some call for reformation—the rearrangement of current policies and practices—and more radical theorists are calling for a revolution—drastic systemic change (Gatto, 2009; Holt, 1989, 2004; Keller & Reigeluth, 2004; Kessler, 2000; J. Miller, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2018; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006; Neill, 1960; Palmer, 2007). The one apparent consensus is that imminent change is necessary to create more meaningful learning opportunities for students and educators, and ultimately, for the betterment of humanity in general. Holt (2004), an advocate of alternative schooling, homeschooling, and unschooling is possibly the most radical critic of the current situation in education and he writes:

Education, with its supporting system of compulsory and competitive schooling, all its carrots and sticks, its grades, diplomas, and credentials, now seems to me perhaps the most authoritarian and dangerous of all social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern and worldwide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and “fans,” driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy, and fear. My concern is not to improve “education” but to do away with it, to end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves. (p. 4)

He later explains that it may take a generation to undo the established education structure and

while I agree with his philosophy of learning and criticisms of the current model, I suspect it is going to take more like two generations to create a monumental shift. I know how difficult and slow it was for me to recognize that reform was not enough and I am considered a radical in many circles. Hopefully, I am wrong.

I also agree with R. Miller (1991) who maintains that a more holistic approach to education is required if we are going to challenge restructuring movements that are “akin to rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*” (p. 3). Miller critiques the current industrial model of public schooling stating a model based on a materialistic worldview, rational, analytical, and scientific ways of knowing that promote wealth, economic greed, consumerism and competition, and divisiveness is not only outdated but is dangerous. He states:

The industrial age has outlived its usefulness and is coming to a close. The reductionist, economic, competitive world view of the past century and a half has brought the Earth’s ecosystem to the brink of destruction and human civilization into moral and spiritual decline. The mounting toll of the Chernobyl and Exxon spills show how callously and stupidly our culture is exploiting the Earth. The growing epidemics of homelessness, drugs and alcoholism, and child abuse are clear indications that colossal impersonal institutions and national competition do not address the deeper needs of human development. (R. Miller, 1991, p. 2)

Miller wrote this 27 years ago and still we continue to rearrange and reform in spite of the fact that terrorism, school shootings and other massacres, economic greed, political unrest, war, nuclear tension, and global warming are on the rise. In my own school the number of students in “crisis” has doubled and the number of suicides and death due to negligence also doubled in my last 10 years of teaching. My school, either by Ministry of Education mandates or administrative

initiative, reacted by installing surveillance cameras, increasing teacher supervision, training teachers in suicide prevention (a half-day workshop), increasing lockdown drills, restricting off-school activities and outings, creating more age- and gender-specific student support groups, restricting public access to the school, adding student “at risk” profiles to staff meetings, and other strategies that did far less for increasing student and staff well-being and more to increase divisiveness, fragmentation, burn-out, anxiety, and fear. Never, not once, did we discuss the purpose of education or examine the real reason for our problems. We continued to react, albeit with the best intentions, and never did we respond. We simply continue to “rearrange the deck chairs” hoping we do not sink with the ship.

R. Miller (1991) maintains that “the holistic worldview is the only paradigm inclusive and flexible and dynamic enough to meet the tremendous ecological and human challenges confronting us in the twenty-first century” (p. 3). Clark (1991) argues that “one’s life is shaped by either an *assumption of separateness* in which the essence of reality is fragmentation, or an *assumption of wholeness* in which the essence of reality is unity” (p. 54). He defends what could be labelled a false dichotomy by explaining that it is possible and often quite probable that within a fundamental nature of wholeness there is dualism but that does not mean we should discount the wholeness and focus on separateness:

Even the earliest human experiences recognized a fundamental dualism implicit in the nature of things—ying/yang, you/me, right/left, light/dark. However, all so-called primitive cultures and all of the world’s great religions have been based on an assumption of wholeness. Although they had an infinite diversity of perspectives, interpretations, and expressions, they shared the insight that underlying all of the explicit dualisms is an implicit fundamental unity. (Clark, 1991, p. 55)

Clark (1991) explains that the traditional notions of separateness embraced by Western civilization is the major cause of many of our problems today stating that “ the consequence of this fragmentation on our thinking and thus our behavior is personal, social, and global competition, conflict, confusion, and exploitation” (p. 55). In my 20 plus years of experience in the public system, I witnessed, first-hand, dedicated, diligent, and compassionate people acting in ways that honour a belief that everything is interconnected; for example, teachers putting their relationships with students before curriculum, teachers making desperate attempts to make their classrooms inviting instead of the confined spaces they were designed to be, administrators, at all levels, bending and sometimes breaking the rules to honour their intuition and be caring and compassionate leaders instead of antiquated policy enforcers, so this makes me believe that, at some level, there is a recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things. However, at the same time I witnessed these very same people, including myself, acting in ways that suggest the opposite is true; even though we intuitively and instinctively know that unity is the underlying foundation of reality we defer to a more pragmatic model that we have been well trained to subscribe to and immersed in our whole lives. I concur with Clark (1991) when he suggests that “we aren’t strong on trusting our intuition anyway, and, since rational logic says that ‘what you see is what there is’, we tend to dismiss these intuitive feelings as relics of a simpler era dominated by superstition and myth” (p. 56).

My instincts and intuitions are validated by different holistic theorists. I reference many theorists to show the complexity and diversity of inquiries into holistic education and the variety of theorists who have influenced my thinking and practice and hope to avoid Bassey’s (1992) criticisms of excessive referencing for “sandbagging, genuflecting and kingmaking” (pp. 10-11). The collective voice of theorists who advocate for education that embraces the whole child—

including, mind, body, spirit, and emotion—combined with my experiences, influenced my shift from the reformation to the revolution camp. After two decades in the classroom, and an extensive amount of energy and effort to participate in the reform movement, I conclude that reform is not enough—it is too slow and too narrow, reform does not address our underlying assumptions and as such reform continues to perpetuate the pragmatic model and is actually a part of the problem.

In his edited book, *Authentic Dissertation*, Four Arrows (2008) critiques formal education and focuses on the problems within higher education stating:

a number of us believe that in many ways, directly or indirectly, the “academy” may be partially responsible for our collective inability to significantly mitigate warfare, global warming, social and ecological injustices, domestic violence, loss of habit, racism, economic despair, loss of the commons etc. (p. 1)

Similar to the authors featured in Four Arrows’s edited text, I believe that we need to embrace a more holistic approach to learning, addressing the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and physical needs of learners and learning. I agree with Holt (1989) that living is learning: “It is impossible to be alive and conscious (and some would say unconscious) without constantly learning things” (p. 157). If we are learning all the time, and I believe we are, then we need to acknowledge and embrace learning in all forms and ways. There are many ways to live and so many ways to learn. As I try to live a meaningful life, I tend to the needs of my body, mind, spirit, and emotions and I thrive in situations where this is also recognized in formal learning. Focusing on the whole learner will provide an opportunity to understand unique values, create time and space for reflection, and encourage action, which may provide some effective solutions to the problems that plague our world today, specifically, challenges in formal education at all

levels. Some examples of challenges I encountered or witnessed most recently in my teaching career include mandatory testing; oversized classrooms; increase in number of students with anxiety and depression; excessive paperwork; increase in supervision, on-calls, and reporting; increase in mandated training and professional development; reduced budgets; lack of teacher and/or student input for new policies and procedures; and reduced course choices and extracurricular activities.

During final presentations in a graduate course, I listened to several of my peers share personal stories of their experiences in/with public schooling. There were stories of verbal, physical, and emotional abuse, some from years ago and some as recent as the year before. I have heard these stories most of my life, but never so many at one time. I felt disgust and shame for being associated with what counts as education in Ontario today. This was my abrupt awakening—the moment I realized that not enough has changed in the last 20 years and it is most likely not going to change unless something radical happens. The result of my existential angst was a decision to put my energy and efforts into something I could change, myself. Following the advice of Gandhi, it was time to put my convictions into action:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. (As cited in Dhiman, 2015)

I entered my classroom in September 2012 with a renewed attitude and authentic conviction. This study is the story of the journey that unfolded thereafter.

What Are the Research Questions That I Have Attempted to Answer?

The main research question is:

1. How has love influenced me as a teacher, learner, and researcher?

The secondary questions are:

2. What is love and specifically how does it / should it unfold in the classroom?
3. What values are incorporated within my loving practice?
4. When am I able to live (teach, learn, and research) with these values?
5. When am I unable to live (teach, learn, and research) with these values?
6. What are the other explanatory principles that guide my practice?

What Did I Aim to Do in My Study?

I investigated my learning, teaching, and researching from the last 6 years, using a narrative inquiry methodology. I examined my field notes, journals, poetry, paintings, and reflections, and re-storied my lived experiences of moving from the parts to the whole. In doing so, I make explicit the instances of meaning making, enhanced understanding, healing, mending, and struggling I experienced as I seek to reveal the “thread of continuity” (Bateson, 2004, p. 2) in the transformative moments of my life and practice which were inspired by living my value of love more fully.

What Do I Claim to Have Done in My Study?

- I have created an account of how I introduced love into the classroom and explored my perception of the effects on the learning environment and the learners in my care and myself.
- I have investigated and unveiled my perception of the limitations within compulsory schooling for living more fully according to my values.
- I have identified hope as a core value in my learning journey and my understanding of educational sustainability.
- I have suggested the significance for creating time for reflection and community for all learners (students and teachers) for authentic learning to occur.

What Have I Deliberately not Done in This Study?

I have not generated a detailed or comprehensive argument for holistic education or created a defense for a major shift in education as to do so would make my study unmanageable. In addition, I believe there already exists an extensive amount of literature on the topic of holistic education and the need for a major shift in what counts as education. I begin from an assumption that we need to improve educational opportunities and focus on how I tried to do this. I also do not attempt to answer questions about the purpose of education but do include my thoughts and the literature that supports education for individual and collective development. As such, I have not asked and answered questions: Do my students or the parents/guardians of my students want me to love them? This might make an interesting study but is beyond the scope of this investigation.

How Have I Integrated the Review of Literature in My Study?

My study will cover several major concepts in a variety of disciplines so my literature review will be incorporated into my dissertation throughout where appropriate (Bruce, 1994, p. 144).

What Original Contribution Do I Believe I Have Made to the Body of Scholarly Knowledge?

I have provided an original account of a unique context that adds to the literature on teaching and learning. The inquiry is unique because I have made a dedicated effort to understand why I do what I do in my practice as an educator in a rural high school setting and how it influences my practice and students. In addition, I have provided a story that other educators might recognize as part of their own story which could inspire questions, ideas, research, and reflection for others. Lastly, I have demonstrated the process of using narrative inquiry as a phenomenon and a method for unveiling tacit knowledge and practicing with

ontological awareness which contributes to the literature on thinking, writing and living narratively.

What Is the Structure of My Dissertation? What Is the Rationale for This Structure?

Initially, my intention was to structure my dissertation in a traditional way (introduction, theoretical framework, research design, literature review, research results, and conclusion) and I worked within this structure for several months. I made steady progress and I continued to work diligently determined to complete the process; however, my progress was extremely slow. My words seemed to lack energy and did not flow from me or on the page; something was amiss and I could not quite identify the culprit. Painstakingly, I continued on in this manner until one day while conversing with a friend and relating my struggle I realized I experienced almost the exact same thing at the same point (about half-way through) while writing up my Master's Research Project (MRP). It was time to take a step back.

Thoughts, questions, emotions, ideas, insights, and contradictions flooded my mind and I felt like I was being pulled in different directions at the same time. I realized then that the process of writing the dissertation was going to be just as messy as living the dissertation which is exactly what I had been doing for the last several decades. How could I possibly take a complex and dynamic life and make it fit neatly into sections without losing something of vital importance? The irony did not escape me and the answer is I cannot. As a result, I have decided to maintain what I have written and to add interludes (which I will call "Or So It Seemed" followed by a number) where appropriate in my dissertation. The interludes are written in *italicized blue font*, separating them from the original text and indicating that I have re-examined the previous section from a different perspective—a more holistic perspective that takes into account my whole being including mind, body, spirit, and emotion. In essence, doing so enabled me be faithful to my values and my evolving worldview which allowed me to be more authentic

and adds to the strength and trustworthiness of this dissertation. My life was, and still is, full of contradictions, uncertainty, questions, different paths, and different directions so to create an authentic dissertation, I could not rearrange the narratives into a neat, structured bundle depicting something they were not. My narratives were the journey and I offer them here in their unpolished, raw, but authentic form as they unfolded in the research journey.

Chapter 2: What Methodological Approach Did I Use?

Journey to Storying

I have lived a storied life since as far back as I can recall. The stories told to me and the stories I share inform my values and actions more so than relying on empirical data. However, it is only in the last few years that I have come to understand the importance of story in my life as I construct meaning about the universe and try to make sense of the world (Bruner, 2004).

Recognizing the significance of story and the potential of story to unveil connections as I tell and re-tell my life story which includes “a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present” (Bateson, 1983 p. 30), I am drawn to using a narrative inquiry methodology to unveil the vulnerable me (my stories of shame, fear, guilt, disconnection, and unworthiness, pleasure, joy, pride, courage, trust, and love) and to let myself be seen (Brown, 2010).

At the age of 5, I immigrated with my family to Canada from Scotland. We arrived in 1965, in the middle of August, with suitcases full of woolen blankets prepared to embrace the challenges of Canadian winters so we could have, in the words of my parents, a better lifestyle. As I revisit this story, I realize how profound an impact it has had on my life as I recognize my struggle for identity and my lifelong search for a sense of belonging, connectedness, and worthiness. At the age of 15, feeling disconnected from both my country of birth and the country I now lived in, I accused my parents of being the source of my existential angst. I told them they had no right to bring us to Canada for a so-called better life because they did not bring their whole selves—they left their hearts in Scotland—and the endless stories they lulled us with taught us to do the same. This story is the foundation of many stories that come after but have never been revisited and need to be examined now as I realize that identifying and articulating

what makes me vulnerable also makes me authentic and able to flourish—to live wholeheartedly and to love (Brown, 2010).

The Practical Research Context

One of the many stories influenced by my story of coming to Canada is the story of why I became a teacher and how I wanted to find *the* way to make things better for students. One of the key findings in my Master's Research Project (MRP) was my ability to reveal, clarify, and explicate my embodied expression of being “loved into learning” (Campbell, 2012, p. 69). Jacqueline Delong, one of my course instructors in the Master's program and who eventually became my supervisor, stood in front of the entire class and told us she loved us. Delong's actions aligned with her values and this inspired me to believe in myself, to realize that I had something significant to contribute and that I could live more fully according to my values. In addition, I felt trusted and respected which enabled me to continue my research with more confidence and authenticity. Recognizing that I had something of value to contribute enabled me to read the theories of others with a more critical lens which enhanced my learning journey. I refer to this process as loved into learning.

This heightened awareness also enabled me, for the first time in my teaching career, to recognize and understand the connection between my ontological values and my teaching practice. My theoretical understandings and my actions are informed by the insights I draw from disciplines of study as well as my lived stories and the living and telling of those stories and, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit, when I “understand the world around [me] narratively ... then it makes sense to study the world narratively” (p. 17). This study is a plethora of stories comprising the story of my learning journey as I continue to develop my living-educational-theory based on Whitehead's (1989) idea of Living Educational Theory as a theoretical

framework and methodology for the construction of my own theory. Huxtable and Whitehead (2008) describe this as “a form of self-study research in which practitioners research questions that are important to them to generate their values based explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others, and the learning of social formations” (p. 1).

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

I chose a narrative methodology within the qualitative research paradigm. Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures both personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and considers the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is a means to generate, gather and analyse my stories in a systematic way may challenges traditional views of knowledge and truth creation, generation, and representation. I am drawn to using this methodology because the underlying principle of a qualitative paradigm aligns more closely with my holistic worldview and my beliefs that we make subjective meaning of our experiences in the objective world which are contextually situated historically, socially, and culturally. This became more evident to me as I recall the story of coming to Canada and realized the profound impact this experience had on my desire to challenge the status-quo in my practice. A qualitative approach recognizes the dynamics of humans and their interactions relying heavily on interpretive approaches drawn from tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958) as valuable ways of knowing and researching.

Embracing tacit knowledge is a key principle in holistic education and in my worldview. My approach to holistic education means embracing the whole child—mind, body, spirit, and emotion, and providing educational opportunities for self-discovery through an integrated and interconnected unfolding of lived experiences that draw on sensory and conceptual knowledge (J. Miller, 2007, 2010; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006). In addition, I embrace the importance of

learning beyond disciplines; connectedness, including interdependencies; non-hierarchical relationships; reverence and awe for all of life, including nature; relevant and meaningful learning that enables the sacredness of the individual to unfold providing opportunities for enlightenment and ultimately transformative experiences; both personal and collective responsibility; and a strong sense of community from the classroom to the global (Forbes, 1996, 2003; J. Miller, 1991; Nielsen, 2001).

The concept of narrative has evolved into an umbrella term for story and storied experiences (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative is an ideal methodology for communicating the interpretative approaches for meaning making embedded in tacit knowing and holistic learning.

The Unique Journey Is the Destination

“When you are preparing for a journey, you own the journey. Once you’ve started the journey, the journey owns you” (Shope, 2006, p. 165).

I use narrative inquiry so that I can draw insights from a variety of methods without having to restrict my research to one specific method; thus, creating an opportunity for the research to drive the inquiry instead of the methodology directing the study. In other words, I give myself permission to be “methodologically inventive” (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 166). A narrative inquiry methodology holds a space for the unfolding of the unique experience of the researcher and allows the researcher to draw insights from a variety of theoretical perspectives and methods. My experiences are examined using prose, art, dialogue, and poetry, with a focus on identifying themes, patterns, contradictions, and questions that unveil both embodied knowledge and the more elusive, often difficult to measure, energy flowing values which constitute the explanatory principles that inform my practice (Whitehead, 1989, 2008, 2009, 2011). Leavy (2009) writing specifically about how poetry can generate a unique perspective and

new knowledge states, “poetry as a research strategy challenges the fact-fiction dichotomy and offers a form for the evocative presentation of data” (p. 63). I challenge the traditional forms of research and knowing by making use of a variety and combination of methods in the generation of my stories.

I intentionally select narrative inquiry, instead of autobiographical inquiry or autoethnography as a methodology as my narrative includes autobiography as well as autoethnographic narratives. I gather a variety of narratives in a variety of forms, including visual, as well as generate narratives in an attempt to focus on the meanings I gather from my story and the story of others. Drawing from Josselson (2006), I aim to provide “insight that befits the complexity of human lives” as I attend to “the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon” (as cited in Trahar, 2009, p. 1). As such, my narratives may include stories from the past (autobiography) and stories that seek to understand personal experience within my cultural experience (autoethnography). Making use of a narrative inquiry enables me to draw on a variety of narratives holding a space for the story to emerge. I try to be open to the narrative process as well and while I share my interpretations and examine how my story is told I aim to do so with “sufficient ambiguity and humility to allow for multiple interpretations and reader response” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 127). I focus on the journey (reflecting learning as living) as well as the story as “the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain, stressing the journey over the destination, and thus eclipses the scientific illusion of control and mastery” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 744-745).

An important distinction I want to emphasize here is that while other methodologies offer similar opportunities to research my practice and my life, few of them recognize that “creating a unique way through [my] research may be as important as [my] self-chosen research

focus” (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p.166). Choosing a narrative methodology allows me to combine various methods (for example: action research, autobiography, autoethnography, and critical research narrative) as needed, thus enabling me to allow the way to conduct my research to emerge in the storying. This approach aligns with my view of reality that everything is interconnected and as I story from a sense and perspective of interconnectedness I cannot limit myself to one way of storying. A more diverse approach contributes to my ability to generate stories that are authentic and trustworthy. Narrative inquiry does not privilege one method but holds open the space for multiple ways (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). This approach aligns with my holistic worldview that everything and everyone is connected and we must inquire holistically (mind, body, spirit, and emotion) to unveil connections and honour different ways of knowing, researching, and representing that challenge the traditional discourse about what counts as education and learning.

Imagining Possibilities and Creating Knowledge

Schön (1995) calls for a new epistemology that highlights the importance of recognizing an epistemology of practice and suggests we view “practice as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but for the generation of knowledge” (p. 5). In so doing, we honour the embodied knowledge of practitioners and provide research opportunities to unveil and make public this valuable and often tacit knowledge that might otherwise remain elusive. The stories of my experiences reveal in “recognitions, judgements, and skills, a pattern of tacit knowing-in-action” that can contribute to the generation of knowledge (Schön, 1995, p. 5).

As a conscientious teacher, I was always aware that my practice could be improved so I sought constant feedback from my students as I cared *for* them and I listened to them wholeheartedly (Noddings, 2005). Freire (1998) claims, “Whenever there is life, there is

unfinishedness” (p. 52) and my unfinished self knows that things can be different and be better and that change is inevitable for growth. My human condition denotes a certain conditioned state, as Freire explains:

I know that the material, social, political, cultural, and ideological conditions in which we find ourselves almost always generate divisions that make difficult the construction of our ideals of change and transformation, I know also that the obstacles are not eternal. (1998, p. 100)

My awareness of my unfinishedness and my understanding of the possibility for change compelled me to seek the opinion of my students. I kept a record of their feedback in my personal journals, reflected (in various forms) on their feedback, revised my actions, and then began the cycle again. Reflecting on this cycle and the results and sharing these accounts with my students and critical peers enabled me to see other possibilities for my interpretation of events and ideally different imaginings for how the story could be told. This, as Bruner (2004) suggests, as he references the importance of living an examined life, is how we can “contribute something new to the great ideal” (p. 709).

For the purpose of this dissertation, I began by revisiting the data I had collected over the last 6 years (journals, student and peer feedback, poetry and art). When I was collecting data from my students and peers, I was doing so in an attempt to improve my practice. When I reflected on my practice in the form of journaling, poetry or art, I was also doing so in an attempt to improve my practice. It was obvious to the people I encountered that I was genuine about the feedback I sought and as a result, both students and peers began to offer feedback without being requested to do so. Eventually, feedback, whether solicited or unsolicited became a daily ritual for me. Initially, I would seek feedback by asking my students to complete an exit card or a

praise, question, polish (PQP) sticky. An exit card is simply a 4X3 blank card and students are invited to complete one just prior to the end of class. I kept a pile of these cards in the back of the room for use at any time. Students could write and/or ask anything they wanted to on the cards and could sign their name or leave them blank. Obviously if they filled one out on a day when no one else did, it might be possible for me to identify the student. Sometimes I would ask students to fill them out and I would provide prompts or specific questions in the event they did not know what to write or if I was seeking feedback on something specific. For example, I might ask if we need to make any revisions to our classroom guideline (i.e. trust and respect yourself and you will flourish). I would ask if they feel our classroom is a safe place to take risks, to voice their opinion, to be creative? Several times I asked, what can I do to make you feel more comfortable in class?

At regular intervals, every week in the beginning and every 2 or 3 weeks after the first month of a course, I would ask students to complete a PQP sticky. The stickies would be collected by a student and placed in a folder with the class and date recorded on the cover. I would rearrange the stickies according to themes and respond to their questions as well as share the results of the praise and polish in the next class. In general, the feedback was usually very positive. Students enjoyed the freedom to explore topics of interest to them and claimed they felt they had a voice and for many, it was the first time in their schooling journey that they felt their voice was valued and honoured. For example, after an exercise involving the question “Who am I?” one student wrote on a PQP sticky that he had never been asked this question before and claimed “for the first time in my life, I feel like I matter, that somebody cares about me and I might actually learn something useful in this course. I feel a little ashamed that I don’t know this answer but also excited that I will have a chance to investigate me.” (Personal journal, September

9, 2015). After reviewing the feedback from my students and peers for the purpose of this dissertation, I experienced an ontological shift. In an attempt to create a narrative account that could be shared I wrote the following reflection in my journal:

For over 3 months I have been examining, organizing, reviewing, and responding to the data I have collected in the last 6 years. I read my personal journals from the last 6 years and I calculated the number of students I have been directly responsible for (over 800) and counted the number of times I sought feedback from my students (2,676). I revisited students' feedback and then organized and labelled all of the data by four main categories (positive, negative, suggestions for improvement, questions). Next, I organized the categories into sub-categories (environment, activities, group dynamics, and teacher). Lastly, I labelled each comment with a theme (freedom, growth, connection, humanity, fear, love, discomfort, democratic, authentic, trust, vulnerability, compassion, empathy, time, reflection, respect, calm, creativity, joy, flow, understanding, knowledge, awareness, confusion, structure, power, honesty, interdependence, community, voice, and spirituality). And that's when I had my eureka moment. My papers covered the entire floor of my living room, some spilling out into the hall and library, covered with different coloured sticky notes and the entire scene crowned with the oversized chart paper with columns and tally marks. And I sat there, mesmerized by the scene before me. Feeling overwhelmed by words and numbers.

Why can't I trust myself and accept that the story I have to tell is far more valuable than the story the numbers tell. The numbers are simply numbers and worse as they often don't reveal anything about nuances or subtleties and could actually be misleading. I received valuable feedback from my students and I want to honour their

honesty and trust. They gave me feedback because I asked for it and as I responded with my revised actions on their feedback, we built a trusting relationship. I journaled about their feedback and these journals will inform my narratives as I write them and my decisions about what stories to tell and what stories not to tell.

Just when I thought I was able to trust myself more fully, I realize I have a long way to go. I am a work in progress and this is an ongoing process. We had some amazing experiences in the classroom, why? Did I trust myself more there? Is it this dissertation that is making me regress? Ah, yes! Write your story, I say to myself but the words are stuck in my throat. (Personal journal, December 2017)

The Story Behind and on Top of the Painting

Whenever I feel frustrated by my inability to capture my feelings with words I turn to other methods to help me get on the inside of my feelings and thoughts. Sometimes I journal or meditate, including walking meditation, and sometimes I paint. In this particular moment of frustration, I turned to my journal, but instead of a pen, I reached for my paints.

I turned the page of the journal and observed the stark white page before me; tabula rasa was the first thought that entered my mind. The stark blank white page staring back at me made me feel vulnerable as my naked mind stared back. I picked up a calming colour and quickly covered the starkness and then I picked up my black acrylic pen and painted the number 2676. Now I had a simple visual for what I was feeling: false dichotomies, dualism, fragmentation, a juxtaposition of dark on light, simple lines/complex details. Regardless of how I viewed the image before me, it remained a meaning-less number. I considered the number and the idea that it was supposed to represent the words, thoughts, insights, revelations, questions, concerns, and revelations of the students in my care. I became physically, emotionally, and psychologically

uncomfortable. I shifted in my seat, acutely aware of the heavy, dull feeling moving from my throat to the pit of my stomach. Consumed by thoughts of betrayal and deceit, I picked up the smallest brush I had and dipped it in the brightest colour I could find. With the utmost care and sensitivity I could muster at the moment, I gently brought the brush down on top of the thick black line allowing the tip of the brush to barely touch the surface of the paper leaving behind a tiny, bright, coloured dot. There, I said to myself, is Ophelia's story. I cleaned the brush and sought out another bright colour and again I placed a tiny, colourful dot on the paper; and there is Jack's story. These are fictitious names I have assigned to protect the identity of my students. I repeated this eight hundred times representing the eight hundred learners in my care in the last 6 years (see Figure 1). Each time the brush made contact with the paper, I recalled the name or story or face of one of the learners in my care. I re/membered our encounters. I began to get on the inside of my story, to approach the space in-between, where a different perspective resides and new insights await. I was becoming an a/r/tographer as I embodied this lived experience between my text and my images and researched aesthetically (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004).

My students and I were not separate, disconnected fragments and neither were our encounters. How vain and ignorant of me to think that I could add up, sort, label and analyse their words and ideas. Our time together was far more complex and dynamic. I turned the page and began to paint vibrant swirls, spirals, and circles. The more I painted, the messier the painting became, and finally, the dull ache in the pit of my stomach was starting to recede (see Figure 2).

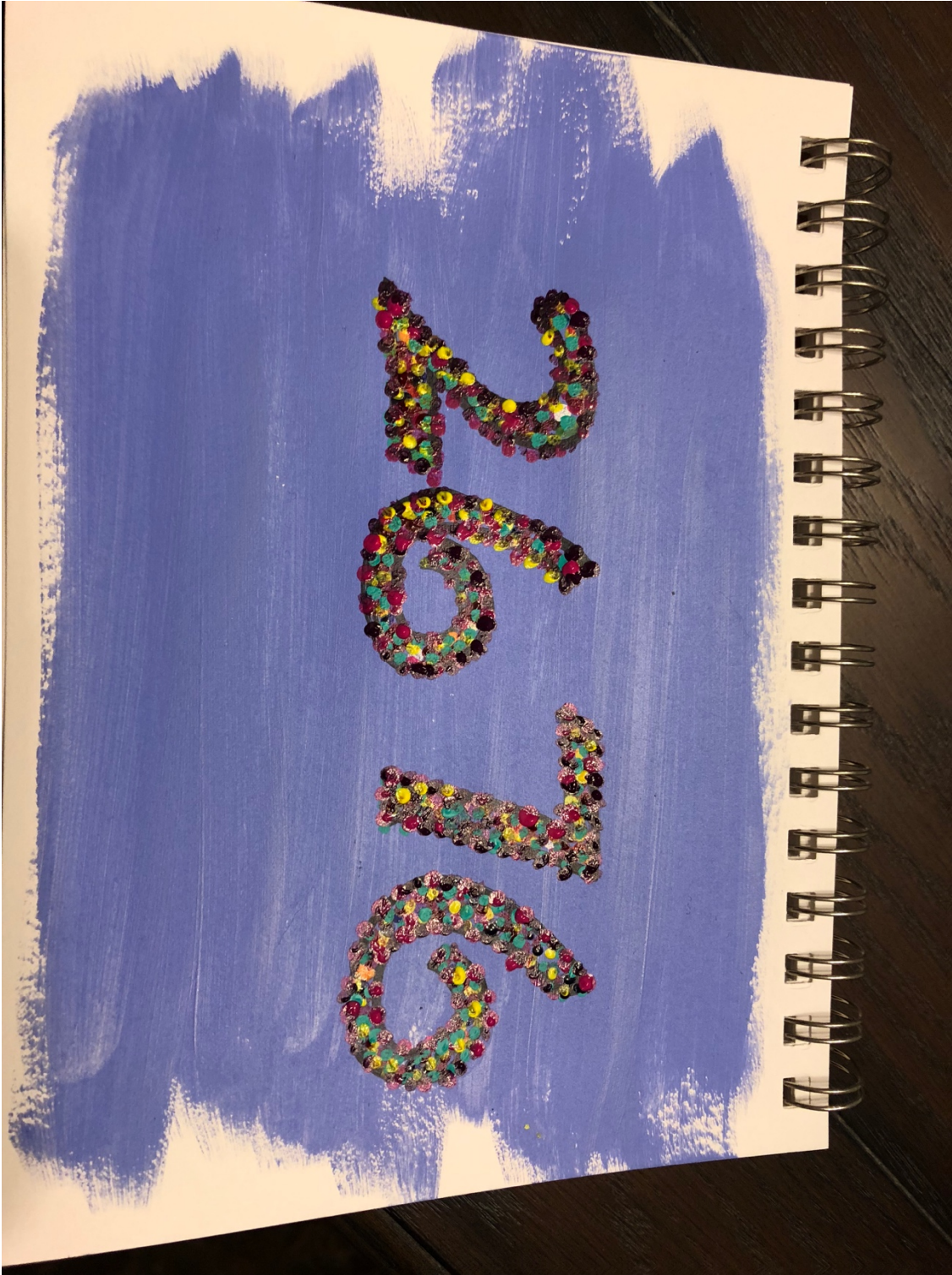


Figure 1. Tattooed part 1.



Figure 2. Tattooed part 2.

Learning, real learning, like living is messy. It is not easily compartmentalized and analysed. The encounters in my classroom were much more like the messy swirls than the neat numbers. I sat looking at the two images before me and then I picked up the messy swirls, which was still wet, and placed it on top of the number painting and pressed down as hard as I could and rubbed the back of the page back and forth several times and then I carefully peeled it away to see what would be revealed (see Figure 3). I then realized that the sick, dull, ache that threatened to consume me earlier was beginning to dissipate. This latest painting was a much more accurate depiction of the lively, dynamic, and unstructured encounters I had with my students and I felt physically better. This is the story I want to tell.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude One

Months have passed since I painted Tattooed part 2 and it is only now after looking back at my paintings and my reflections that I have a better understanding of what unfolded in that process. I was so uncomfortable with examining the data I had collected and sorting and labelling it and I could not completely understand why. Painting the spirals and pressing them on top of the number enabled me to release something and a more relaxed state emerged. Reflecting on my artistic interpretations now has enabled me to glean new insights and different perspectives. Leavy (2009) refers to what Hunter et al. (2002) call the “incubation phase” during the vital period of “intellectual chaos” and explains the use of artistic inquiry as a way to create “multiple interpretive moments...and heightened idea generation.” Leavy writes:

This strategy deepened the “incubation phase,” allowed relationships between data to emerge that may otherwise remain hidden, and weaved interpretation throughout the research design in a systemic and holistic manner that could later be explained and reflected on. (p. 232)

I now recognize that using and creating images provided a way for me to navigate through the intellectual chaos and explore embodied knowledge and make new meaning in the interpretive phase. What emerged in that process was that I made a conscious decision not to include specific data about my students even though I had their written consent to do so but I did not understand until now why I made that decision. I knew I wanted to honour the trusting relationship I had and still want to have with my students and now I recognize that my ethical duty to do so requires I do not share specific or detailed information because it is possible, and more likely probable, that their decision to provide consent may not accurately reflect their wishes and interests (a requirement of TCPS 2) even if they think it does. It is possible that they were simply complying with my request to please me. Moreover, I doubt that they are free to make an informed decision while entrenched in compulsory schooling that requires compliance and obedience. My students trust me to love them and this means that I must protect them.

The Love Story

I am an experienced classroom teacher and one of the explanatory principles (Whitehead, 1989, 2008, 2011) of my teaching practice is that I love my students. I refer to Peck's (1978) definition of love to explain to my students what I mean by love: "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (p. 85). This is a living standard of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) that I am willing to be held accountable to, and I wanted to know when I could act in accordance with my standard and when and in what circumstances and situations I was not able to do so.



Figure 3. Tattooed part 3.

Creating and sharing my accounts of how I loved my students into learning, and how I tell these stories is the main focus of this dissertation and may reveal something that resonates with others who have similar concerns and experiences. Johnson (2008) claims future research in the field by teachers who teach from the heart is needed so that a better understanding of what practices teachers employ and who they are as educational practitioners that enables them to create loving bonds with their students can be made public (p. 138). Dennis (2012) completed a study titled “How Teachers Show Love in the Classroom” and concludes that more research needs to be done on the topic of pedagogical love in both middle and high schools as her study was restricted to one elementary school. Dennis (2012) maintains that few educational theorists have examined ways in which teachers love their students in the classroom setting (p. 71) which is representative of my limited findings on love in the secondary classroom. I agree with Plotkin (2008) who writes, “What we need now are new stories to share with each other, new tales to live into the world, which is to say, stories to make real by living our own versions of them” (p. 20). As action research, self-study, and narrative inquiry are becoming more accepted as valuable research methodologies, many educators and/or researchers are making use of these methodologies to share their stories. However, there is still a very limited amount of research from a first person perspective on the topic of love in teaching at the secondary school level. To uncover my story of how love has influenced me, I made use of as many tools as I could to get beneath the surface and the obvious to explore with an open mind and an open heart.

I concur with Aoki (1994), that “whenever I write a story, I not only produce a narrative but I’m reproducing myself. The very narrating acts upon me and I am changing” (p. 10). The act of storying and re-storying as I compose and re-compose my life enables me to attend to what I

tell, how I tell it, and equally important, what I do not tell, and what I do not show in both “stories of victory and ruin” (MacLure, 1996, p. 283).

I have storied my experiences orally, textually, and visually with the desire to “gain insights into, the texture, depth, and intricacy of [my] lived experiences” (Pillay, Naicker, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016). I examine these recorded experiences referred to by Clandinin (2013) as “stories to live by” to generate new stories by revealing the unsaid and undiscovered truths that lay just beneath the surface in an attempt “to understand how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively” (p. 146). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) claim these unexamined stories and the stories yet to emerge, stories to live by, are “shaped by such matters as secret teacher stories, sacred stories of schooling, and teachers’ cover stories” (p. 4). This dissertation is the narrative of my journey of examining my secret and sacred stories so that I can unveil my cover story. As Freeman (2007) states, narrative inquiry “practices fidelity not to that which can be objectified and measured but to the whole person, the human life, in all of its ambiguous, messy, beautiful detail” (p. 134). My cover story is not a smooth, coherent, sequential, fluid account but a more realistic portrayal of a bumpy, confusing, contradictory, mysterious, paradoxical journey.

Methods

To clearly communicate my storied experience, I made use of a variety of methods as needed in the unfolding of my stories (for example, journals, video, critical feedback, paintings, fiction, and narrative) to make my explanation explicit, comprehensible, authentic, and truthful (Habermas, 1976, pp. 2-3). I concur with Dadds and Hart (2001) that “no methodology is, or should, cast in stone, if we accept that professional intention should be informing research processes, not pre-set ideas about methods of techniques” (p. 169). My desire to improve and

enhance my understanding of my practice is what drives my research not a commitment to a specific method of research.

I gathered and examined the data by creating a “living floor” similar to the “living wall” I created for my MRP (Campbell, 2012), which included the creation of a wall size visual of pieces of data (journals, student work, field notes, Skype call transcripts, conversations). Due to a lack of wall space, I gathered and arranged my data on the floor. Next, I added quotes I had gathered from the literature and began looking for connections, contradictions, patterns, themes, and identifying underlying and guiding questions. I responded to what I saw in the form that was most suitable (for example: journaling, auto-biography, poetry, art) and shared my responses with my critical friends (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) also known as response communities (Clandinin, 2013) seeking critical feedback as I “become autobiographically conscious of [my] own reactions to [my] work” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46). The feedback I received and my own reflecting on my stories and the literature I immersed myself in (books and articles) is what prompted me to write the second layer of my dissertation, which I have titled *Or So It Seemed*. As Kim (2016) explained, “a layered account is a juxtaposition between the authors experience and relevant literature” (p. 209). This is my attempt to be as authentic as possible; to look back at my words, thoughts, claims, and insights and ask myself is this what you really think? Is this what really happened? Does this accurately describe the whole me or just a part of me? What, if anything lays beneath the surface of this story?

I have been trying to teach and live more authentically, to demonstrate consistency between my values and actions (Kerber, Klamfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenble, 2007). When my actions do not align with my worldview, my values, and/or my professional intention, I experience tension. This tension, according to Whitehead (1989), is a living contradiction, “holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them” and recognizing, articulating,

and identifying these discrepancies “moves us to imagine alternative ways of improving our situation” (p. 4). Within this space of dissonance there is potential for growth. I examined and identified obstacles and challenges, and explicitly named and shared what I have done and what I plan to do in the name of love. My inquiry includes examining my data and my narratives for recurring themes, key words and concepts, unanswered questions, paradoxes, tensions, and new questions. Reviewing my data and my stories with these ideas in mind allows me to explore where “story lines interweave and interconnect,” and identify the explicit and not so explicit “continuities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131).

Multiplicity (Lenses and Dimensions)

As I researched from the process advanced by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I story from “a multi-dimensional exploration of experience involving temporality (past, present, and future), interaction, (personal and social), and location (place)” (p. 576). Clandinin and Huber (2010) advocate researching and storying from this perspective to enhance our understanding of who we are in our unique and complex contexts as individuals interacting with others:

Through attending to the commonplaces, narrative inquirers are able to study the complexity of the relational composition of people’s lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry and, as well, to imagine the future possibilities of these lives. (p. 3)

Within this study, I examined my personal experiences as a high school teacher, researcher and learner introducing love into my practice. I considered my experiences from multiple lenses looking inward, outward, forward and backward, known as four directions, an approach that Clandinin and Connelly (2004) explain as:

methods of the study of personal experience are simultaneously focused in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. By *inward* we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, ascetic reactions, moral dispositions, and so on. By *outward* we mean

existential conditions, that is, the environment or what E. M. Bruner (1986) calls reality. By *backward* and *forward* we are referring to temporality, past, present, and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. (p. 417)

Reflecting on my past, present, and future is one dimension within this framework that I storied from as I looked inward to identify and reveal the personal feelings, emotions, values, and ethics that encouraged and prevented me from loving my students while simultaneously looking outward to consider the influence, ideas, assumptions, and beliefs of others—the social aspects that support and/or hinder my actions and decisions. I examined the past and present stories that informed the better future I imagined for the learners in my care. This is a future where I envisioned them flourishing—living according to their own values that promote a better future for all—as we challenged the restrictions imposed by the limitations of the physical space and place that inform the context and metaphysical parameters—the third dimension.

Leggo and Sameshima (2014) claim “we need spaces for many kinds of research, including research that focuses on fictional, narrative, autobiographical, artful, and creative knowing” (p. 539) so that we can uncover “beginnings long lost and conclusions mysteriously hidden” to contribute to educational transformation” (p. 542). Embracing alternative ways of knowing, researching, and representing through multiple lenses creates an opportunity to reveal some of the nuances and mysteries of my practice and specifically, how love has influenced me (positively and/or negatively) as a researcher, teacher, and learner.

Methodological Issues

A narrative inquiry is storied experience, but for every story that is told, there are many that have not been shared. This also applies to my research as I select and generate stories that I believe are meaningful, but I do so in a self-conscious way that acknowledges that “truth and

meaning are not stable in an empirical sense” (Leggo & Sameshima, 2014, p. 540). Kilbourne (1999) advocates for narrative writing that reveals nuances of the author’s epistemological stance and methodological choices as a writer trying to create an engaging story thus acknowledging the subjectivity and motivation of the writer. Although I hope I produced something that adds value, I am only representing my limited perspective—a single account that is not intended to provide a universal truth or even a specific answer. My unfinished, imperfect, ongoing, subjective story is an opportunity to unveil and offer a unique perspective to both me and my reader. Richardson (1997) explains the limitations and value:

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meaning allegorically extending to others, seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, revisioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing “the place for the first time.” (p. 6)

As I identify and reveal my cover story and make it public, I provide an opportunity for others to identify with my struggles and insights and perhaps shed some light on their own journey that may enable or assist them in moving forward. My desire to produce an authentic story is inspired by the obligation I feel to offer my truth in a genuine way that might help others identify and live more fully according to their truths.

Trustworthiness

Issues of validation (quality, accuracy, and value) in qualitative research are an ongoing and complicated discussion. Many qualitative researchers are calling for specific criteria unique to the interpretive approach and even though there is still disagreement and a lack of consensus on exact criteria, the need for credibility and trustworthiness is embraced by many (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The criteria for determining the credibility and trustworthiness of a text varies (as it should) according to techniques used by the researcher (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Iannacci (2007) advocating for “critical narrative research (CNR)” claims “no single set of criteria can be used to cultivate or assess validity in narrative inquiry” (p. 73) and promotes the combination of criteria and methods to generate CNR based on internal validity which is derived from field duration, reflexivity, replication, description, and disconfirming evidence. Attending to Iannacci’s concepts of CNR allowed me to research from a holistic paradigm and explicitly address and critique the dominant discourse within education. My personal experiences with prevailing structures (policy and processes), power imbalance, and overall inequities and injustices have created unattended tensions in my practice. Throughout much of my teaching and learning career, I have been torn between the obligation to comply and the desire to attend to my instincts and intuition. For example, I have administered tests and assignments even though I knew they were not an adequate indicator of what my students learned but I was forced to follow Ministry of Education course expectations. In situations where I was teaching the same course as another teacher, we were required, by school policy, to generate and use the same exam for our students. I remember thinking that this was a ludicrous policy as it was impossible that the same conversations and questions would have unfolded in two different classrooms with different students and different teachers. As the junior teacher, I did not challenge the policy and often deferred to the questions suggested by the senior teacher or department head. Creating critical narratives enables me to identify and unpack these stories.

Credible Value

Whittemore et al. (2001) drawing on the work of many researchers concerned with issues of validity organize criteria into two sub-headings: primary (credibility, authenticity, criticality,

and integrity) and secondary (explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity). As I produce something of credible value, instead of attempting to make my research generalizable, I consulted the primary and secondary criteria outlined by Whittemore et al. (2001) and made use of Habermas's (1976) four criteria for social validity (a blend of primary and secondary criteria) and sought feedback on truthfulness (have I provided support for my stories?), rightness (do my stories make sense in light of the social and historical contexts I write about and from?), authenticity (does my story align with my values?), and comprehensibility (is my story clear and understandable?). It is important to me to produce something of value—a story that is useful (Bochner, 2002, p. 34) to others and offers some “criticalness” and is not simply a “mere telling of stories” (Iannacci, 2007, p. 55). The nature of what I am studying (people, learning, and love) is complex and full of nuances and subtleties resting within untold stories. A qualitative approach and specifically a truthful narrative, allows me to attend specifically to the why underlying what is often considered elusive and complex and can unveil valuable insights about humans and human nature without reducing these rich stories and encounters to general facts but instead, honours the rich and unique experiences of human lives.

McNiff and Whitehead (2011) encourage researchers to use critical friends and validation groups to help improve research accounts. Similarly, Clandinin (2013) promotes the use of response communities. I shared my work at all stages with people who offered me genuine critical feedback to produce something of value. Who I sought critical feedback from at various stages in my research depended on the nature of the subject and content, and the representational form of my work. On several occasions, I consulted the international Skype group I meet with every Sunday. This is a group of practitioners who are trying to improve their practice and share their accounts for critical feedback. I also facilitated a self-study action research group within our

board and sought critical feedback from my peers who are aware of the unique historical and social contexts of my teaching practice.

As I shared my work and received feedback, I would revise my actions to reflect the new insights I gleaned. It is difficult to provide specific examples, although there are many, as to do so would breach ethical protocol. In order for me to adequately explain a situation I would reveal details that would make it possible for a student or colleague to self-identify or at the very least wonder if I am referring to him or her. I am compelled by ethical protocol and my own ethical values to do no harm. I can, however, provide some general examples which demonstrate both the value of sharing what we do and how I revised my actions based on feedback. One of the most significant instances occurred as I was casually discussing my teaching philosophy with a colleague. After listening to me express some of my concerns about evaluation and grading, a colleague responded by saying: “Wow, Liz, you are really passionate about inclusive education!” I did not think much of the remark as I assumed that most educators are passionate about inclusive education and I felt that being inclusive was a part of my job. Several weeks later, I received the very same comment from an instructor, and again, two weeks later, from a different colleague. I began to give their responses some serious thought and started to pay more attention to how inclusivity played a role in my practice as well as having intentional discussions with students and colleagues about inclusivity. For example, on one occasion when I was struggling with how to engage a student who was obviously disinterested and sometimes disruptive, I shared my concerns and my multiple and varied attempts with a colleague.

My main concern was that this student did not have a sense of belonging in our classroom and would often resort to rude behaviour toward me or his peers. After a lengthy discussion with my colleague, I was reminded about my values of honesty, authenticity and agency. As a result, I

arranged a one-on-one conversation with the student I was concerned about. I spoke honestly and openly to the student and he responded in kind. The student was experiencing some very difficult challenges outside of school which helped me to be more empathetic and because I disclosed my concerns and frustration, he too became more empathetic. The situation in our classroom improved as the student was no longer disruptive or rude and was beginning to develop a sense of belonging and then suddenly he was gone. All I could find out was that he had been removed from school. Due to my own ethical guidelines and my obligation to comply with Nipissing University ethics regulations, I am unable to provide more details without risk to the student.

Ethics

One of the cornerstones of good research is attention to ethical issues. I am acutely aware of the significance, complexity (Trahar, 2009), fragmented (Ellis, 2007), disjunctive (Sermijn, Devliegger, & Loots, 2008), changing and ongoing (Ellis, 2007; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) nature of ethical issues particular to a narrative inquiry and agree with Smythe and Murray (2000) that “traditional, ethical principles in research offer insufficient guidance to maintain balanced ethical standards (p. 318). Bond and Misfud (2006) acknowledge this conundrum stating that “inevitably, the complex issues that are a consequence of this messy research can rarely be resolved at the outset and can be difficult to anticipate” (p. 11).

Developing a narrative identity is about “self and the other than self” (Freeman, 2014, p. 8). We must acknowledge that the “narrative self is located in language, culture and history” if we want to avoid “moral lateness” (acting without thinking) or “the terrible wisdom of hindsight” (realizing too late that we are intimately connected to others and our world) (Freeman, 2014, p. 12). I followed the requirements in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (TCPS 2, 2014) abiding by university regulations regarding “procedural” (Ellis, 2007, p. 3) ethics requirements,

seeking informed, ongoing consent from anyone who could be identified honoring the rights of participants to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and protection from harm.

The ethical considerations specific to autoethnography and autobiographical narrative accounts which are “further complicated by the emergent” (Rambo, 2005, p. 583) nature of my process and the inherent and unpredictable challenges, identified by Ellis (2007) as situational and relational ethics, require a heightened awareness of “our ethical responsibilities toward intimate others who are implicated in the stories we write” (p. 3). My journals, a recorded collection of my experiences, including my responses to and reflections of the lived experiences of others, comprise the greatest source for my research and as I move from field notes to interim texts to research texts, I negotiate the texts in a way that “respectfully represent[s] participants’ lived and told stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 200). I blend both rational (consent) and intuitive (personal feelings about what best serves the intimate others) judgments as I balance ethical issues with ethical practice in a critical and self-reflective way (Smythe & Murray, 2000). I have included, with permission, names, and identifiable details, and when I could not acquire consent, I omitted the reference. I am privileged to maintain contacts with the students and peers from my working life. This privilege also adds a layer of complication to the situation as I “strive to leave [my] community, participants, and [my]self better off (Ellis, 2007, p. 25) as a result of my research and “deal with the reality and practice of changing relationships with participants over time” (Ellis, 2007, p. 3). Recognizing that ethical concerns changed and shifted throughout the inquiry, especially as I moved from field texts to research texts, I extended my ethical responsibilities to include “situational and relational” dimensions of attention to ethics.

Ellis’s (2007) notion of an ethic of friendship as a method (acting out of a place of hope, caring justice, and love) provided guidelines for how I conducted my research knowing full well I cannot “leave the field” (p. 13). Where necessary I: practiced “process consent” (Ellis, 2007, p.

23) as I consulted at each stage of my research; included multiple voices; and offered a variety of interpretations. In addition, I made use of alternate plans (wrote generically or excluded something altogether) when consent was not given or minor changes to the text did not offer enough protection to protect the stories of others and my desire to “ensure the intellectual integrity” of the research (Trahar, 2009, p. 11). The data I collected in the last 6 years from former and current students, the data I continue to collect, and my own reflections on that data, represent a “fleeting glimpse of a multitude of stories that could be constructed” (Sermijn et al., 2008, p. 640). My interpretations only offer one possible interpretation in a given moment. I am transparent about my biases and prejudices and explicitly note my privileged stance. To make my narrative accounts more critical I journaled and constantly reflected on my feelings, perceptions, and interpretations as I analyzed the data. This proved to be a very challenging and emotionally charged task that reaped benefits beyond my expectations which I will elaborate on in my conclusion.

I have followed the requirements of the TCPS 2 (2014) as I remain “sensitive to the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration they are due” and maintain respect for “human dignity” at all times throughout my study (p. 6). In the generation of stories, I continued to “monitor [my] internal hunches” and shared my writings and thoughts with my participants and critical friends where I had permission and written consent to do so (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 332). I was determined to “remain wakeful to who [I am] in the inquiry space and to how [my] presence shapes spaces between [me] and my participants” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 199). I have received ethical approval to access the data I have collected and the stories I generated provided I receive written consent of those named, referenced or easily identified in my study. I have sought and received written consent from my family members and colleagues referenced in my research (see Appendix A) throughout the study as referenced in Chapter 3 of TCPS 2 and provided participants with the opportunity for ongoing review and to withdraw at any time. I

chose not to include any specific data about students and only wrote generically about my encounters with students due to my desire to protect their unvoiced values, wishes and interests. Even though there are stories I have permission to share, I have elected not to do so in an attempt to protect my students beyond their conscious awareness of their need for protection. After reflecting on the data I have collected over the years, I now realize that it is possible that the data was tainted by my students' desire to please me and to comply. I now question their ability to freely provide consent when in fact their freedom in a compulsory school setting was restricted.

Relational Narratives

By generating relational narratives that challenge the academic bias against subjectivity that Palmer (2007) warns us against, I have revealed tensions and I have tried to reduce the possibility of being alienated from my own inner life. As Trahar (2009) writes, "I am an original storyteller and I, too, have striven to be accountable to my spirit and values" (p. 11). Trahar's words resonated with me and I kept them in mind as I strove to achieve a balance between protecting others and being true to myself. I believe this was possible to do because I experience personal and spiritual growth in my encounters with the other as I embrace Buber's (1996) theory of I/thou which he explains as "every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its You freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. It fills the firmament—not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in *its* light" (p. 126). I do not exist without You and the more I acknowledge and live according to this maxim, the more oriented I am to the You in my life. I refer to the collective Yous as the other. As I approach the other with an attitude of I/thou we both flourish. I recognize that we are interconnected and agree with Freeman (2014) who states that when we are "oriented to what is *other* to that which unselfs us" (p. 14) we are acting and living in a way that provides the fertile ground for all to grow.

O'Donohue (2004a) claims that "love begins with paying attention to others, with an act of gracious self-forgetting. This is the condition in which we grow" (p. 7). The other is the reason I and my story exist; I make a committed effort to maintain the truth of my story and protect the other.

I agree with Smythe and Murray (2000) who claim that there is "no single best way to tell a story" (p. 326). I sought creative options (paintings and poetry) recognizing that "judgments regarding value are steeped in alternate paths" (Leggo & Sameshima, 2014, p. 546). I was eager to pursue alternate paths to achieve my goal of unveiling my cover story by embracing alternative ways of knowing, researching, and representing (Four Arrows, 2008). Ellis (2007), referring to protecting the stories of others, claims "the wisest know that the best they can do is not good enough" (p. 23) which has served as a constant reminder to me as I worked within the tensions and blurry boundaries of fidelity and trustworthiness to legitimize critical research (Moss, 2004, p. 365) and to love my students and myself and all beings and non-beings in the universe.

My narratives are simply that: my subjective stories. They are limited by my subjectivity and represent my position, my point of view and my particular understanding of the situation at a given moment in time. However, I embrace the subjectivity within qualitative narrative research and see it as a strength and not a weakness within the methodology. Getting on the inside of stories helped me to get on the inside of the truth. As I tell my story, which is full of bias, subjectivity, prejudice and privilege, I offer the reader an opportunity to contextualize the results within their own narrative. By unveiling my cover story, I provide the groundwork for others to possibly examine their own narrative with a different lens or at the very least to be able to contextualize my story.

Chapter 3: Theory

To educate as the practice of freedom ... comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. (hooks, 1994, p. 13)

Theoretical Framework

Although I use holistic education as my theoretical framework as I draw on insights from traditional and contemporary holistic theorists, I also include ideas from other paradigms such as Whitehead's Living Educational Theory (1989, 2008) and poststructuralist theory, thus creating an "eclectic approach" in an attempt to avoid a "theoretical paradigm quandary" (Stinson, 2009). I believe that in order for me to conduct a valuable research inquiry, it is necessary to include my own explanations of how love has influenced me as a teacher, researcher, and learner. Santos (2014) writes:

To be a learned ignorant in our time is to know that the epistemological diversity of the world is potentially infinite and that each way of knowing grasps it only in a very limited manner. ... The learned ignorance of our time is infinitely plural, as plural as the possibility of different ways of knowing ... the impossibility of grasping the infinite epistemological diversity of the world does not release us from trying to know it; on the contrary, it demands that we do. This demand or exigency, I call the *ecology of knowledges*. ... If the truth exists only in the search for truth, knowledge exists only as an ecology of knowledges. (p. 111)

Even though I know my explanations are limited by my "Eurocentric" experiences, in an effort to avoid "epistemicide" I am obliged to seek an "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2014).

This approach differs from traditional educational theoretical approaches that rely on disciplines of education (e.g., philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, and theology; Whitehead, 1989, p. 2). Often, these traditional approaches, either in isolation or in combination, only offer explanations of individual actions and influences that are derived from the general abstract concepts of the theories. Relying on these explanations for validation of individual theories may exclude the unique theoretical perspective and voice of the researcher. In developing my own living-educational-theory, I am not bound by any limitations or parameters of existing theories. My living educational theory that is based on my core values and lived experiences which explains the principles which I chose to guide my life and hold myself accountable to. I will include insights from current social theories and my own educational experiences. Together, these insights form the “explanatory principals” that generate the “standards of judgment” for my definition of educational sustainability and ultimately, my living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2009).

Educational Sustainability

My definition of educational sustainability has changed significantly over the last few years and will likely continue to change and evolve as I embrace ideas about the absence of an absolute formula and the inherent nature of humankind to change and grow as we live with more awareness and continue to explore and experience (Buber, as cited in Hodes, 1973). I put my definition of educational sustainability into practice as my awareness evolves and I recognize that the theories I embrace must align with my actions and my worldview in order to conduct meaningful research that represents holistic learning. Like Stinson (2009), I maintain that “it [is] imperative that the philosophical underpinnings of the theoretical paradigm(s) match my evolving philosophy” (p. 2). In other words, my theoretical perspectives must be holistic to align

with my assumption of reality that everything is interconnected. In addition, the way I research, the methodology and methods I make use of also need to be holistic because I am studying learning and I believe that authentic learning is holistic, so the best way to look at learning is through a holistic theoretical and methodological lens.

My definition of educational sustainability is the freedom to think *and* act holistically and includes the underlying assumption that everyone and everything is connected. Of paramount importance to my life as a researcher, learner, and teacher is my ability to think and act holistically, thus keeping my values of love, hope, and joy in ontological harmony. Although this may appear to be a very simple definition, it is not simplistic. I will explain what I mean by educational freedom, sustainability, and holistic education by drawing on insights from various theorists and my own lived experiences.

Educational Freedom

I experienced a shift in educational freedom when I experienced being loved into learning. Prior to this experience, I rarely experienced educational freedom and this is one of the main reasons I became a teacher. I believed there was a different and more meaningful way to experience learning and I hoped I would be able to discover it and share it with the learners in my care. My motivation increased exponentially when I became a mother and again now as a grandmother. What I have learned is that there is no single model or definitive approach that is right in all situations for all learners. I have learned that there is a term (holistic education) for what I believe was part of my intuitive pedagogy, and finally, I have learned that love, particularly spiritual love, which I define as the willingness to embrace and act on the idea that everyone and everything is connected, is an essential requirement for me to have a meaningful learning experience. I did not learn this in isolation in a particular course or from a specific book

or from mandatory professional development; I learned it from living and from trusting myself—only then could I turn to academia and make sense of the theories I encountered. In addition, I learned that the entire process was more meaningful if I was guided by someone who trusted and respected me, someone who believed in me, someone who loved me and someone who I in turn could trust, respect, and love. Perhaps by sharing the story of how love influenced me as a teacher, learner, and researcher, my readers will find something that resonates with them and they will be able to learn from my shared experiences.

Whitehead (2009) makes a distinction between education and *educational* by explaining that an experience is only *educational* if it allows students to draw their own conclusions and formulate their own ideas that are supported by their own lived experiences, which enables them to create unique epistemologies and ontologies that contribute to the flourishing of humanity. In other words, ideas are not imposed upon the learner; the learner's valued lived experiences enable him/her to internalize theories from disciplines and make new meaning, personal meaning, of theoretical ideas.

Similarly, Buber (1996) promotes the idea of doing *for* others and not *to* others to create an ideal learning environment that respects the uniqueness of individuals and their freedom to learn and be. Likewise, Dewey (1938) advocating for the value of experiential learning as the foundation of a meaningful education, emphasizes the importance of intellectual freedom—freedom of observation and judgement that occur for purposes that are worthwhile (p. 61). Buber and Dewey, along with many others, challenge the traditional notion of education as a banking model where information is received and stored and regurgitated on request forcing learners to remain ignorant and worse yet, stifling creative and critical thought. An environment for learning that does not include a space for emphasis on the process of inquiry but just the

products is oppressive. Challenging an oppressive system is complicated, controversial, and at times chaotic. In order to liberate learners, we need liberated leaders. Whether referring to students, teaches, or administrators, it is not simple to move from an environment of oppression to one where intellectual freedom flourishes. Freire (1993a, 1993b) explains that people who have been subjected to an oppressive environment become fearful of freedom after internalizing and living according to oppressive maxims.

I wholeheartedly agree with Holt (2004) who claims that:

Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other persons' experiences, find and make the meaning of our own lives. (p. 4)

Freedom, according to Holt, is the right to choose how we live, including how and when we learn. He maintains that regardless of how well intentioned we are, this kind of educational freedom will never exist in our current model of schools. Holt (2004) highlights the absurdity and inherent contradiction in the idea that we can mandate critical, creative, independent thinking “in a place where we coerce and bribe, wheedle, motivate, grade, rank, and label” (p. 204) . Freedom includes choice and independent thinking and “in a place where every part of their lives and thought is decided, controlled, and judged by authorities, how could children learn to be skeptical and critical of authority?” (Holt, 2004, p. 204).

Holistic Education

“Because it offers an antidote to materialism, fear, and separation, the holistic perspective is important not only for the renewal of education, but also for our very own survival” (Nielsen, 2001, p. 4).

The conceptual framework for my research is based on holism and in particular, holistic education. This is the philosophy that frames my evolving worldview and guides my actions. I am not going to provide an argument in favour of holistic education, that has already been done very well by many (Holt, 1989; Krishnamurti, 1953; J. Miller, 2006, 2007, 2010; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006; Palmer, 2007; Ricci & Pritscher, 2015). Instead, I provide an analysis of the spiritual components of holistic education and provide an argument for the necessity of love within holistic education. I then extend the theoretical perspectives by conducting a narrative inquiry of the past 6 years of my practice. I provide details of the definition and explanation of holistic education by drawing on insights from Buber (1996), Cho (2005), Dewey (1938), Freire (1993a, 1993b), Holt (1989), Kessler (2000), Krishnamurti (1953), J. Miller (2006, 2007, 2010, 2018), R. Miller (1991, 1997, 2006), Palmer (2007), Ricci and Pritscher (2015), and others. I make explicit some of the nuances of spiritual love and how I have embraced love in my practice while at the same time honouring the mystery and diversity of spiritual love. I do believe that the ability to love and be loved is part of what it means to be human and it is therefore necessary for me to acknowledge and embrace the idea of love within public education; that is, make it an explicit part of all that happens within my classroom. I agree wholeheartedly with Marshall (2014) who writes,

... the long-term solution to the inequality, violence, an environmental degradation that plague our world lies in increasing the number of people who commit themselves to an ethos of love and loving practice, and that the classroom is an ideal place to teach and learn how to do it. (p. 94)

Although I always included some principles and practices of holistic education in my teaching philosophy (e.g., reflection, creativity, meditation, emphasis on process, strength, and

interest-based inquiry) I could not call myself a holistic educator in the full sense of the term for reasons that I will continue to explore in my research—although I suspect that ignorance, politics, and compliance rather than courage might form part of the explanation. I have struggled with the tensions within public education and my core values for two decades. I am not naïve enough to think that what I have done or hope to try and accomplish will alleviate the problems within public education, but I do think that I have changed myself by challenging status-quo thinking and avoided the title of “commissar” that Noam Chomsky assigns to all who “work primarily to reproduce, legitimate, and maintain the dominant social order from which they reap benefits” (as cited in Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 122). My goal is to answer Freire’s (1993a) call to find the courage, hope, and humility to create a unified community of inquiry that recognizes the oppressive ideologies that need to be addressed to transform public education and, specifically, to introduce the idea of “profound love” into my practice. My hope is that by sharing the story of my struggles, challenges, and insights, I will provide something that resonates with others who have similar experiences and concerns. A more holistic approach to education honours the space for the kind of diversity I need to change myself and my practice. I can contribute to transforming public education by transforming myself.

What is the definition of holistic education? As many holistic theorists have postulated, it is difficult to provide a specific definition of holistic education—inherent in the concept is a defiance to being categorized, labeled, pigeon-holed, or deconstructed; nonetheless, this is not perceived as a problem by holistic thinkers, but instead an indication of the diversity which is considered a positive attribute (R. Miller, 1991). Generally, holistic theorists and practitioners do agree that holistic education is a philosophy that endeavours to embrace the whole child—mind, body, spirit, and emotion—and seeks to provide educational opportunities for self-discovery

through an integrated and interconnected unfolding of lived experiences (J. Miller, 2006, 2007, 2010; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006). In addition, there is some consensus on several of the major principles and/or guiding concepts such as the importance of learning beyond disciplines; connectedness, including interdependencies; non-hierarchical relationships; reverence and awe for all of life, including nature; relevant and meaningful learning that enables the sacredness of the individual to unfold thus providing opportunities for enlightenment and ultimately transformative experiences; both personal and collective responsibility; and a strong sense of community from the classroom to the global (Forbes, 1996, 2003; R. Miller, 1991; Nielsen, 2001).

Contemporary holistic educators seem to focus more on the spiritual principles of holistic education while still valuing the autonomy, democracy, and freedom advocated by theorists embracing more humanistic ideals (J. Miller, 2006, 2007, 2010; R. Miller, 1991, 1997, 2006; Palmer, 2007). Nonetheless, there is plenty of overlap and more similarities than differences apparent to me at this point in my research. I will focus on the spiritual principles in the literature review and seek theoretical support for the inclusion of spiritual love within holistic education.

Love

I am particularly interested in the spiritual principles of holistic education because I believe that love is a core component of spirituality and that both are essential to meaningful learning. I believe that one way to educate the heart is from the heart and with love. Whether or not I had any success bringing love into my classroom is part of the purpose of this study. J. Miller (2007) maintains that all teaching falls within three distinct categories (transmission, transaction, and transformation) and that students benefit when a teacher's approach includes all three because at various times, students prefer one approach over the other. Goethe asserts that "you only learn from someone you love" (as cited in Forbes, 1996, p. 5) and although my ideal

learning environment includes someone who loves me, I believe I can also learn from someone who does not love me; in fact, I can learn from someone who does not even know me but the best learning environment I have experienced is one where I feel loved.

Much like holistic education, love resists absolute definition (Loreman, 2011). My working definition of spiritual love is the willingness to embrace and act on the explicit and the mysterious ideas inherent in the maxim that everyone and everything is interconnected. The application of this definition in the classroom, among other things, means that the relationship between teacher and student is non-hierarchical and is based on mutual trust and respect. This is definitely not a new or unique idea and many have written and researched this concept by studying soul, care, compassion, empathy and so forth, but only a few (Cho, 2005; Freire, 2000; hooks, 2011; Loreman, 2011; Marshall, 2014; Ricci & Pritscher, 2015) speak specifically and extensively to the pedagogy of love, and in particular a sacred and/or spiritual love. Each of these authors and researchers advocate for a shift in education that takes into account the emotional, spiritual, psychological, and intellectual needs of students and educators, and call on those interested in transformative experiences to recognize the need for trust, honesty, respect, empathy, and connectedness in our relationships with students. Marshall (2014) asks us to consider “what might happen if we viewed each foray into the classroom not only as an opportunity to teach a lesson or facilitate discussion, but as another chance at love—at connection—that would not only and enrich our students, but deepen our experience of living as well?” (p. 94).

I believe that holistic teaching is a sacred act primarily because it requires the educator to enter into a spiritual journey with other learners in an attempt to create a space for each to discover their own sacredness. Cho (2005) describes this process as a more global endeavour and maintains that it can occur “by turning away from one another and toward the world in order to

produce knowledge through inquiry and thought” (p. 95). One way I believe this can be accomplished is through love for the whole person and the process of learning, including the tensions, beauty, suffering, pain, joy, and mystery. My “love plan” requires unconditional love and means I embrace “unappealing characteristics and behaviors with humor, tranquility, and curiosity. It would not be transactional or affected by my students’ daily or cumulative decisions” (Redford, 2018, p. 1). I love my students when I do not agree with them or they do not agree with me or each other; I love them when they are frustrated, angry, disappointed, rude, disengaged, or disruptive. I do this first by reminding them that I love them and then asking questions that I do not have answers to and listening with empathy and compassion or simply letting them be and trusting they will seek advice or support if needed. Although this may sound exhausting and almost impossible, the opposite is truer to what I experienced. Redford (2018) writes that although she was feeling more peaceful she was concerned she would not be able to maintain her love plan and states “loving my students also got easier as the year progressed. I had initially worried that my approach wasn’t sustainable. But the opposite was true. Love begot love (p. 2). I became energized and rejuvenated as I developed a habit of loving unconditionally and I too felt more loving and loved as I loved my students into learning.

Cho (2005) claims:

Knowledge emerges only through the invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. Love marks the splitting of the teacher-student that structures the truth of the void of the relation by pushing both parties into the world in the pursuit of knowledge. (pp. 94-95)

Cho describes a learning environment conducive to sustainable education. The encounter is one of knowledge creation and when the student and teacher part, each is more equipped to continue

their learning journey because of their encounter. The student is not dependent on the teacher or a particular set of standards or expectations, but seeks to know simply for the love of learning, the love of self, and the love of others: essentially, a love of living. Likewise, the teacher is not dependent on the student for a sense of purpose or self-fulfillment and continues to seek loving encounters for the sake of loving and learning.

Bringing love into the classroom and creating the type of environment Cho (2005) describes within public education has many challenges and obstacles to say the very least. I have met students who are passive, disinterested, compliant, and rebellious and I had to be very creative and courageous to deal with questions and challenges from administrators and parents. In addition, I had to confront my own fears and self-imposed or perceived limitations. However, it is a challenge I embraced with stories of both victory and ruin (MacLure, 1996), because I believe there is hope for change, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Freire (2000) claims ignoring or discounting the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means we are essentially supporting the powerful; it is not possible to be neutral.

In my attempt to move beyond neutrality, I returned to the classroom in 2012 with a renewed conviction to be more authentic; that is to be more honest and open about my values, especially my value of love and to live more fully according to my values of love, hope, and joy which included other values like truthfulness, connection, integrity, community, creativity, diversity, and inclusion. I made a concerted effort to be aware of my values in action and also when I was unable to live out my values. I communicated my values to my students and colleagues so that I could be held accountable to my values. I also continued to read articles and books related to my value of love and to connect weekly with the International Living Theory Researchers Skype group I met with on Sunday afternoon and continued to share my ideas, concerns, insights and resources with BARN participants. The feedback I received from my

students, Skype group participants and BARN participants was the most significant for moving my thinking forward. However, there was one particular book I read that challenged my thinking and understanding of love and changed the way I understood love. *All About Love: New Visions* (hooks, 2000) not only affirmed many of my beliefs but also challenged me to take my ability to love and be loved to another level. hooks helped me to realize that the reason some people may be reluctant to discuss love is because they do not really understand what it means and even if they do have a working understanding of love they are fearful of expressing their love or perhaps concerned about how embracing love could cause radical change.

Although I had read widely about the lack of a language of love and/or spirituality in academia and in schools, nothing I read addressed in any detail the reasons for such an absence. hooks (2000) addresses this concern in the preface of her book:

Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational. And it is especially hard to speak of love when what we have to say calls attention to the fact that lovelessness is more common than love, that many of us are not sure what we mean when we talk of love or how to express love. (p. xxvii)

My understanding of love became clearer to me when I lost my brother, the sibling next in line to me, in a workplace accident. In 2005, my brother, Norm, was electrocuted at work. One year later, in April of 2006, I found myself standing in front of a few hundred people at a corporate service recognizing the National Day of Mourning for those who lost their lives in workplace accidents and I was scheduled to speak on behalf of my family. I had not prepared anything as I decided to speak directly from the heart hoping that something I said would enable others to work more safely. The only thing I can recall today is that I emphasized that it was love that

enabled my family to live through this tragic loss and I encouraged anyone who did not have love in their life to address it immediately. I recall stating that love is the only thing that matters and because Norm lived a life dedicated to love, his family will learn to live with the loss and grief and will continue to love. I was not nervous about speaking in front of these strangers but I was slightly nervous about speaking so openly with such emotional intensity and calling to attention the fact that some of us live with lovelessness; however, it was something that I felt deep within my soul that needed to be recognized and shared. If our loss could improve someone's life then my brother's tragic death would have some purpose.

hooks (2000) goes on to say that "to open our hearts more fully to love's power and grace we must dare to acknowledge how little we know of love in both theory and practice" (p. xxix). Ten years before my brother was killed, my younger sister was killed in a tragic car accident a week before her 17th birthday. The combination of these tragedies enabled me to know beyond imagining that life can be totally unpredictable and turned upside down in a micro-second and this knowledge reinforced for me the desire to live more fully with love. I wanted to improve my ability to always act with love and to understand how to do so in my life, including my teaching practice, which is precisely why I chose to research how love has influenced me. Even though love is a topic that has been studied for thousands of years by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, theologians, scientists and many others, it is difficult to make any progress given the varied nature of our meanings and understandings. I concur with hooks who maintains that "our confusion about what we mean when we use the word 'love' is the source of our difficulty in loving" (p. 3). In order to elicit any change to become more loving hooks claims we must think of love always as an action and doing so encourages us to be more accountable and assumes we will take responsibility for when our actions are loving and when they are not (p. 13).

This was certainly true for me when I began telling my students I loved them and invited them to hold me accountable to this statement. Being honest with my students allowed us to develop a trusting relationship which enabled us to forge a deep and meaningful connection where love could flourish. hooks (2000) writes that maintaining a “love ethic” means that “we make choices based on the belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions. ... I know no one who has embraced a love ethic whose life has not become joyous and more fulfilling. ... Living ethically ensures that relationships in our lives, including encounters with strangers, nurture our spiritual growth” (p. 88). Making the choice to love more fully and choosing to explicitly name love as part of my practice enhanced both my practice and my life and allowed me to live a more spiritually enriched life. Suffering through the tragic loss of my siblings enabled me to confront my fear and discomfort with naming love as essential to my life and my practice.

hooks (2000) states “it is not in the interest of the conservative status quo to encourage us to confront our collective fear of love. An overall cultural embrace of the love ethic would mean that we would all oppose much of the public policy conservatives condone and support” (p. 91). I know how much embracing love in the classroom challenged and changed how I viewed, interpreted, and implemented school, board and ministry policies as I put the needs of my students before the expectation to comply and conform. I chose to love and in doing so I chose to challenge the power structures dominating my classroom. According to hooks,

Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience... as a culture we are obsessed with the notion of safety... fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known... when we choose to love we choose to move against fear—against alienation

and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other.

(2000, p. 93)

The remainder of this dissertation is the story of how I introduced love into my classroom in an effort to address power imbalance and move from a position of neutrality to a position of action and to find myself in the other.

Chapter 4: My Story

Conceptual Framework

In order to create a space for my story to be shared, I turn to an idea from Indigenous cultures who use the double wampum belt—“a dual delivery system deliberately replicating a spiritual principle”—to honour their ethical concerns and alternative ways of knowing (Mann, 2008, p. 41). The wampum, in general terms, is a visual memory keeper and is the model for my visual symbol. Honouring my cultural heritage, and my ethical concerns about fragmentation, reductionism, and false dichotomies, I use the Celtic triskelion (three conjoined spirals) as a visual memory keeper holding a space for the triple delivery system I make use of to symbolize the intertwining of reflections, narratives, literature, paintings, and poetry that comprise my storying (see Figure 4). The three spirals represent my three distinct but connected roles: researcher, learner, and teacher. I selected the triskelion because of its importance in Celtic history as well as other cultures. Although I was born in Scotland, I am a human being connected to all other humans.

The triskelion is also an important symbol in Greek, Italian, and Japanese cultures and as such represents the diversity I value and the inherent diversity in holistic education. Equally significant is the fact that the triskelion is made up of three conjoined spirals, which represent my three stories among many other significant triads within my stories and in holistic education. The spiral has always been a significant symbol for me as a metaphor for the many principles that guide my life and in this case represents the forward movement, energy, and change that is essential for achieving growth, wisdom, insight, transformation, and enlightenment, which are all motivators in my life, and are key principles in many contemporary theorists' ideas of holistic education (J. Miller, 2006).



Figure 4. Unity.

What Is the Image That Guides My Journey?

The triskelion knot was the image I had in mind as I began thinking about my dissertation. I imagined my dissertation journey as an attempt to bring all the disconnected parts into a whole—the whole in my mind was the underlying principle that everything and everyone is interconnected, but I was troubled by a question that haunted me every day. If I am correct that everything and everyone is interconnected, what is it that holds all the pieces together? After a lot of soul searching and reflecting, I decided that it was love, the need to be loved and the need to love, that united everyone and everything and I painted *Unity*.

I began by selecting images and text related to love and my role as a teacher, researcher, and learner. The images and text are from magazines, pictures I had taken and collected over the years, quotes from my students and the literature I was reading, and excerpts from my journals. I pasted them onto the canvas in the shape of a triskelion knot placing each piece in the appropriate spiral (learner was at the top, researcher on the left, and teacher, on the right). I left the painting this way for several days and each day I would sit in front of it and observe. For over a week, this became part of my daily meditation.

As I gazed at the images, I would recall the experiences I was representing most of which made me feel somewhat content and validated but still I felt an overarching sense of uneasiness, an incompleteness. I picked up my palette and placed equal amounts of different colours representing the chakra (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet) and began painting over the canvas. This was my attempt to bring some energy into the lifeless painting. I covered the entire canvas with the various colours blending them here and there to depict the blurry boundaries of my life. Once the paint dried, I painted the imperfect (like my life) triskelion knot again in the same order I had created it on the first layer. I was getting closer to capturing the

image that I was feeling, yet still I felt uneasy. I took out my journal and wrote the following poem:

I confess

the lure of the shadow is too much for me

I succumb

sucked into the vacuous and hypnotic space of conformity and compliance I remain
temporarily asleep

hope hovers longingly awaiting my awakening and awaken I will

timeless thoughts and ideas once stifled by the status quo flourish as embodied

knowledge is unveiled and creativity awakened

another suffocation lingers in the hope and marginalization as I seek the beautiful

Rumi says let the beauty we love be what we do

there are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground

I must find mine

I answer the call of the tide and seek the water's edge

mesmerized by the natural flow and ebb I begin to hear the beating of my own heart and
awakening commences

voices of the ancients echo in the tumbling waves, their sweet harmony a gentle reminder
of attending to the light and the dark

mother earth's mirror reflects the truth, unveils hidden treasures

the shadow is swallowed. (Personal journal, August 2017)

After allowing the paint to dry on my canvas, I added the final layer to my painting as I
printed my poem over and over again until it covered the entire canvas. The layers, including the

final layer of the poem reflect hidden truths, the blended colours depicting blurry boundaries and the struggle to find balance, the inherent contradictions, looming questions, and incompleteness in my poem, are a more accurate depiction of how I envisioned my life, my practice, and my research journey, and this messy paradoxical being is what I wanted to capture and include in my dissertation.

The Dance

As I propose the details of my inquiry and as I conduct my research, the intertwined threads (narratives from my lived experience as a teacher, researcher, and learner) connect to the whole (the role of love for individual and collective enlightenment and transformation) thus honouring my holistic worldview. Although the spirals are three distinct parts, none are complete without the other and rely on one another for strength, sensibility, and hope. Each part is of equal importance, interdependent, and interconnected. The symbol, like my story, and like holistic education, can only be understood by considering the relationship of the parts to the larger whole (Forbes, 1996, p. 4). More importantly, and although somewhat elusive, is the dynamic between the parts and the whole which is the essence of my story and of holistic education.

We move from the parts to the whole and back again, and in that dance of comprehension, in that amazing circle of understanding we come alive to meaning, to value, and to vision; the very circle of understanding guides our way, weaving together the pieces, healing fractures, mending the torn and fractured fragments, lighting the way ahead. (Wilber, 1997, p. 1)

My intention is to capture, with the use of images, poetry, and narratives, the back and forth movement of the dance of my practice and my life.

Chapter 5: How Has Love Influenced Me as a Teacher?

How Did I Get Here?

Completing a Master's degree and creating my own living educational theory changed my life forever and for the better. I had a much deeper understanding of who I was and I wanted that person to show up in the classroom every day. However, I was also acutely aware of how easy it is to get lost within the power structures. My challenge was to remain true to myself and to others.

We teach who we are claims Parker Palmer (2007) and if we do not know who we are then it begs the question "Who is showing up in the classroom?" Self-study is an ideal process for helping us to figure out who we are and who we want to be or become in life and in the classroom. One quickly discovers that the two are intertwined and interdependent.

I am privileged to have had the opportunity and resources to conduct an in-depth self-study during the completion of my Master's degree but I maintain that it is not necessary to do so to study your own practice. Self-study, action research, and living educational theory are three possible approaches for improving one's practice available to anyone willing to make the commitment. Completing a self-study, action research MRP provided me with valuable insights and knowledge about my practice and my worldview, and self-study combined with action research provided a framework for me to approach the tensions and challenges within my practice and life. However, it was and still is the continued generation of my evolving living educational theory that provided the impetus and framework to ensure that my authentic self was the one to show up in the classroom every day. Self-study and action research provided valuable knowledge but it was the generation of my own living educational theory that provided a deeper understanding; one that gave me the confidence and tools to identify and articulate what mattered most—love.

It was the use of digital media that enabled me to identify love as a core value and working with other living educational theorists in my International Skype group (Marie Huxtable, Robyn Pound, Arianna Briganti, Sonia Hutchison, and many others) who focused on energy flowing values that contribute to the flourishing of humanity provided the support I needed to continue to explore the meaning and role of love in my practice and life. I discovered that the space in-between me and the learners in my care was filled with a life affirming energy founded on love. Using digital media to record my conversations and interactions with students allowed me to review the interactions as many times as necessary and helped me to identify what Fredrickson (2013) calls “micro moments” of love; she describes love in these micro moments as:

the momentary upwelling of three tightly interwoven events: first, a sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another; second, a synchrony between your and the other person’s biochemistry and behaviors: and third, a reflected motive to invest in each other’s well-being that brings mutual care. (p. 17)

She calls the combined interaction of these three indicators “positivity resonance” which also provides a useful description of the energy flowing value of love I encountered with the learners in my care. Fredrickson explains further that “this back and forth reverberation of positive energy sustains itself—and can even grow stronger—until the momentary connection wanes, which is of course inevitable, because that’s how emotions work” (p. 17). Once I experienced and understood this connectedness in micro moments of love there was no turning back; I was energized to seek out and create more opportunities for this kind of connection.

For example, I can recall with great fondness the second day of a grade 12 philosophy class in 2015. The previous day, the first day of class, is consumed with a considerable amount of required administrative work such as updating class lists, distributing course outlines, and

reviewing school policies. In addition, I do more talking than I am generally comfortable with as I communicate the framework of the course and my personal teaching style to students. I try to provide this information as soon as possible so that if a student decides that this is not what they were expecting or the course content or my teaching style does not align with their interests, desires and / or expectations, the student has more opportunity to find something more appropriate and can make the necessary timetable changes before other courses reach their maximum capacity. I apologize in advance for the excessive amount of talking that I do and thank them for their patience and understanding.

On day two of this particular class, I asked the students to put the chairs in a circle so we could experience what would be a regular practice in the class and then I asked the students to share a comment or question that they might have given that they had received an extensive amount of information the day before. There was no hesitation that day as students eagerly shared their questions and comments and an interesting, engaging, and dynamic discussion unfolded which lasted almost the entire 75 minute period. I was quite surprised at how quickly the students adapted to sharing openly in the talking circle and how trusting and respectful they were of each other and me. I knew a handful of the students from the previous year but most of them were unknown to me prior to day one and I was expecting that it would take much longer for them to become comfortable in the talking circle. I shared this observation with the students and expressed my pleasure and excitement and then I asked them why they were willing to share so openly. Again, the conversation became very lively and students nodded in agreement and jumped in with elaboration and validation as their peers said “it’s easy to trust you because you were so honest with us” and “it is obvious you really care about us; you even said you loved us” and the one that I will never forget: “it’s the first time in my high school experience that I feel

like what I have to say matters and might even make a difference.” I remember their exact words as I was so moved by their authenticity and eagerness. I sat there in stunned silence making eye contact with each of them as I glanced around the circle and in that very moment there was an energy in the room that I can still feel remnants of 3 years later.

I was not familiar with Fredrickson’s (2013) work at the time so could not name the experience with her terminology but that did not diminish the experience or the memory of the experience or our ability to continue to have similar experiences in any way. I was in the process of generating my own living theory based on my personal values and living more fully according to my values encouraged me to make love an explicit part of my practice and my other guiding values of hope, joy, trust, respect, authenticity, and agency in addition to my evolving understanding of creating my living educational theory helped me to understand and seek out opportunities to experience “energy flowing values” and empathetic resonance.”

Generating one’s own living educational theory is a sustainable life-long self-study, action research endeavour. My life, including my practice became a journey of love that will continue until I take my last breath. This is a simple statement and at the same time extremely complex. Since I had experienced some micro moments of connection with my students, I yearned for more but I often experienced the opposite. Several years ago, struggling with my desire to bring love into my teaching practice, I wrote the following:

I love my students so very much that sometimes I can hardly stand to be a part of their education. Today, I told my colleague that I felt like one of the characters from the cartoon “Ghost Busters” only I walked around with a special pack that enabled me to suck the souls out of people. She was shocked by my statement and said it was a horrid image. I said I know but it is how I feel sometimes. (Personal journal, November 2014)

Why Did I Stay?

It took me a long time to find some kind of harmony between loving my students and working within a public education setting. Many times I was tempted to walk away or to give up because the constraints, policies, mandates, and other external pressures of public education made me feel like the “soul sucker” I described in my journal. Sometimes, especially Monday mornings, it would take us a while to get energized and get the conversation flowing in the class but eventually, for the most part, we would get to a point where students were asking questions of each other and prompting each other and anxiously awaiting their turn to speak. They would be onto something very exciting, completely engrossed in a conversation that could change the way they think or something that could be the seed for personal or collective action and then quite suddenly, everyone’s thoughts would be abruptly interrupted by a shrilling, high-pitched beep indicating the end of the allotted time for that particular conversation. Class was over. Time to move on to another subject.

Another example of a time I felt like a “soul-sucking” teacher was whenever I was teaching a grade 10 class and we were forced to do practice assignments for the grade 10 literacy test and I could see that my students were extremely bored or in some cases so anxious they would not actually benefit. Plotkin (2008), referring to the literacy rate in America, maintains that:

Studies show that the astonishingly low literacy rate in our country is due not to a lack of schooling but to too much of the wrong kind of schooling. Most children become highly literate on their own if allowed to explore areas of genuine interest. (p. 210)

Nonetheless, we had to comply and complete and submit the work. On these occasions, I truly felt like I let my students down. I felt like I was sending a message that they could not be trusted

to pass this test on their own merit or that this test was so important and essential to their success in high school that we had to spend extra time practicing. I felt like a hypocrite and yet I stayed.

I now realize there was really only one reason I stayed as long as I did even though I sometimes told myself otherwise at the time. The reason I stayed is because I loved my students, which is the very reason that often made me feel like I should quit teaching. I spent an entire year researching why teachers quit and was actually considering making this the focus of my PhD. What I discovered was that I often felt like I was contributing to the perpetuation of a system that was in dire need of major systemic change and I was guilt ridden and full of shame, anger, discontent, and hopelessness. So much so that this and needing to care for my mother, who was very ill at the time, forced me to take a semester off. The following is an excerpt from my journal at that time:

I had an appointment with my doctor today and she wants me to take an anti-depressant and when I told her this was not something I felt I needed at this particular time she assumed I felt ashamed. She said there was no shame in taking anti-depressants and continued to justify her recommendation by explaining that many of her patients were teachers and almost half of them were on some type of anti-depressant. Well, she just made me feel worse! So we dope our children up with Ritalin so they can sit still in class and we dope our teenagers up with anti-anxiety meds so they can attend high school and we dope our teachers up with anti-depressants so they can numb the guilt and depression of working in a system that kills creativity and stifles individuality. Well isn't that a wonderful example of evolved thinking and the potential for humanity to flourish in these circumstances is really inspiring! (Personal journal, October 2016)

I imagine you can see the anger and frustration in my journal entry but what you may not see is the deep sadness I felt at the time. Obviously my doctor saw it and that is why she

suggested anti-depressants. So in a way, her diagnosis was helpful because it made me angry which helped me to see the greatest source of my sadness and my despair. What I really needed was some time to reconnect with myself and my values so I would be in a healthier place to figure out a way to navigate the tensions in my life. Taking time to meditate, reflect, write, paint, and share my concerns with my research support group helped me to reconnect with my values and see the importance of love, hope, and joy in my life and in my practice. I loved myself back into living and I returned to the classroom so I could love my students which I discovered was a significant part of how I loved myself. I had something to share and my students needed more love—it was that simple.

Where Did I Experience Unconditional Love?

I am loved deeply and that is why I think I can love the way I do. Both my mother and father loved me. Sure, they did so in some strange ways at times but the point is I know they loved me and my mother who is still with me today still loves me deeply, so much so that she supported our relocation to another province even when she would have preferred it if we had stayed. So, I know what it feels like to be loved and I know it can get me through some difficult times. My husband loves me more than I can express and at times more than I think I deserve but he loves me unconditionally. He has often been the one to bear the brunt of my dissatisfaction with the public school system and yet he has always supported me, no matter what radical ideas I conjured up and no matter how much I put my job in jeopardy and no matter how much he knew I would regret something I did or said and no matter how much of our money I spent on resources for my students and no matter how much time and energy I dedicated to my career instead of our marriage. My brothers love me and my children and now my grandchildren love me. I am a blessed woman.

I have always been a passionate educator and I cared deeply for my students, but it was only when Jackie Delong, an instructor in one of my courses for a Master's degree who eventually became my supervisor and a lifelong friend, told us that she loved us that I began to contemplate love in my practice; this evolved into my theory of being "loved into learning" (Campbell, 2012). Now, I too tell my students I love them. Not all of my students experience this kind of love and when I tell them I love them I know it makes some of them squirm with discomfort, but I also know some of them breathe a sigh of relief. I know this because they have told me in their writing and with their words and actions. Even the students who are uncomfortable in the beginning come to embrace the idea of being loved in the classroom when they understand what I mean and what the practical application of this love means for them.

I do not need my students to love me back; it is enough that they allow me love them. I do need them to trust and respect me and I believe I earn this when I trust and respect them. Although it is sometimes challenging to always love my students unconditionally as I am far from perfect and don't always have the energy or patience I feel like I need to deal with interruptions, excessive administrative demands and expectations (oversized classrooms, excessive paperwork and supervision) disruptive and disengaged students, ministry of education policy changes (excessive testing and reporting), systemic problems, and unexpected tragedies or simply the day to day demands of a complex job. However, I did find it both easier and harder to love unconditionally as it was becoming more of a habit for me but at the same time I was becoming more aware of the obstacles and challenges, especially the unnecessary ones like thoughtless interruptions, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) grade 9 numeracy and grade 10 literacy tests which made it more difficult for me to be a part of a system that I felt was oppressive. In addition, I do not always like all of my students; for example, when they are rude, inconsiderate, disrespectful and / or cause physical and emotional harm to others

but I do still love them. It would be easier to love them unconditionally if I also always like them. However, I am able to love them because I believe I have an ability to see the beauty in them; even when they do not see it themselves. After some dedicated reflection on this topic, I have come to realize that I learned this from my mother and father. They loved me unconditionally and they saw beauty in all human beings. They parented me with an open heart and I now recognize I have an open heart. One example, and there are many, is from a time in my adolescence when I told my parents about something I had done that I had since come to regret. They listened without judgement and when I was finished, they came over to me, hugged me, and told me they loved me. I guess they sensed that I was feeling unworthy of their love. Something I have only come to realize now. And I believe they thought this was not enough as my mother went down the hall and woke up my brothers and sister and told them to go and tell me how much they loved me. Each of my siblings came into the living room where I was sitting, crouched in the corner of the sofa, making myself as small as possible, and without knowing why they were asked to express their love to me, each of them did so in a way that made me believe them. I felt their genuine love and as a result, I was able to forgive myself and let myself be loved. Perhaps this is why I am able to love my students even when they do not love themselves.

What Is My Inner Voice Telling Me?

Before recognizing the role of love in my practice, I experienced a lot of tension as I struggled to comply with standards and policies that contradicted what I knew in my heart and head. I wanted to be a “good” teacher and for a long time, I thought that meant doing what I was told was best. I complied and I was conflicted. I lived in this constant state of conflict for over a decade and I know it negatively impacted my whole life, not just my teaching practice. When I reflect on this and why I did not do something sooner I believe it was because I never had or made the time to think about it in any depth. I was teaching full time, the mother of three, and the

wife of a shift-worker—I was a busy woman. I now understand that I was busy trying to comply and never gave a moment to that inner voice. It takes a lot of energy to ignore that voice and even more to find ways to comply with something you do not believe. At the end of the day, there was not much energy, if any, left over.

Once we became empty-nesters, I found myself with some extra time in the evening and on weekends and this is when I started listening to that inner voice. Sometimes, my husband would come home after a 12-hour shift and find me sitting in the dark. The look of concern on his face would jolt me out of my reflective state and back into reality. What often ensued after that was a lengthy conversation about what I had been thinking about. He was my sounding board and sat patiently and listened while I gave my thoughts words. He asked questions that helped me clarify my thinking and he offered critical feedback that sometimes challenged and sometimes validated my concerns and insights. Eventually, I came to realize that if I had trusted myself more or was aware of different options things could have been very different but I did what I was trained to do and started searching for theories to support my ideas. I immersed myself in the literature and finally decided to apply to complete a Master's degree thinking this would help give me the credibility I needed to make my inner voice heard. What I ended up doing, thanks to Jackie Delong and her introduction to Whitehead's (1989) *Living Educational Theory*, was realizing that I did not need academia to validate my own lived experiences. And I also discovered that I might help to create a shift in education by sharing this knowledge with others. This was something that I came to understand was extremely important to me. It was the only way I could honour my own journey and contribute to something greater than myself. As Cornell West (2008) states, "you must have a compassion for something bigger than your own egocentric predicament" (p. 35). The thing that was bigger than me and my situation was love and I needed to name it and act in a way that recognized this explicitly both in my classroom and my life.

What Did I Do That Was Different?

I felt more aware and authentic after completing my self-study, action-research and believe that generating my own living educational theory enabled me to be more present in my own life and to those I encountered. I was able to trust myself more and arrived in my classroom with a deeper understanding of who I was and what my purpose was in the classroom. Following is a list of the intentions I set for myself and some examples of what I did differently after discovering that I wanted love to play a more significant role in my practice.

1. Create a space for individual truth to unfold;
2. Support students as they discovered and celebrated their own unique voice, their own truths— which includes being uncomfortable at times and recognizing that truths often resides in suffering and “suffering can’t speak if the lies are suffocating that voice” (West, 2008, p. 38);
3. Awaken, or re-awaken, natural curiosity and creativity, and/or inspire awareness of challenges to natural curiosity and creativity;
4. Embrace alternative ways of researching, representing and knowing and challenging oppressive, fragmented, dichotomous, mechanistic, consumeristic, thinking and being;
5. Create an environment where students and teacher could get to know their inner-selves so we could connect to others and our environment more authentically;
6. Recognize and nurture our own gifts;
7. Know and understand gratitude and wisdom;
8. Recognize and embrace Beauty;
9. Stop, breathe, smile.

How Did I Begin?

The first few weeks of any course I taught were spent getting to know each other. On day 1

I would ask students to bring their chairs into a circle and explain that this is the set-up for how much of our time in class would be spent. I would ask simple questions (why did you take this course, what are you hoping to learn...?) and *invite* them to respond. I tried to practice “humble inquiry” which Schein (2013) defines as “the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person” (p. 2). Right from the start I would encourage students to be honest and tell them any answer was acceptable provided it was honest. Once one or two students shared honestly (“I just want a credit”; “I heard it was an easy course”; “I don’t know anything about philosophy”; etc.) and they saw that I embraced and appreciated the honest responses, usually more students would speak up.

Depending on the energy in the room, I might ask for volunteers or simply move around the circle always making clear the option to pass. If no one spoke, we would sit silently for several minutes and after a long silence I would share what I knew about the importance of sitting in silence and embracing silence. I might talk about mediation and ask what they knew about it or if any had tried it. This almost always got the conversation going. Again, sensing the energy in the room we would either carry on with a sharing circle or I would provide a prompt. I might read some quotes from former students, play a song and provide copies of the lyrics or the video version (one in particular that I recall students enjoyed is *Little Boxes* performed by the Canadian indie pop band Walk Off the Earth), read a poem, pass around a picture or art. Often, what happened after that was student-directed as they asked “have you seen...”; “have you heard...”; “that reminds me of...”. When this happened on day 1, I felt confident it was going to be an interesting journey. One thing that always amazed me and happened quite regularly in the beginning was how after thirty minutes or so of what my students often referred to as getting off-track or side-tracked they would quiet down and look to me to get us “back on track.” This is

when I would explain how this class was different and that we embrace these opportunities. Often what followed after that was a discussion about democratic learning, or self-directed learning, or unschooling or whatever topic students were interested in exploring.

How Did I Tell My Students I Loved Them?

One thing I know I did on day 1 or 2 of every course I taught in the last 6 years was tell my students I loved them. I have written about this several times and presented papers at several conferences on this topic. The following is an excerpt from an article written for the *Educational Journal of Living Theories*:

Appreciating the importance of making the relationally dynamics component of a loving culture of inquiry explicit, I begin each course by telling my students I love them and before they get too uncomfortable with the idea, I share Scott Peck's definition of love to explain what I mean. Love according to Peck (1978) is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of one's own or another's spiritual growth" (p. 85). Immediately, I see my students relax a little as they process this definition of love. I wait a few minutes...often someone asks what I mean by spiritual and then I explain that I use the term spiritual according to the definition bell hooks provides, "one who seeks to know and live according to values that promote universal well-being" (2001, p. 19). As a class, we identify values that will contribute to the greater good and note that we feel trusted and respected if we feel loved. I demonstrate trust and respect for my students when I provide them with opportunities to direct their own learning. Students then begin their own inquiries to identify their values and unveil their embodied knowledge. They begin with their lived experiences and then move on to the voices of others and eventually produce

validated knowledge claims which represent a combination of both education and educational theories. (Campbell, 2012, p. 50)

What Did I Share?

Another thing I intentionally did in the first week of any course was share my learning journey with my students as one example of how to unveil embodied knowledge. How I did this varied depending on my audience but it always included my story of un-graduating (see Appendix B) my evolving living educational theory which includes an explanation of self-study action-research, values identification and explication, and the four questions that guided my MRP: Who am I? How do I know? So what (why does this matter)? Now what (what will I do differently in light of this information)? I will elaborate more on the four questions later.

How Did I “Manage” the Classroom?

Trust and respect yourself and others and you will flourish. This is the only “rule” (I prefer to call it a guideline) I had in my classroom after beginning my PhD studies and it was written at the top of the whiteboard and remained there all year. I invited my students to add to it or modify it as the term progressed and for over 6 years, although it was referenced and discussed in detail many times, no changes were ever made. One example of the practical application of this rule to me meant that students did not need to ask permission to leave the classroom for whatever reason. I asked that if they were going to be gone longer than 5 or 10 minutes that they leave a sticky note on my desk providing details. I wish I did not have to do that but due to numerous fire drills, lockdowns, and inclement weather drills, all of which I had to account for the whereabouts of all my students, I found it necessary. I also asked that unless necessary, only one student at a time leave the room. All students had to do was put their name on the board when they left the room and erase it when they returned. It was not much freedom,

but it was more than they experienced in other classes so it was one indication of how things would be different in our classroom. As the term progressed and our trusting relationship grew, students would often sign out of the class individually or in groups to work on group projects or self-directed research. This could mean going to the library, a shop class, drama, music or art room, computer labs, and sometimes outside the building. Unfortunately, students were not allowed to leave the school property because of administrative policy and this limited the self-directed research opportunities to the resources available in the school and also required the permission of the teacher responsible for those spaces.

Another example is that students were encouraged to sit wherever they liked and they could change seats whenever they wanted. I only asked that they sit in the same spot for the first couple of weeks so I could learn their names. They also had the option of changing the physical space of the room by rearranging desks and chairs. My only request was that whatever changes were made included the possibility of putting our chairs into a circle so that we could easily re-arrange the space for talking circles.

What Resources Were Available?

Whenever I was assigned a classroom with enough space to house more than the usual desks and bookcase for textbooks, I would create a space for an art corner (basic supplies and a work space), a library (my books from home), the supplies to make a cup of tea (sometimes homemade cookies), a few laptops, a video camera and speakers, a gong (students created a ritual of ringing the gong when they had a eureka moment), candles, essential oils, and plants and flowers from my garden when in season helped to reduce the institutional feeling of the space. Recognizing that these things came from my home and/or my own pocketbook, students would often bring in contributions as well; this is when the space really became ours.

Prior to the major renovation of our school, I did not have to share the classroom so it was easier to set it up exactly how we wanted and needed. This allowed us to have a space for yoga mats, musical instruments, meditation cushions and even a sofa, loveseat, and lamp lighting (instead of the big overhead florescent lights). We also had a large counter and cupboards which housed a microwave, hotplate, and small fridge so we could prepare and share meals.

Our school renovation was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education and had to meet the new formulaic standards set out by the Ministry (a specific number of square feet per student). Due to declining enrolment, this forced our school to close off some classrooms and lose the use of valuable space. Unfortunately, the new classrooms were much smaller. Teachers no longer had home rooms and had to share classrooms. Prior to this, I stayed in my classroom during my prep period which had many advantages for both me and my students. For example: students could leave works in progress out; students always knew where to find me, before and after class and other times; students could come and use the space during their spare periods or lunch. I could keep all my resources in one space and access them whenever I needed. In addition, it was a safe space for students to store private work. Room allocation post-renovation was triggered simply by numbers. This meant that sometimes, certainly more often than I liked, I had to change classrooms every period and had to teach in very traditional spaces (blackboards and rows of desks) which made it extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to create the kind of environment conducive to holistic education. During these challenging times, I became known as “the cart teacher.” I had an old television cart that was about 4 feet high and had four shelves on it that I could load up and wheel down the hall. I would load up my cart each morning with all the resources (which were housed in my office) I thought I would need for the day. Unfortunately, this inhibited our activities to what was available on the cart which obviously

could not hold everything I would have in my ideal classroom but it was certainly better than nothing.

One of the many negative consequences was the unnecessary tension and anxiety among staff that this “practical” strategy created. We never knew from semester to semester where we would be and what kind of space and resources to which we had access. This made it difficult to plan and to be creative.

How Else Did I Set the Tone?

In addition to the alternative physical space I required in general for practical reasons, I felt it was essential to create/generate a specific mood in my classroom so students could feel safe and comfortable taking risks, embracing their vulnerability, and essentially acknowledging the need to be uncomfortable to experience personal growth. My philosophy classes almost always had a waiting list and consisted of anywhere from 30 to 35 senior students, many of whom had difficulty fitting in the outdated one piece molded desks we were sometimes assigned and working in a group that size often took longer to create the trust and respect for one another to create the emotional and psychological space for personal growth. Both personal and collective growth is possible when there is a high level of trust and respect for self and others. Other factors also played a significant role (open-mindedness, sense of belonging, honesty, acceptance, and embracing diversity of thought and being, embracing the slow-movement). Dedicated time and effort by all create the space for these values to become the new norm.

Acknowledging and embracing alternative ways of knowing, researching and representing helped to create the meta-physical environment for holistic education. Some examples of how I introduced this idea are:

1. *Contemplative learning and knowing.* One resource I used almost every year due to the

- positive feedback from students was “The tree of contemplative practice” (see Appendix C).
2. *Dedicated time to play (indoor and outdoor).* We would often plan this in advance so students could bring in any supplies they needed (LEGO, playdough, board games, cards, paints, knitting, and origami supplies are some examples of things that made their way into our class). I would ask students about things they don’t do anymore that they used to love to do. Sometimes students collaborated with others and sometimes they just played alongside of others.
 3. *Meditation.* We made use of various forms of meditation (guided, visual, walking, laughing, and silent). I have certification for teaching meditation and I have a daily meditation practice so I would often lead the meditation until students were comfortable taking over. I would begin with 2-minute meditations and increase the time based on feedback from students. One group progressed up to 30-minute meditations and some students wanted more so we offered 20-minute meditation sessions during lunch; sometimes students would lead these sessions. Several students began their own practice and some used this as their action-research projects. When available, I would invite guests from the community to share their practice and lead us in meditation.
 4. *Mindfulness.* Although this was connected to our meditation practice when we did mindful meditation (i.e., awareness of breath) we also tried to practice mindfulness (being more present) in other ways during our sharing circles, walking down the hall, playing, eating, conversing, working out and so on. We listened to some excerpts from John Kabot Zinn’s audio books and student selected readings from Thich Nhat Hanh and Pema Chodron’s books were often our inspiration and guide. These were books in our class library.

5. *The arts.* Visual art, music, drama, and dance activities were led by students, guests, and myself depending on willingness and availability. One example is a wonderful community member who came in regularly with her rhythm instruments and djembe drums and hosted drum circles for us. In addition, we learned about non-Western art by studying Tai Chi, Chi Gong, reiki, art-therapy, yoga (mostly led by guests but sometimes by students and occasionally me).
6. *Being flexible.* Embracing and acknowledging the need for alternative arrangements for learning. For example: students worked outside of class (in the guidance office, library or resource room); I worked one-on-one in alternative spaces with students who had mental health issues which prevented them from attending regular class; I created opportunities for students to work online and have a weekly or monthly meet-up. These arrangements were created to accommodate students' requests. An interesting note is that in over six years of providing these types of options for students I never, not once, had a complaint from any students who attended regular class that it was unfair; nor did I have any complaints or concerns from administration personnel or parents.
7. *Cyber guests.* Since we were located in a rural area and were also restricted by inclement weather in the winter, we invited local and international guests into our classroom via Skype.

How Did We Embrace Self-Directed Learning?

The opportunity for self-directed learning was integral to almost everything I tried to do in my practice. Since I was teaching in a public school, it was impossible to create a true self-directed learning environment and meet Ministry of Education curriculum requirements and maintain school and Board policies, but this did not mean I had to abandon the idea altogether. For example, in my grade 12 philosophy class (HZZT4U) students were expected to write an essay. Many students had taken grade 11 and/or grade 12 history where they had ample

opportunity to develop their essay writing skills and many, by their own admission, felt confident that they had enough essay writing skills to meet the demands of a first year university course so were more interested in developing other skills to adequately prepare them for post-secondary education. I would suggest to students that it was essential to have decent writing skills before paying for university courses where they were expected to be able to write a formulaic essay but I did not make it a requirement. I did require students to conduct research and to communicate their findings to the class as per HZT4U course expectations.

The best way I could come up with to give my students a taste of self-directed learning was by introducing them to Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989). Through the use of self-study, action research, students could generate their own theories based on their own experiences and interests. Central to being able to generate your own theory is the ability to know your inner self which we did by examining and articulating our values and worldviews and then looking for patterns, themes and contradictions to create new questions. The framework was set as students examined self and completed action-research cycles to answer the guiding question: How can I improve [____]? and the self-direction was experienced as they determined the blank in the question, the actions to take and how they would represent the theory they created.

The most important and significant change I made was asking students instead of telling students or assuming I knew what was best. Besides telling my students I loved them, I believe the most important thing I did that was different in the last 6 years of my practice was seeking guidance from students. In the past, I would do this but only after I had tried and failed to figure something out on my own. Now it is the first thing I do on both a large and small scale and both individually and as a whole class. I constantly seek their input (simply by asking them once we have developed a trusting relationship for verbal feedback or request them to complete a PQP or

exit card), direction, and guidance whether I am trying to resolve a problem or create new opportunities or simply trying to manage the day-to-day tasks.

How Did We Embrace Democracy?

Seeking the opinion of students and asking them for solutions instead of making decisions for them was one of the most significant changes I made to my practice. One specific strategy I made use of to accomplish democracy in the classroom was daily collaboration and cooperation to determine how our time together was used. For example, I invited students to set the plans for the day, week, and year, including any trips or invited guest speakers. I specifically embraced un-grading, growth-grading, and the elimination of tests and traditional exams (the learning that was taking place in our classroom could not be measured by traditional tests and exams). As much as I would have liked to eliminate assignments completely, I found it difficult to do this and still meet school and board policies. However, I found it unfair to assign any work for grades prior to giving students an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of who they are, how they know, and what is important to them. Unfortunately, this did not always align with the reporting periods of our school. Instead, after introducing students to ideas and theories that challenged traditional schooling, I proposed several options and allowed them to decide what they would evaluate. The options were endless as students could pick from a list I generated or add their own or some sort of combination of both. Some examples of the broad topics their work addressed are: worldview, ontological values, epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics, social justice, education and learning, contradictions, and false dichotomies.

The Four Questions

Within the first week of the course I introduce my students to the four questions that evolved from my Master's research. I would ask them to answer these questions: Who am I? How do I know? So what (why does this matter)? Now what (what will I do differently in light

of this information)? I made sure they understood that there was no wrong answer (even “I don’t know” was acceptable) and that they would receive feedback on their answers but no grades. I would ask them to be sure to date their response as they could refer to their answers at the end of the course as they answered the questions again which comprised our final exam. Final marks for the course were determined by students based on criteria set by a democratic process. The criteria almost always involved “growth-grading” a term my students generated to denote an increase in their self-knowledge and their ability and confidence to clearly communicate these insights.

On Being Present

After several different trials of different strategies to connect with my students and support them in their self-directed inquiries, I found one-on-one meetings to be the most successful as well as the most challenging. It was during these meetings that I found it easy to listen wholeheartedly and ask meaningful questions. However, it was difficult to carve out time to meet individually with students when you have 35 students in a class and only a 75-minute time slot. After each class there is a 10-minute break and then I often had another class of 30 or more students and then another after the lunch break. Not only was it time consuming, it was exhausting. At times, I doubted my ability to have the spiritual stamina to maintain the one-on-one meetings and once, I even abandoned them altogether. I quickly realized the negative impact of this and reinstated the one-on-one meetings. However, I also knew that I needed to do something different if I was going to maintain this practice and that is when I learned to let go even more and trust myself and my students more fully. I came to a deeper understanding of the importance of good questions (I call them authentic questions) and that became my focus instead of trying to provide all the resources and answers.

I would suggest a resource if I could or an answer if I had one and it was requested but I

did not feel as obliged to have all the answers or know all the resources. I too had permission to say I do not know. What I could do, and what came more naturally to me, was asking questions and simply having conversations that helped my students move forward in their inquiries. All I had to do was listen to them with my whole heart and mind and I was able to ask meaningful questions. Essentially the questions were already there in their minds and sometimes even their words and actions. By asking questions in response to them, they were able to connect the dots more easily and figure out their own next steps. One thing I had to make clear was that I did not know the answers to questions I posed but I knew that they did or could figure out the answer. These, among other strategies and activities helped us to embrace flexibility, spontaneity, creativity, silence, and curiosity and to challenge the dominant discourse in education. I am not suggesting that my practice was perfect or without challenges. There were many challenges; in fact, I would say there were daily challenges. Some of the challenges that were imposed on us included school and board policies (including grading and reporting) the bell, classroom relocation, oversized classes, and students who did not want to be in the class but were placed there because it was the only class available that they were qualified to take and they needed the credit to graduate.

Another challenge that I was completely unaware of in the beginning that I attended to more and more each year was the difficulty some students had transitioning to a different learning environment. I had to constantly remind myself that not all students are or want to be self-directed learners within a public school setting. Some students need more guidance, direction and feedback while others need more freedom. Figuring out the needs of each student as early as possible in the course was essential. The best way I found (after several different attempts and varying success) was to meet with them one-on-one.

These changes in my practice also influenced the way my time outside of the classroom changed. When I attempt to answer the question: “How has love influenced me as a teacher?” I immediately visualize the multiple roles I play intertwined and interconnected. I cannot be an effective teacher if I am not able to live my values fully in the classroom and those are the very same values that guide my life outside of the classroom. Isolating those roles to examine them more closely has proven to be very difficult. The boundaries are extremely blurry and as I grow as a teacher, the boundaries become even more blurry to the point that at times they do not exist. This is when I feel I am at my best. I am more fully present and aware of all the interconnectedness in my life and the lives of the learners in my care. The actions that used to require making an effort to include as I embraced love as an explicit part of my practice were becoming habits; that is, they were part of my ontological being.

A Different Perspective

Love influenced me as a teacher in more ways than the brief account I have provided. However, the more I attempt to explain this influence, the more obscure it seems to become. Leavy (2009) writes:

Poems, surrounded by space and weighted by silence, break through the noise to present an essence. Sensory scenes created with skillfully placed words and purposeful pauses, poems push feelings to the forefront capturing heightened moments of social reality as if under a magnifying glass. (p. 63)

I make use of words and space to attempt to enable a deeper meaning to emerge. I pay particular attention to how I craft the poem and hope that my poem “can be understood as evoking a snippet of human experience that is artistically expressed as in a heightened state” (Leavy, 2009, p. 64). I turn now to poetry to offer another perspective:

He never spoke
 She never spoke her truth
 I listened to the silence
 I listened to the lies
 He spoke
 She spoke her truth
 The other he
 Remains a mystery
 I let the mystery be

This poem represents one of the daily struggles I encountered as each day I faced new challenges and obstacles and I was determined to meet them head on and optimistic enough to believe that every challenge could be met and every obstacle could be overcome. The he and the she in the poem represent many students over many years. I was often troubled by students who did not feel safe enough to express their ideas and also by students who I knew had ideas different than what they would express in public. I would fall asleep at night thinking about ways to connect with these students. I discovered that often the best thing I could do was remain patient and trust my students; however, this was not always easy to do in an institution that was fixated with time and deadlines which I represent with the short and abrupt lines. The other he, the mystery, is the students that I never connected with, the ones who “slipped through the crack.” A convenient euphemism that I too have uttered to placate the feeling of guilt associated with not having done enough.

When student A takes his own life because his spirit is crushed and he feels hopeless or student B gets intoxicated at a party and is raped or student C develops an eating disorder

because she feels unworthy or student D lashes out with brutal violence and destroys the life of another as well as his own or student E is so depressed and anxious he recedes to the confines of his bedroom for the remainder of his youth, I too lose a piece of myself, feel hopeless, unworthy, and resort to distractions to appease my guilt. The last line in the poem is an attempt to capture the inherent contradictions within the entire system and myself including the futility and hopelessness and hope. If I can accept the futility then there is hope and if I can learn to honour the mystery there is hope. This was my struggle.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude Two

Krishnamurt (1953) claims that [f]rustration is not the result of being forced by circumstances to do this or that; it arises when we do not know for ourselves what it is that we really want to do. Being confused, we get pushed around, and finally landed in something which has no appeal for us at all (p. 112). I thought I knew that I wanted to complete a PhD so I could create a place for my voice to be heard but I sometimes find it difficult to recognize my own voice let alone communicate it to others.

Writing what I did is extremely frustrating. In fact, writing in general just now is exhaustive. I wonder why this is as I usually don't mind writing. After some reflection, I think I have come to understand my frustration with writing, especially writing about what I did in the classroom. Besides being difficult to communicate something that is more dynamic, organic and responsive than a prepared lesson plan, I feel disconnected when I write. I tried imagining someone who might be reading my dissertation and write for that specific person, but honestly, that did not work and the reason I don't think it worked is because I find it difficult to imagine a teacher finding the time and desire to read dissertations in general, let alone mine. The only people I can imagine reading this are the people who have to read it in order to decide whether

or not my work is worthy of a PhD and I find it quite intimidating to write for them. My intimidation is a result of my inability to trust myself fully and the reality that academia is still a divisive space when it comes to what counts as knowledge? Where do my readers stand? Are they truly interested in my process? Do they think I have something valuable to offer? Do I stop writing this reflection now and turn to my stack of articles and books all carefully organized by theme and tagged with quotes that support my thoughts and actions? Do I need to find scholars to support what I am saying and thinking to make it valuable? Why is it that a published article carries more weight than my reflection based on over 20 years of classroom teaching experience? If I stop now I could lose the rhythm and flow (if there is any) and I will certainly lose the authentic voice I am trying to capture and if there is any energy in the space in-between my words, it too could be lost. And so I continue.

What is missing when I write is the energy that existed in the space in-between during my encounters with my students and my class as a whole. There is little or no energy between my words—just an empty space. This empty space can be filled with anything by the reader—doubt, judgment, boredom. How can I possibly communicate the feel of my life's work? The written word is not enough. In fact, I don't think my art or poetry does any better. I expend an enormous amount of time and effort trying to do something that is almost impossible. Perhaps if I were a better writer or artist I might have more success?

I don't feel the details are necessary as it is not like someone can or should replicate what I did. Yes, these are some of the things I did, but teaching is far more complex than that. I feel like I would rather be doing more being than explain what I did. How can I be in the printed word? I realize there is value in being able to name and share what you do but essentially what I have learned to do is respond to the learner in front of me—to be fully present.

The variables involved in being more present are as plentiful as the number of students I encounter multiplied by their unique experiences and my own, including the fact that I am a work in progress. Every student and every situation is unique. I try to be fully present and listen wholeheartedly. If I can do that, I can usually provide a space for students to unveil embodied knowledge and glean insights from their own thoughts, ideas, and words. Sometimes just listening and sometimes asking meaningful questions, really just echoing back their own questions, enables students to dig deeper and remain open-minded. This is a more accurate description of what I tried to do/be. However, I don't have a formula for this either. My life is being love and bringing this love into the classroom is my vocation. Krishnamurti (1953) states that

if teaching is our true vocation, we may feel temporarily frustrated because we have not seen a way out of this present educational confusion; but the moment we see and understand the implications of the right kind of education, we shall have all the necessary drive and enthusiasm. It is not a matter of will or resolution, but of perception and understanding. (p. 112)

My evolving understanding of love is providing me with the drive and enthusiasm to continue on my journey. Loving myself is the most helpful thing I can do to be prepared for loving others. This includes maintaining my own meditation practice and other contemplative activities; speaking up and speaking out; saying no and I don't know.

What influenced me the most was experiencing love in the classroom for myself, feeling valued, having a sense of belonging and being trusted—in essence, knowing I was loved. As I said earlier, I only experienced this once during a Master's course and it was a profound experience that influenced my actions and thoughts forever after. I believe I became a better

listener when I experienced being listened to. How did I know I was being listened to? You just know, you feel it in the space in-between. There is an energy, an actual chemical and physical presence that you can feel and sense. It is difficult to describe and explain but not at all difficult to recognize when you experience it. And once you experience it, you want more and the environments where this loving energy doesn't exit begin to feel empty, superficial, and in some cases draining.

Because I experienced a loving learning environment, on that one occasion and as a child growing up I knew what it felt like to be loved and to be in a loving learning environment and I knew it was possible to create one, and I also knew this was probably the best thing I could attempt to create for the learners in my care. If I could provide a space where they felt safe to be uncomfortable and challenge their own thinking, biases, and self-perceived and /or imposed limitations, and the confines of traditional education then perhaps they would graduate with some of what they needed to live more fully and to flourish. This is why I became a teacher and this is what I could be for my students.

Is important to realize that I did not do all of these things all of the time and this is only a sampling of some of the activities and ideas we used to create a loving environment and encounter. I involved my students as much as they were willing to be involved and we embraced the organic and dynamic nature of our encounters, so naturally the specifics also changed day to day, moment to moment, and class to class. My presence in the class was also constantly changing—true presence is impermanent. With each experience, both positive and negative, my unfinishedness evolved. I was not the same person who entered the room that first week in September. Nothing would please me more than to be able to say I was able to achieve all that I

intended and that I had discovered a way to gently bring love into the classroom but this would not be entirely true.

***What is my truth?** While it is true that as a result of my efforts to explicitly name love as integral to my practice I did improve my practice; however, it is equally true that my actions did not improve my life. Each time I experienced and witnessed the results of loving my students into learning, I yearned for more. For example, I witnessed first-hand how removing the pressures of grading, marking, and testing allowed students to experience more authentic learning as they became more engaged in learning for its own sake and took more responsibility for what they learned and how they learned it, but I was unable to completely eliminate grading, marking and assignments and therefore they were unable to take full responsibility for their learning. I was obligated to provide a midterm and final grade and although I became very creative at generating grades, the end result was still the same. I had to assign a number to each student which represented their ability to meet course expectations outlined by the Ministry of Education. This simple yet **power full** act could easily undermine everything we had achieved and learned, including their ability to trust and respect me. If I could not have trusting and respectful encounters with my students, which I do not think can happen when one person holds all the power, then I was unable to live fully according to my values and this made my life very difficult, so difficult that I had to leave teaching 2 years before I was eligible for full retirement. However, the fact that I am now retired and no longer under contract means I am able to speak more freely. This is both liberating and challenging.*

I do want to genuinely express my concerns but I want to do so in a way that does not harm anyone and also makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge base of educational theory. At this point, all I can do is what I set out to do in the first place—change myself. I no

longer have to think like someone under contract to “tow the party line.” I am free to think, speak, and act however I see fit. For now, that means looking back at what I have written from the perspective of a free person and critique my own thoughts, words, and actions (the reason for these interludes) and perhaps then I will unveil my truth.

Truth: Accountability interferes with authenticity. *As I stated earlier, one of my intentions was to be more authentic which meant I wanted to teach in a loving way honouring the whole student. I now recognize that even as I tried to be creatively compliant with grading, marking, testing, and assignments, the fact remains that I was still guided by accountability rather than the unique needs and interests of the learners in my care. As my students selected projects, researched, presented and shared their thoughts and ideas in talking circles and one-on-one conversations, there was always a curriculum expectations mental checklist running in the back of my mind. I would get excited when a question or comment or action allowed me to mentally check a box. I thought I was being clever finding a way around the policies and expectations that I believed stifled learning and hurt students but all I was really doing was deceiving my students and chances are I did not even do that very well.*

Students are much better at the game of schooling than we realize Holt (1989). They likely knew even as I did not that this was still a checklist game. If I did not deceive my students then what did my actions reveal? Kohn (2005), writing about unconditional teaching, states that “[a] diminution in what we value, then may affect whom we value” (p. 20). If I was valuing my students’ ability to enable me to check more boxes, then I was not loving them fully. The fact that I had a mental checklist means I was not fully present and I was not listening wholeheartedly or appreciating and valuing what they said or did just for its own sake but also how it enabled me to check more boxes. This realization makes me feel physically ill. Did my students think I valued

my mental checklist more than them? Is it possible that at some subconscious level I might have? Did my ego get in the way? Was I more concerned about my ability to find creative solutions than I was about the human life in front of me? Did my students feel less valued? Kohn (2005) claims that “regardless of the criteria we happen to be using, or the number of students who meet those criteria, every student gets the same message that our acceptance is never a sure thing. They learn that their worth hinges on their performance” (p. 20). Is this how my students felt?

I have always been concerned about the well-being of my students from a holistic perspective; that is, their mental, emotional, and spiritual development was important to me, and in most cases, more important than their intellectual development. Kohn (2005) referencing psychological researchers and theorists, argues that “the best predictor of mental health may not be one’s level of self-esteem but the extent to which it fluctuates” and that the real problem is when self-esteem is “too contingent” (p. 201). This is extremely disturbing to me because I know that in spite of my limitations and the limitations imposed on me, I did have some meaningful encounters with my students. Is it possible that I could have done more harm than good if all I did was contribute to a fluctuating self-esteem? Were my students better off before I introduced them to ideas that challenged traditional schooling and the status-quo because doing so within a public institution required they had to leave my class after seventy-five minutes and attend one that was more traditional? Did they believe they were only valued in certain situations under certain conditions? Did they, as Kohn (2005) asserts, “come to disown parts of themselves that aren’t valued” (p. 20)? What did this do to their sense of worthiness? Were my subversive actions contributing to the increase of anxiety and depression in my students? Did I somehow know this and that is why I retired early? These questions are very disturbing and while I could easily decide at this moment to change the topic of my dissertation, I think that I can make a

significant contribution by making the process of my realizations explicit and public and so I continue and I ask myself: what other truths lay just beneath the surface?

Truth: Choice is an illusion within public schooling. *Another claim that I made was that by encouraging my students to choose what they wanted to learn, how they wanted to learn it, I was providing a more relevant learning environment. However, I now realize there is a serious problem with this statement. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the definition of choice (noun) is: “the act of choosing; the act of picking or deciding between two or more possibilities; the opportunity or power to make a decision.” Given this definition, it is true that my students did have the opportunity to exercise choice as they made selections from various options. Since I was teaching philosophy, it was not very difficult to justify almost any topic that my students selected.*

Again, I allowed my ego to distract me as I took great pride in being creative in making the curriculum expectations align with their unique interests. When they were doubtful about something they were interested in being relevant to the course curriculum I would assure them that I could make it fit. I would tell them that I wasn’t spending hours creating tests and marking papers or generating and revising lesson plans so I could spend time finding creative ways to demonstrate how and what they were learning met the Ministry of Education curriculum expectations. I took pride in the fact that in over 6 years I had never been stumped by a request.

Perhaps if I was less focused on my challenges and accomplishments, I might have realized that my students could never really have the power to choose since they did not have the choice not to choose. Learning in my classroom was imposed just like the requirement to attend school. I wonder how many students would attend school if it was not mandated by the government and an expectation of their parents and/or caregivers. I suspect there would be some

students who prefer not to have complete freedom of choice as they might find the decision too daunting and simply prefer be told what to do; however, even this is difficult to anticipate as students who have never experienced true freedom may not be able to imagine what freedom really feels like. If I was really going to give students choice then I should begin by giving them the opportunity to choose whether or not to complete assignments and ultimately whether or not to attend class at all. This would be real, democratic choice. Anything less than this is simply perpetuating an illusion of choice.

Chapter 6: How Did Love Influence Me as a Researcher?

Researching love from multiple perspectives was an intentional act so that I might gain a richer understanding of the dynamic and complex role of love in my life. I claim that I try to live and teach holistically and as such, it is essential for me to understand whether or not love has influenced me beyond my actions in the classroom as a practicing teacher. As I live and work holistically, I believe I have a responsibility to myself and to others to be as aware as possible of the influences my actions have on my various roles and on those who I interact with in my life. Exploring love from the perspective of a researcher enhanced my understanding of those influences and also helped me to make my biases and prejudices explicit so that I can produce a reliable and truthful narrative. I began the process by returning to my journals.

Mining my data for evidence of how love has influenced me as a researcher, revealed three main themes: awareness, authenticity, and action. As I read various journal entries, I placed a sticky note on all of the entries that had anything to do with how and what I researched. I then re-read each of the entries (there were over 200 in total) and tried to identify the key idea in the passage. I recognized that most of the journal entries had something to do with an enhanced understanding of existing or new information, I decided to call this awareness; or a change in how I acted and/or responded in a way that was improving my ability to live more fully according to my value of love, I called this authenticity; or had something to do with general changes in my behaviour, I called this action. However the situations where I identified these themes did not occur in any particular order and rarely existed in isolation. Sometimes it was my action that influenced my awareness and sometimes it was authenticity that influenced my action and every other imaginable combination of the three themes also exists. Additionally, these themes also emerged in how love has influenced me as a teacher and learner and I realized that

sometimes it was action in teaching or learning that influenced awareness in research and again every other imaginable combination within the three themes exists within the three roles. I had identified these themes in each role supported by examples and made a sticky note for each one and laid them out on the table. Next, I began rearranging them as I tried to identify a pattern or specific process. What I discovered was that although these bits of data were single episodes and I was able to identify them in isolation, they did not actually occur in isolation but neither was there a pattern or a specific process that I could identify. What I came to understand more deeply was the interconnectedness and the interdependence of the three roles and the interconnectedness and interdependence of the themes within the individual roles and also holistically.

It may be helpful here to consider the painting I referred to earlier (see Figure 4). Each spiral represents a specific role (teacher, learner, researcher) and within each spiral many themes exist and while some of the themes may only exist in one or two of the spirals, many exist in all of the spirals. One specific example is the occurrence of authenticity, awareness and action in each of the roles of my inquiry. Obviously, there are other roles in my life (mother, wife, daughter, friend, grandmother, citizen, and so on) and many, if not all of them, influence each other but I am only writing about my role as a teacher, learner, and researcher at the moment and I will elaborate more on this later.

Researching With My Values

Once I became aware of my purpose to include love as a significant part of my practice, my role as a researcher changed. Instead of trying to keep myself informed about the latest theories of education, the Ontario Ministry of Education's new policies, and my schoolboard's goals, priorities, and strategic plans, I focused on the things that aligned more fully with my purpose to be a loving teacher. One specific example was the K-12 School Effectiveness

Framework (Appendix D) that was introduced in 2013 by the Ministry of Education and filtered down to me through the Board. I reviewed the document in light of what I was trying to do with my students and looked for policy that supported our goals and actions. In the past, in an attempt to be a “good” teacher, I would have reviewed this document and tried to implement anything I was not currently doing, which usually meant doing to students instead of doing with and/or for students. I viewed my practice from a deficit model instead of an abundance model. Once my awareness changed, so did my actions. Here too is an example of how my desire to be more authentic changed. By considering research from the perspective of how it supported my values and purpose (which included recognizing the values and purposes my students identified), I was being more authentic (living more fully according to my values) instead of trying to be the “good” teacher.

BARN Is Born

The second illustration I provide is one of the first examples of how love influenced me as a researcher but it is also something that continues to thrive today and into the future. Shortly after earning a Master’s degree and generating my own living theory, I along with another of the participants in my Master’s cohort (Cathy Griffin) received an invitation to co-write a paper with our Master’s supervisor (Jackie Delong) and the founder of Living Educational Theory (Jack Whitehead). This paper was accepted for presentation at AERA (San Francisco, 2013) and all of us were able to attend and present. This was the first large academic conference Cathy and I had attended and we were both excited and anxious. It was very energizing to be with so many people who were passionate about learning and dedicated to improving education. In addition, we encountered many people who were genuinely interested in what we had to say as practicing teachers and researchers.

Cathy and I were both humbled and grateful as well as angered by the injustice of our teacher training that did not make room for ideas that challenge the status quo. We felt so fortunate and privileged and wanted desperately to share our experience with other teachers as we knew that others, passionate and dedicated educators, were suffering injustices too. West (2008) states:

Hope is inseparable from despair. Those of us who truly hope make despair a constant companion whom we outwrestle every day owing to our commitment to justice, love and hope. It is impossible to look honestly at our catastrophic conditions and not have some despair—it is a healthy sign of how deeply we care. It is also a mark of maturity—a rejection of American optimism. (p. 217)

We were eager to share our journey as we lived our values of love, justice, and hope so others might realize the value of their embodied knowledge and have an opportunity to have their voice heard. We were walking down the street as we moved from one workshop to another engaged in a lively discussion about how we might do this which eventually led to the idea of starting a research group and the first seed for Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN) was planted.

Creating a Collaborative Community—BARN

We met in person and in cyberspace, via Skype, as we brainstormed our vision and identified the major principles that would inform BARN. Although Cathy and I are two very different people in many ways, we shared some common values and understandings and one of the non-negotiable requirements that we were both adamant about is that members participated on a voluntary basis only. We were not at all interested in delivering any mandatory professional development and we needed as much freedom and flexibility as possible so that what we modelled (the space we created) would be something that could easily be transferred to a

classroom setting in a way that would provide self-directed and holistic opportunities for students. We did not make transferability a goal or a requirement for researchers, we simply hoped it would be one of many possibilities. We submitted an application via our Board for funding through the Teacher Learner and Leadership Program (TLLP) and Provincial Knowledge Exchange (PKE) program and we were successful.

Our work with BARN was featured in TVO Teach Ontario and after interviewing Cathy and I, the author wrote:

The BARN process begins with a full day group meeting of the teachers participating in the project. “We started off asking people to identify their values in their personal and professional lives and their concerns in their own practice,” Griffin reports. “For the most part, people came up with a huge list.” Participants are encouraged to focus on one thing they want to improve upon. They spend the balance of the day creating an action plan and referring to external research as needed. The focus is on teachers using their personal knowledge of context, students, and self, to generate and test their own theories. After Day One, participants go back to their schools and take action. They work on changing their practice and are encouraged to collect and record data in the form of reflections, critical conversations, student work and video of their practice before the next meeting.

Each teacher’s process is self-directed and self-determined, but includes identifying personal values and concerns about their own practice, planning corrective actions, reporting back to the group on the outcome of those actions and inviting others to critique their work. Educators involved in the project spend four full days meeting with the group and dedicate one personal research and writing day sometime between those meetings. (Teach Ontario Team, 2016, paras. 5-6)

Sustainability of BARN

Our first year surpassed our expectations and we continued to apply for and receive funding every year since then. In 2016, Cathy became a vice-principal; I retired in 2017, but BARN continues to grow. The first year we were honoured to have Jackie Delong co-facilitate BARN with us and following our first year, we invited previous participants to co-facilitate. Sustainability was important to us and we were eager to create an opportunity for BARN participants to become leaders and share in the excitement and energy of having a positive influence as well as secure the future of BARN. To this end, we experienced great success as BARN is still running today due to the commitment of former participants Krystal Damn, Kelly McDougall, and Penny Phillips. We were also very fortunate to have Jack Whitehead as a guest (via Skype or in person) every year.

Publicly Sharing Our Work

One of the requirements of the funding allocation was that we share our findings, which is also one of the few requirements of participation in BARN. How individual participants did this was optional and the facilitators organized a symposium every year as one possible way to share the research. Almost all of the participants opted to participate in the symposium and in addition to that continued to share their work in different ways. Since the inauguration of BARN, facilitators and BARN participants, together and individually, shared our experiences as we presented at academic conferences, delivered optional professional development within our home schools and Board wide, offered one-on-one mentoring to interested teachers, presented at Ministry of Education workshops, academic conferences, Ontario Teachers' Federation conferences, and co-written papers.

We have video-taped and made available to the public much of this work and have posted links to the research findings which you will find on the Teach Ontario website. Also available to

the public via the Teach Ontario site is access to an e-book (see Figure 5) we created and published which includes an explanation and description of BARN, biographies of participants from that year, and links to their research findings. In 2017, we created a BARN Living Poster so we could share our work and links to our videos publicly (see Figure 6). As previously mentioned, our work was featured in 2016 on the TVO Teach Ontario website.¹

Meaningful Research

In the last paragraph of the TVO interview, the author writes: “Campbell and Griffin say their practice is more meaningful and continues to be inspired by the dedication and insights of BARN participants and their fellow co-facilitators” (Teach Ontario Team, 2016, Outcomes section, para. 8). This is definitely an accurate statement but it really does not capture the beauty and energy that gave more meaning to my practice and my life. BARN was created because Cathy and I had a desire to share our experiences with the hope that something would resonate with others and allow them to improve their practice based on their own values and experiences.

¹ The full document is available at:

<https://www.teachontario.ca/community/explore/teachontario-talks/blog/2016/05/09/values-reflection-drive-teacher-development-in-bluewater-action-research-network>

On this page, you can also follow a link to an example of how BARN was profiled on an international scale by Jack Whitehead (see Figure 7).



Bluewater Action Research Network 2013-14

2014-15 Facilitators: Cathy Griffin, Liz Campbell, Bradley Clarke, Krystal Damm, Melissa Juniper
Funded by Ontario Ministry of Education through the Teacher Leadership Learning Project

BLUE TEXT IS HYPERLINKED

(1) our process

invitational, self-directed, self determined, identification of personal values and concerns about my own practice, plan action, take action, reflect, use video to reflect on practice, invite critical friends and validators to bring out embodied knowledge, to question and to probe deeper... repeat... set a deadline to sharing findings publicly... but... it never ends...

quick facts for 2013-14

16 Practitioners: ECE, elementary, secondary, administration

4 full day meetings Dec 2013 - April 2014

1 personal research/writing days

Sharing Symposium May 12, 2014

Consultant [Jackie DeLong](#)

[Meeting Agendas for BARN 2013-14](#)

[Public Sharing Archive](#) 2013-14 on Mentoring Moments Ning



[Liz Campbell on BARN](#)



[our process](#): participant voices

"I really enjoyed sharing this journey with others. Knowing that others were reflecting, recording, and exploring alongside me, motivated me to continue and push myself."

"This project has shown me the real power of invitational, self-determined, self-directed professional development for teachers."

"This project allowed me to step back and take a look at my practise with ongoing support and feedback. I found myself reflecting on my practise each and every day. It was through this reflection that change began to happen."



Cathy Griffin, Jackie DeLong, Liz Campbell

Authors: Campbell, E., Clarke, B., Damm, K., Griffin, C., Juniper, M.

Figure 5. E-book.

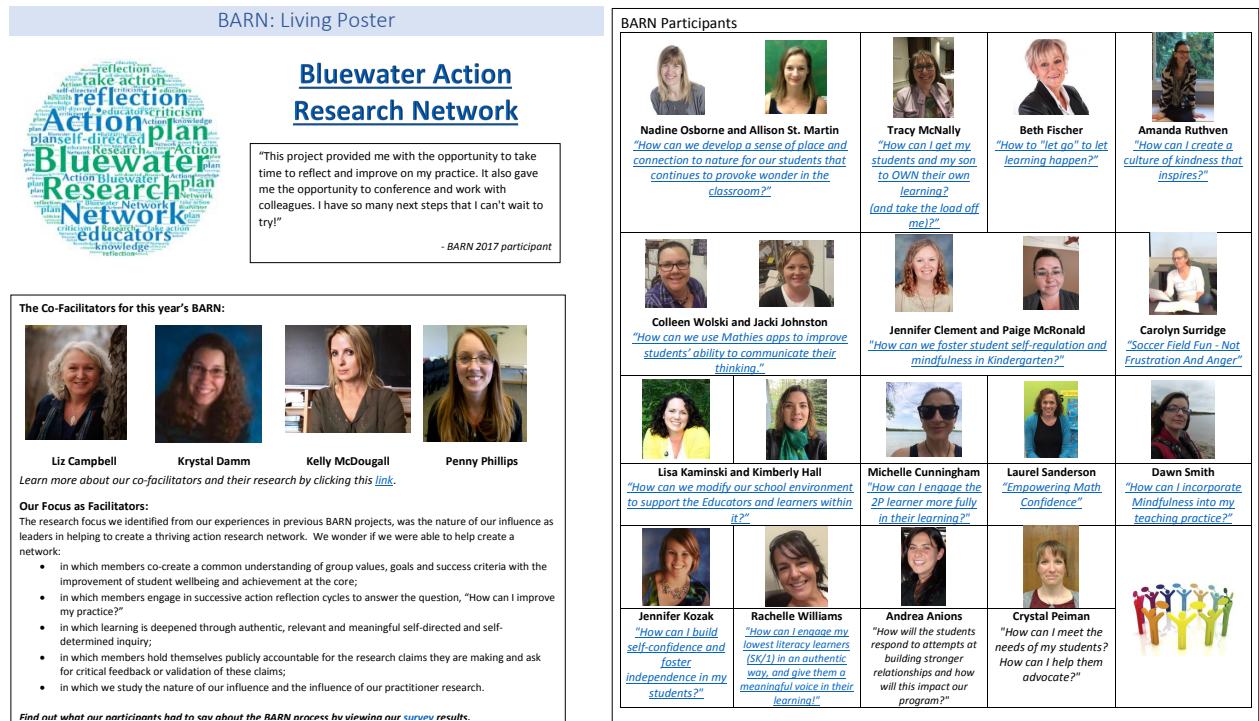


Figure 6. Living poster.

Bluewater Action Research Network In An International Context

A presentation by Jack Whitehead of the University of Cumbria, UK, to the Bluewater Action Research Network Symposium on Sharing Our Knowledge on the 8th April 2016 at the Central Office, North Chesley, Ontario, Canada.

13:35 minute video introduction at:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r_BNblVQL4

Abstract

The presentation begins by placing the Bluewater Action Research Network (BARN) in the International Context of the Town Hall Meeting of the Action Research Network (ARNA) of the Americas Conference in Toronto on the 8th May 2015. The Meeting included the living-poster of BARN, presented in the Town Hall meeting convened by Jacqueline Delong (2015). The living-posters at <http://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage061115.pdf> direct attention to Living Theory research in the generation and sharing of individuals' explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings.

The presentations in this Symposium, with their foci on I and/or we, are then contrasted with the titles of contributors to a 2016 text on Academic Autoethnographies from international contexts. The contrast includes an autoethnographic focus on cultural influences in using insights from the methodologies of Autoethnography, Narrative Research, Self-study Research and Action Research in the creation of the living-methodologies and theories of members of BARN.

The conclusion is in the form of an advocacy for the creation of partnerships between Universities and professional accrediting agencies to offer degrees that recognize the embodied knowledge of master and doctor educators that can enhance the influence of BARN as a social movement in an international context.

Figure 7. Whitehead link.

I was committed to this endeavour because I believe like Allender and Allender (2008) that the embodied knowledge and experiences of classroom teachers is often minimized and/or trivialized in favour of academic research:

The belief that educational research trumps practice, historically and still, is one of the major obstacles. The results of scholarly inquiry have managed to become the top of a top down world. The not-so subtle message is that there is a better way to teach and teachers ought to change their practices accordingly. And, teachers have a way of willingly participating in this system when they persist in searching for the new trick to quickly and magically make their teaching easier. Progress depends on giving up the hegemony of scholarly inquiry. Knowledge has many sources, and they are best honoured when they are part of a lively dialectic. The obvious shift is for teachers to give themselves credit for having an expertise that is uniquely valuable to themselves and others. (pp. 127-128)

There is no trick or magic when it comes to interacting with others and yet I, like many teachers, spent an inordinate amount of time and energy looking elsewhere for answers that were right in front of me (my students) and inside of me (my experiences, values, and embodied knowledge). Generating my own living educational theory provided a process for getting on the inside of that knowledge and understanding, which gave me the courage and confidence to look inward, outward, backward, and forward while imagining other possibilities. I realized that it was my inability to teach according to my values; that is, to teach in a loving way, that was causing my angst. I recognized that the systemic barriers within the institution of public schooling (for example: mandated professional development, testing, grading, fixed schedules, mandatory attendance, imposed curriculum, and other policies and procedures) were causing me to feel oppressed and prevented me from recognizing and valuing my own voice and living out my values. I also knew there were dedicated and passionate teachers who were suffering (like I was)

with self-doubt and spiritual fatigue, among other things, and I was literally physically ill thinking about the suffering of students and my peers. My love for self, others, and my practice inspired and called me to share my experience with other teachers but this was only the beginning. This is why we needed BARN.

Unlike other professional development, BARN was and still is optional. Participation is by choice and the learning is self-determined. The only requirement is the necessity to share findings. Researchers often begin with questions related to curriculum or improving student performance but almost always end up with a question that reflects how they can change something about self. As individuals that is all we can really hope to do and when you work with a group of individuals on a similar journey who all work within a particular institution then there is a possibility that collectively we can affect change at a systemic level. However, the goal is simply to gain a deeper understanding of self. Krishnamurti (1953) states that

only a profound inward revolution which alters all our values can create a different environment, an intelligent social structure, and such a revolution can be brought about only by you and me. No new order will arrive until we individually breakdown our own psychological barriers and are free. (p. 52)

BARN is an opportunity for participants to make time to reflect and collaborate. Some of the participants do examine psychological barriers, barriers that are self-imposed and often a direct result of the systemic barriers that are an inherent part of the oppressive system of public schooling.

How BARN Gave Me Hope

I was teaching full-time, a new grandmother, married to a shift worker, and completing a PhD; it would have been easy for me to say I did not have time to do BARN. It was one more thing on a plate that was full. At times, I would reprimand myself for not focusing on my PhD or spending more time with my family, especially my grandchildren, but what I am aware of now is

that I was living my living educational theory. I was looking after me, loving me, and in doing so I was able to be more present for others when I was with them. I became involved with BARN because I thought I had something to share which I still believe, but I also had something to learn and the participants in BARN loved me into learning and how love influenced me is the main topic of my dissertation so I was working on my PhD.

I learned that there is hope for the future of public education and as difficult and time consuming as it seems to be when involved in something at the grassroots level, it is actually quite liberating and energizing to live more fully according to your values. The systemic barriers seemed overwhelming at times and I know this contributed to my sense of helplessness. I felt frustrated when I was told how to respond to a controversial situation like the threat of a work-to-rule action or the implementation of a failed electronic literacy test. I also felt undermined when I was given non-negotiable, specific instructions on how to implement late, absence, cell phone usage, dress code, late assignment, computer use, emergency plan, lunch room, and washroom visit policies and procedures. My sense of hopelessness escalated during staff meetings when we were discouraged from asking questions that diverted us from covering the pre-set meeting agenda. We created BARN because we knew others also felt hopeless and frustrated and had something valuable to contribute that was not being heard anywhere else. We wanted to provide an opportunity for educators to ask those burning questions and openly voice their concerns and pose questions without the fear of reprimand, public humiliation, or judgement.

Cathy and I created the space for BARN to be born but it was the participants who held that space open and allowed us to return year after and to collectively flourish. Without their willingness to trust, to be vulnerable, to take risks, to share, and to question, my theory would simply have been words on a page. They gave my theory life; they put breath in my words and spirit in our collective growth. I felt, and still do feel, a great sense of interconnectedness and

interdependence with my colleagues. Together we struggled to examine our values, identify contradictions, imagine possibilities, put our ideas into action and reflect on our actions and begin the cycle again. None of this would have been possible if we did not trust and respect each other and believe that it was possible to do things differently; to be better human beings.

We put “I” at the centre of our practice and invited each other to openly critique that “I” as we asked “How can I improve ...?” (Whitehead, 1989). My “I” in a loving environment soon took on a different relationship with self and others as I started to see I as “i~we” which was inspired by the South African concept of Ubuntu, “I am because we are and we are because I am” (Whitehead & Huxtable, 2015). I extend the notion of Ubuntu to I am because we are becoming and we are because I am becoming, which is reflected in the relational dynamics between me and my colleagues. In the space in between the I and the we, i.e., the “~” is an open, flexible, and sacred space where there is no room for hierarchy, judgement, and fragmentation. It is a space where it is safe to become, to grow, and to awaken, if need be, and nourish our spirit. When I can acknowledge that I am becoming, and I need the other for my “I” to even exist, there is room for spiritual growth. My love brought me to BARN, but it was the acceptance of my love and the space for my love and spirit to grow and be nourished by the other that allows me to have hope and to continue on my journey of authenticity; that is, of living more fully according to my values of becoming.

BARN Summary

As I stated earlier, BARN surpassed our expectations, which is an example of what is possible when you provide a space, place, and time for learners to determine their own learning journey. Each of the participants, as well as the facilitators, came to BARN for various reasons but those reasons had several things in common including a desire to be better humans, a desire

to improve practice, and a sense that it was time for something different to overcome feelings of failure, frustration and fear. From the first day of our BARN sessions and every day thereafter, we sought constant feedback (informal and formal) from our participants to ensure we were responding to their needs and interests and not simply our own ideas and interests. Based on that feedback and our own observations we were inspired to continue to apply for funding for BARN and to make every effort to honour the needs and interests of the learners in our care.

We continued to be rejuvenated by the energy and spirit of the participants as they openly shared their deepest concerns, challenges and insights. Participants were keen to share because they appreciated the efforts made on their behalf to create a time to examine and reflect on their practice and their life. One of the prevailing themes in the collective voice was that they rarely had time to reflect and/or collaborate and they knew instinctively that slowing down and thinking about what they did and why they did it was crucial to improving their situations. Furthermore, they came to understand that their voice was valued in BARN which was a significant contribution to the sense of community that evolved in BARN sessions. As each individual openly shared their research questions, process, and findings, others benefitted as well as the individual researcher. In the end, most of the participants discovered that although they often felt powerless in their individual situations, they were empowered when they focused on changing self. Their willingness to openly share this with others inspired others to have the courage to face their fears and honestly reflect. The process eventually took on a life of its own as the more people shared, the more they were inspired, and the more they were inspired, the more they wanted to share—a sustainable cycle of learning.

The participants in BARN ranged from new educators to veteran educators, junior kindergarten to grade 12 educational assistants, teachers, teaching assistants, and lead teachers

(student success, alternative programs, area resource and curriculum lead) responsible for whole grades (some split-level classes), specific subjects at the high school level including English, math, history, social sciences, drama, art, music, resource, and business and technology studies and what we all learned was that regardless of our diverse roles, we could learn with and from one another. In fact, the diversity within the group enhanced the learning as we recognized the value of having a diverse group of learners that can transcend the boundaries of experience, subject area, and responsibilities. We learned that there is hope for change when the desired change is focused on internal instead of external knowledge and behaviour. The hope arises from the fact that we can make a difference individually and collectively when we live the change we want to see. For a full list of the questions and topics that informed BARN participants, see Appendix E.

I agree with Illich (2002) who claims that “most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction” (p. 12) which is precisely what I witnessed in the BARN sessions. Illich asserts that learners of all ages “should be able to meet around a problem chosen and defined by their own initiative ... in a network or service which g[ives] each man the same opportunity to share his current concern with others motivated by the same concern” (p. 19). This radical alternative to schooling accurately describes what unfolded during BARN sessions, which became a radical alternative to professional development.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude Three

BARN was a place where I could be more authentic and I could live out my values of love, joy, and hope more fully. My attempts to introduce self-determined action research in the classroom were limited primarily because students were not there by choice. The participants in

BARN chose to attend and as free agents within that environment they had autonomy. My experience of being loved into learning occurred in a similar situation. I chose to complete the courses for a Master's degree and I did so of my own free will for no other reason than I wanted to learn from someone who had some expertise in an area that interested me. The experience was enhanced when I found someone to guide me (Jackie Delong) in a safe place as I embraced my vulnerabilities and awakened my creativity. O'Donohue (2004b) writes "When we discover our creativity, we begin to attend to this constant emergence of who we are. Our creativity is excited by what is new, different and concealed within us" (p. 143). In this space I was able to live the change I wanted to see and extending this experience to the participants in BARN was an opportunity for me to continue living this way while providing a space for others to do the same. In hindsight, I see that facilitating BARN gave me hope for the future as I witnessed myself and others changing ourselves. This is all we can actually control and in doing so possibly influence those we encounter.

Passing the Torch

Another example of how love has influenced my actions as a researcher comes from an informal comment made to me by a colleague who, after 10 years, was still in search of a permanent teaching position. In a casual conversation, she told me she had picked up a part-time contract at our school and was assigned a course that was part of my assignment the previous semester. I had, and still have, an amicable relationship with this colleague (which I cannot say was true about all of my relationships with colleagues) and I know she valued and respected my teaching style and teaching philosophy. When she was fortunate enough to secure any work at our school we often had very animated discussions about what was wrong with public education and what each of us was doing to try and address some of these wrongs. She had some very

interesting and diverse experiences as she was tossed around from school to school within our district filling temporary assignments until she could secure permanent employment. I valued her broad perspective of the social and contextual norms within our district and I also respected her teaching style and philosophy. Our reciprocal trust and respect provided the safe space for us to share ideas, concerns, and questions. She told me she heard we were doing some different and meaningful things in class and then followed it up with but I bet you did not write anything down. We both laughed. She knew me well and she was accurate. I did not write much down at all for a variety of reasons.

One reason for this is I did not follow any specific curriculum but tried to build a course around the interest and self-identified needs of the students in front of me and I found that this is rarely the same class to class or year to year so I did not see the value in keeping an accurate account of what we did, nor did I see the value in spending valuable time preparing lesson plans that would quickly become irrelevant. I could certainly provide a lesson plan, or more accurately a learning record, at the end of a class but what was the point in that for me or anyone else as what we did on a particular day might only be valuable on that given day. I did keep detailed journals, but this was not something I could or would pass on to anyone else. My colleague's comment caused me to reconsider. If there are other teachers who are interested in what is going on in our class then perhaps I should be making an effort to create something that could be shared not so it could be replicated but so others could have a more accurate idea of how what we did was different. If I love my colleague, which I claim I do just like I love my students, then I would be remiss not to give her comment serious consideration. Consequently, I began to keep more accurate but generic records of what we did and why. For example, I kept a list of the videos we watched (many selected by students) and would make some brief notes about why the

video was selected and how we used it in the classroom. Anytime I photocopied something for my students (either something I came across that I thought would be of interest to them or something they came across that they wanted to share with the class) I made an extra copy for the records binder as I came to call it. That was 5 years ago and as it turns out, I am very grateful for the comment from my colleague.

Fast forward to August 2017 when I decided to retire early. I will explain this in more detail when I write about how love influenced me as a learner. The point I want to make here is that I made the decision in mid-August and two days later I submitted the official paperwork and shortly after that my replacement was hired. The only thing left to do was clean out my office and classroom which was a time consuming and emotionally fraught task I was not looking forward to completing. Ironically, it was my colleague who made the comment to me about writing things down who was hired to replace me. I was very pleased that she had secured permanent work and felt much calmer knowing my students would have a teacher who was willing to take risks and be vulnerable. She contacted me immediately and we arranged to meet at the school.

She arrived with pen and notebook in hand and proceeded to ask questions and take notes. In the end, I think she had more questions recorded than anything else which I believe is a good thing. As I was giving examples of one thing or another, I often referred to the “records binder.” I told her the binders (there were several now) only existed because of the casual comment she made to me years earlier. I asked her if she would like me to leave anything for her and she replied enthusiastically that she would take everything. I was very moved by her response; she was eager to forage through my archives and to learn. This made me feel valued, appreciated, and hopeful which was not always the case in my career so I certainly appreciated it

as I moved into the next phase of my life. Prior to being influenced by love as a researcher, I might have kept a very different binder, a more prescriptive account. I did not know it was my colleague that I would pass the binders on to and I did not know if the person replacing me would even want anything from me before I left, but it did not matter to me. I was able to let that go because I had learned to love myself, in all my roles, more fully and I did not need the approval of others to validate that I had a meaningful experience (at least more often than in the past). The encounters with the learners in my care were more than enough for me. That does not mean that I did not appreciate my colleague's enthusiasm; I certainly did and if I were more Zen like perhaps I would have a more spiritual response but I am a work in progress with a long way to go and I am okay with me in this moment.

Chapter 7: How Did Love Influence Me as a Learner?

Background

In 1997, I received my first permanent teaching contract. Prior to that, I was a “stay at home” mom for 11 years. Those were some of the best years of my life and I can recall them now with great fondness. Our life was simple and rich (although we did not have much money at all). I was and still am blessed with three beautiful, gifted children and a very supportive partner. My children were and still are all very different and each of them as grown into their unique gifts as they continue to flourish. Even though they are quite unique, they share the ability to live and love wholeheartedly (Brown, 2010).

The year I started teaching full-time is a bit of a blur to me now. I do not think I would have survived the year without the physical, emotional, and psychological support and commitment of my husband and mother. September and October flew by and all of a sudden I found myself in the first week of December without any inclination of what to do about Christmas. Usually, I spent a lot of time thinking, planning, and sourcing out a thoughtful gift for each of my children. It was readily apparent that this was not going to be an option for the upcoming Christmas. I recall, like it was yesterday, the day I asked them for some help. My eldest son told me just to buy whatever I wanted as I always picked the best gifts. My daughter asked for a doll she had seen on television, and my youngest son said he had no idea. For several years he had indicated he would like a Nintendo (a game box) but that was always out of our price range and I was not a big fan of them at the time. When I suggested the game box to him, he said “no thanks, all of my friends have one and that’s what we do when we are at their house.”

In the past, I would make the 3-hour drive to Toronto and spend the weekend tracking down the gifts I had planned but there was no time for a trip to Toronto that year. I headed to

Owen Sound, a half-hour drive, to the nearest little mall, secured a shopping cart, and wandered aimlessly up and down the toy aisles looking for something that would pique their interest and maybe, just maybe, ignite that spark in their eyes that I witnessed so often and treasured so much. I do not recall what I purchased but I do recall that they seemed interested in the gifts they received and they enjoyed them for a few days, but there was definitely no spark in the gift giving that Christmas. The one-size fits all toy did not fit my children.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude Four

To the brook and back. I go to the kitchen to make myself a fresh cup of chai tea. I am home alone as my husband (Leo) is back in Ontario doing some contract work (that was all part of the grand plan). As I wait for the kettle to boil, I stare out the window and into the woods where Leo has started cutting a trail to the brook. I recall my walk to the brook the day before and I feel transported just thinking about it. It is only a 10 minute walk to the brook but it felt like an eternity. It was so peaceful and tranquil. I felt a strange connection to my husband even though he is over a thousand miles away. I could see the results of his labour as he carved a path into the next phase of our life together.

As I walked the path, I stopped and looked into the woods on either side of me, ahead of me and behind me, imagining what he saw and heard. I see some paw prints of the bobcat my neighbours told me they saw lurking by the shed and for some reason the idea of an unexpected encounter with a bobcat does not arouse any fear in me. I take a picture to share with my husband. I continue on to the brook and suddenly the silence is pierced by the sound of rushing water but it is not an intrusive sound; I am the intruder. I walk a few more yards up the slight incline and then I see it; a large spruce has fallen directly across the path blocking the way to the brook. I stop for a moment to assess the situation. I can hear the brook beckoning but the tree

is too high to climb over and the footing is slippery and deceiving as thin layers of ice cover ruts and uneven ground. No one knows I have come for a walk; if I slip and fall I could be there for days before someone discovers me. I should turn around, retreat. I am in no rush; I stand still. After a few moments, I realize I have several options and only one involves retreating. I can go over, under, around to the left, around to the right, or stay right here for a while. I decide to go right and if it proves too difficult I will try left. Slowly and carefully with great attention to my footing, I duck under and weave my way around protruding branches, stumps, and ruts, mindful of the ice hidden beneath the thin layer of new snow. I reach out and firmly grasp the offending branches that also offer stability and balance as I make my way back onto the path, and in a few more yards I arrive at the brook.

I am brought back to the present moment as the kettle reaches a boil. I make my tea. I decide to sit for a moment and savour it before it gets too cold to drink. I think about the piece I have just written about Christmas shopping over 20 years ago and in the time it takes to enjoy two sips of my tea, I think of a hundred other things I could have done that Christmas and I wonder why I did not have these ideas at the time. Ah, time, time to think, to reflect, to imagine other possibilities. There never seemed to be enough time to slow down and savour the moment.

My Spiritual Death

Many times during my teaching career I also felt the same detachment and dullness that I felt the day I succumbed to Christmas shopping in the mall. Peterson (1999) writes

one does not have to walk long in the hallways of schools to see that something is very wrong. We search in our students for the passion and enthusiasm for learning that they possessed before entering school. Instead, we find idle bystanders content to remain distant from formal instruction and from their hearts. Too often they remain dazed,

passive consumers window shopping the mall of education. Education becomes something to get through with a grade or a degree rather than a clearing for deep experience. A common malady of education today is the familiar emptiness found in the experiences of both teachers and students. (p. 9)

The mall of education proved to be as disappointing as Christmas shopping at a retail mall but this was the path I chose. This was also the beginning of my spiritual death. West (2008) prophesizes that “if you live long enough, a moment of spiritual death is inevitable. The question is: How will you wrestle with it?” (p. 197). I rarely felt any connection to anything or anyone as I wandered aimlessly navigating the crowded spaces and mandates of public schooling, trying out one-size-fits-all strategies and theories, yearning to see the spark in my students’ eyes. Rushing from task to task, class to class, and meeting to meeting, there was little chance of hearing the distant sounds of running water, and here I also felt like an intruder, an unwelcome one. I know there were some branches I could have leaned on, even if they appeared offensive, but I could not reach out. I could not imagine a way to negotiate the tensions and co-exist with the paradoxes rife in public education. Like many students who cannot engage, I retreated, complied, and immersed myself in mastering what I was told to do so I could at least have the satisfaction of being a “good” teacher according to policy.

After several years of this masquerade, and having my instincts about killing curiosity (Robinson, 2006) and crushing souls validated, I began to take more risks in my classroom; I acquired a new expertise: “flying below the radar.” This was satisfying for a while and there were times when I allowed myself a moment to think about what learning should feel like and look like. I would placate myself, like many other teachers, with the idea that if I could reach one student, see the spark in one student’s eyes, then my journey was purpose full. I concur with West (2008) that “sometimes we just fall in love with lies” (p. 22). Often, I felt very fortunate

and inspired as I had many positive and wonderful experiences in my classrooms and in my encounters with students but it soon became apparent to me that it was not often enough, there were too many un-truths, and I was exhausted from the extra effort it took to “fly below the radar.” Although I was sometimes creating a space for my students to have a voice, I was insisting that they whisper; worse yet, I was teaching them to be cowards and to be deceitful (the ideal environment for shame and guilt to thrive). I wanted to soar unrestricted and I wanted to create a space for my students to soar; a space where we could re-awaken our spirituality and better yet, a place where our spiritual well-being could flourish, but there was a very large tree blocking our path and I did not have the courage, wisdom, or fortitude to figure out a way to navigate the obstacle.

I decided to try an alternate route in an attempt to combat my spiritual death and applied for and accepted a position at the local Board of Education. After 3 years in that position and after being invited to extend my contract, I requested a return to the classroom. During that time, I had completed a Master’s degree, where I learned to generate my own living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989) and where I experienced being loved into learning (Campbell, 2012). I worked with teachers in every high school in our district and some from elementary schools; I also worked closely with principals, other lead teachers, and board administrators; I also had many opportunities to represent our Board at the Ministry of Education level. All of these experiences contributed to and informed my enhanced awareness and my decision to return to the classroom; however, the main reason I returned was because I wanted to put my theory into practice. And that is exactly what I did for the next 5 years.

During this time, as I mentioned previously, I also began a PhD, co-created and co-facilitated a research group for 4 years, and shared my learning with anyone who was interested formally (through papers and presentations) and informally (through mentoring and casual

conversations). I was busier than I had ever been in my career and I was both exhausted and invigorated. The times that were not invigorating were quite devastating and at the same time, enlightening. Following are a few of many possible examples.

Awakening Hope

An alternative program that I was leading and very passionate about and that was quite successful was suddenly cancelled due to a change in funding. A student who was in my class the year before committed suicide. More and more students were being diagnosed with anxiety and depression. The number of teachers and administrators (Board wide) taking stress leaves was at an all-time high. And this was only the local scene.

I had completed the course work for my PhD and was preparing to write my exams. It was during this time that it was suggested to me that I reconsider my original research topic which was love in the classroom and that I write about what does not work in education. Initially, I was intrigued and agreed to give it some thought. I am grateful for the suggestion now as it helped me to realize something of extreme importance to me. While considering this new topic, I became quite distraught. I reflected on my years of practice and all the problems I had encountered, experienced, or created for myself, others and especially my students.

On Sunday afternoons, I participate in a living theory research support group. I began to explain my conundrum to the group when all of a sudden I burst into tears. I do not cry very often, not because I think I should not for whatever reason; I just do not. Perhaps I do not cry often because I have suffered some great losses and it takes a lot to make me cry or maybe it is just my nature. Either way, I knew there was something significant going on when I burst into tears during my Skype call and I knew that I was about to have a growth spurt if I could see this as a challenge and not a threat. As J. Miller (2018) writes, “creative people see challenging

situations as opportunities for spiritual growth rather than seeing them as threats. ... Love, creativity and gentleness are closely linked” (p. 11).

My spiritual growth involved the recognition that in addition to the two core values of love and joy that I identified as part of my living educational theory during my Master’s research, I needed to add hope as one of my foundational values. Almost every day during my practice as a teacher, I encountered challenges and obstacles that at times seemed insurmountable. I realize now that it was only because I valued and nourished hope that I was able to remain positive and hopeful. I believe I would have given up teaching over a decade ago if I did not have hope to sustain me. I am not suggesting that I have hope in the public education system to make the necessary changes to improve education but I do have hope in individual human beings. The power of hope became clear to me during the BARN sessions. Not only did I recognize that the individual educators who signed up for BARN were inspired and motivated by their belief that there was hope for improvement and change but it was also readily apparent during the symposium sessions where invited guests came to witness the research results of their colleagues. At the end of the symposium, facilitators ask for verbal and / or written feedback and many of the comments we received acknowledged the passion and hope of the presenters as agents of change.

I have learned that hope is an essential value in my life as a learner. I need hope to sustain my joy and nourish my love. Hope and joy are the “energy flowing values” that constitute the “life affirming energy” in my ability to love and be loved; to be love (Whitehead, 2009). In order to be love, I recognize hope as a driving force and like West (2008) proclaims this “Blues-inflected hope” compels me to never give up and I acknowledge that “I am in no way optimistic, but I remain a prisoner of hope” (p. 41). He goes on to say that we acquire wisdom when we engage and struggle with despair and “not allowing despair to have the last word. That’s why hope is always

blood-stained and tear-soaked” (West, 2008, p. 217). As difficult as it is to remain hopeful in challenging times, I know that I will always have hope. My hope stems from my understanding that I can make a difference by changing myself and as I change myself, I am influencing others. If others recognize their ability to make a difference and we can collaborate and combine our efforts then our hope grows exponentially.

Learning to Love the Questions

I intentionally set up my research question (How has love influenced me as a teacher, researcher and learner?) into three distinct categories as I initially believed it would make it easier to get on the inside of how love unfolded within the educational environments in my life and I would be able to articulate how love influenced my learning, the learning of others, and the learning within the social formations (Whitehead, 1989) I encounter, which is a distinguishing feature in the generation of one’s Living Educational Theory. Although I believe I have achieved this in some instances, I am not completely satisfied with my results, but I remain hopeful that I will continue on this journey long after I have completed the writing of this dissertation. Now that I have a deeper understanding of my need to maintain and nourish my value of hope, I will be more capable of making value informed choices and decisions in my life.

There are a variety of possible explanations for my inability to clearly articulate my living educational theory as I would have preferred, which I hope to address and research in the near future. This is a question that contains unresolved issues. I am comforted by Brix (2005) who affirms that “part of appreciating yourself just as you are is an appreciation for that which is unresolved” (p.69). Since recognizing, or perhaps reawakening, the value of hope in my life, I am able to love myself more as I recognize that sometimes I need to let questions remain unresolved. Perhaps my urgency and inability to resolve some of the tensions and contradictions in my practice stifled my hopefulness because I know I was hopeful when I made the decision to

become a teacher. Here is the abbreviated form of my Teaching Philosophy that I wrote for my resumé in June 1996:

The foundation of teaching is love—unconditional love.

The essence of teaching is to create an ideal learning environment that will enable students to realize their full potential. Students must feel confident and free to take risks; thus, allowing them the freedom to explore their feelings and ideas without fear of failure. Furthermore, accepting the uniqueness of each student encourages mutual respect and enhances a just and caring environment. A love for teaching/learning and a genuine love for humankind will provide a powerful foundation for educational excellence.

If I were to rewrite this now after 20 plus years of teaching experience, 10 years of academic research experience, and 58 years of learning experience, it would look something like this:

Teaching philosophy: be love. But then I probably would not be hired and I would be okay with that now. As Rumi (1995) states:

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
And frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down the musical instrument.

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground. (p. 36)

If I did not get hired as a classroom teacher I would have had to find another way to be love. I would have had to reach beyond the obvious and move out of my comfort zone.

Being Love as I Retire

The reawakening of this hope during my PhD research is what enabled me to leave my practice without any anger, remorse, or frustration. As I stated earlier, I took an early retirement, quite unexpectedly, in August 2018. I have heard many teachers offer their final words as they embark on their retirement. These are emotional times for many and my retirement was no

different in that sense but I was not sad about leaving; I was excited about the next phase in my journey. I was not only leaving my workplace, my husband I had decided to move from a small town (population 8,000) in Bruce County (population, 66, 491) located in rural Ontario to a village (population 2, 634) in Richmond County (population 8,964) located on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. My decision to leave was unique in that I did not have a long time to think about it. It was quite sudden and unexpected by many. So here I was in a moment in time that is considered significant by many and I had to decide how I would acknowledge this moment. Should it be a moment of reckoning, gratitude, humour? It should be sincere, respectful, authentic—a moment of truth.

The tradition at the school I taught at is to celebrate retirements at the end-of-the-year staff party in June. I have never enjoyed formal social gatherings and was not at all disappointed that I would not have an official send-off. I much prefer small group and informal gatherings and I do not have much patience for superficial conversations or artificial sentiments, which are often the norm in some formal gatherings. I also have a reputation for being somewhat outspoken at times and was not sure I could trust myself to behave according to tradition; nor was I sure I even wanted to “behave.” In spite of my insistence that I did not want or need to celebrate my retirement, arrangements were made to acknowledge my departure at the first-week-of-school staff party. A very dear friend and colleague convinced me to go because she said other people needed it even if I did not. In addition, it was being hosted at the home of another dear friend and colleague and he was excited and looking forward to hosting on my behalf so I did not want to disappoint him. In the end, I am pleased that I had the opportunity to say goodbye. I gave serious thought to what I would say to my colleagues knowing this might be the very last time I would have a chance to say anything. While there are a handful of people I will remain in touch with and plan to visit with, there are many more that I will likely never see again. What should I say?

In the end it was a very easy decision, I only had to think about my core values of love, hope, and joy, and I knew that I had to speak from the heart, be authentic, be vulnerable (I knew that showing up made me feel vulnerable but that would not be enough), share some hope and some joy, be love. I began by acknowledging the kind words of my dear friend who introduced me. I knew that there was a lot of curiosity around my decision to retire so I shared a song I had just written for my husband. I do not know how much more vulnerable I could be as I am not an experienced song-writer or gifted writer. It was very difficult to share my song with my colleague's but in an attempt to be authentic I forged ahead and read the following:

Call of the Sea

Come home to me lad, I have called ye before

To the land of your father atop the east shore

For years I have missed ye now return to me

And answer the call of the sea

Can ya picture yerself in a pub by the shore

And leaving remorse, yer inflicted no more

Breathing once more salty air o'er the lea

A home for yer spirit to root and just be

Do bring yer fine lass with her gifts aplenty

The whispering winds a message she sent ye

So bundle yer blessings and travel with care

To the house on the hilltop with more love to share

Many a heart will yearn when you leave

But the roots you lay down will be your reprieve

And friends'll come callin' from lands far away

And family has home now forever to stay

The breeze is abundant and quick to embrace

The hearts of your offspring and more but for grace

A simple man's dream does here come to light

Cause the love of his homeland he never lost sight

Come home to me lad, I have called ye before

To the land of your father atop the east shore

For years I have missed ye, now returning to me

'Cause you answered the call of the sea

All 'cause you answered the call of the sea

As teachers we are trained to be over-prepared, which is another paradox which creates tension, confusion, and frustration. I agree that we have responsibilities and we should never shirk those or intentionally avoid them, but my understanding of what I am responsible for has shifted and I wanted to model this for my colleagues. I did not make any notes and it is possible I appeared to some to be unprepared and irresponsible but I did a lot of difficult inner-work; I knew, and still know, that I have a better understanding of the "I" who was showing up in my classroom every day, and I know that this is essential for teachers and students to have meaningful teaching and learning experiences. I knew my subject (I) and I was aware of my responsibility to "create a space" (Palmer, 1998, p. 90). My hope was that at my retirement celebration I could create a space for whatever needed to unfold in myself and in others and that

others might benefit from this as they hold the space open for their own self to be recognized, witnessed, awakened or re-awakened. I, however, have absolutely no control over whether or not others would hold the space open. “In reality, we cause or control very little. “To ‘create a space’ acknowledges both our sphere of responsibility and our lack of control” (O’Reilly, 1998, p. 2).

The Blessing

Speaking to my colleagues at my retirement celebration was an opportunity I wanted to take full advantage of and I wanted to leave them with something meaningful that might help them to reflect on their own practice. I had learned so much about myself as an educator and I wanted to share some of my newfound understandings but I did not want to speak at them in a way that implied I knew better or more; I simply wanted to create a space where they would be acknowledged for the tireless, difficult, challenging, transformative work they do. Feeling slightly inundated by the task I laid before myself, I turned to one of my favourite authors for the poetic words my colleagues deserved and I shared *A blessing for one who holds power* (O’Donohue, 2008, p. 147). O’Donohue’s words really sum up much that I have learned about myself and about learning in the last 5 years and I did share these insights with my colleagues. I also shared that I figured a lot of this out through the generation of a Living Educational Theory and that BARN was a safe place to examine, unveil, and articulate personal values. I finished by stating that wonderful thing it would be if we could create more of these opportunities in our own classrooms. Next, I read the poem slowly, pausing, and leaving a space for silence. I include it here and not in the appendix as these words deserve a place of honour. I let them speak for me at my retirement celebration and I offer them here to you, my beloved reader, should one show up, as a way to acknowledge your difficult work and bless you with words that might guide you as you navigate the tensions and paradoxes in your life. I hope that something resonates with you:

May the gift of leadership awaken in you as a vocation
Keep you mindful of the providence that calls you to serve.

As high over the mountains the eagle spreads its wings,
May your perspective be larger than the view from the foothills.

When the way is flat and dull in times of grey endurance,
May your imagination continue to evoke horizons.

When thirst burns in times of drought,
May you be blessed to find the wells.

May you have the wisdom to read time clearly
And know when the seed of change will flourish.

In your heart may there be a sanctuary
For the stillness where clarity is born.

May your work be infused with passion and creativity
And have the wisdom to balance compassion and challenge.

May your soul find the graciousness
To rise above the fester of small mediocrities.

May your power never become a shell
Wherein your heart would silently atrophy.

May you welcome your own vulnerability
As the ground where healing and truth join.

May integrity of soul be your first ideal,
The source that will guide and bless your work.

Retiring from teaching was a defining moment in my life because it is one of the rare times I honoured my own well-being before others and it felt very satisfying. I felt like I was being more authentic as I finally lived the words I would suggest to others: love yourself first so you can love others more fully. I was not sad at all about leaving; I was relieved. I was also inspired and invigorated by the uncertainty of the next phase of my journey.

What Is My New Path?

My eagerness to return to the classroom and love my students into learning was an exciting and enlightening journey. As I learned to trust and respect my students more fully, I realized that knew much more than any test or exam could reveal and I learned that very few students were even aware of the knowledge they held. By having one on one meetings with students and listening to them without an agenda or a an evaluation in mind, I was able to more readily recognize and acknowledge their skills, interest, passions and talents. I learned so much from my students simply by listening and having an open heart. J. Miller (2018) referencing Hardin sates that experiencing “open love” begins by loving ourselves and gently extends to others and cautions us against moving too quickly “without really extending that feeling of deep love and friendship in ourselves” (p. 13). Although I have absolutely no regrets about my return to the classroom and I learned that it was in fact possible, although not without many challenges, to love my students into learning, it took me a few years to realize that the demands of public education made it very difficult to do so in a way that enabled me to continue to nourish my soul and love myself in a way that I could continue to awaken to my true being. I seemed to have reached a threshold of spirit; I was on the verge of something but could not seem to get beyond

the simple realization that there was something more. Once again, bells, policies, overcrowded classes, mandated curriculum, and my limited skills and experience created a barrier, another tree was blocking the path or was it? Perhaps this was just the end of this particular path for me. Perhaps it was time to heed O'Reilly's (1998) advice and "listen to the texts you're teaching and face the consequences" and know that when you are in "the contemplative mode, your life is always on the line" (pp. 14-15). An honest and critical reflection of the situation clearly revealed that it was time for me to move on. I was 2 years away from retirement, and within 2 weeks, I made the decision to leave. I could not stand on the threshold anymore; a different path beckoned.

As I stated earlier, this was shocking news for many, but the people who knew me well were not the least bit surprised and responded to the news with heartfelt congratulations and excitement for the next phase of my journey. These friends and family members understood soul work and knew that my spiritual well-being left me little choice and they also knew that as I develop and grow, so will our relationships. As I write this, I wonder if I too was being called to sea.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude Five

I feel more fully alive in nature and yet when I think of my past, I realize nature never really played a prominent role and even when it did, I did not realize the significant effect nature had on my well-being. I was born in Dundee, Scotland and lived in a three-storey walk-up in a dense housing community. When I was 5 years old, my parents immigrated to Canada, and together with my two brothers, and another due to arrive shortly, we lived in a variety of apartments in dense communities in Toronto. My only connection with nature at this point was the postage stamp size allocated green space and our traditional trips to parks at Easter and beaches and parks on summer vacation. Unfortunately, everyone else in the city had the same

idea. Eventually my parents bought a home in Downsview and my nature experience expanded to include a 50-feet wide and 70-feet long backyard and our family grew too, a new baby sister. After another 5 years, my parents relocated to Brampton and my nature experience expanded to include a quarry where we swam and hiked and investigated during the lazy days of summer but those days soon came to an abrupt end when I, at the age of 15, took a summer job in retail.

My mother worked with someone who had a family cottage in Sauble Beach and this soon became our annual get-out-of-the-city vacation. As Brampton continued to grow and expand at exponential rates, my father decided it was time to take the family out of the city. My parents bought a home in Southampton (a small town just a few kilometres away from Sauble Beach) and once again, we packed up our belongings, carefully stored our memories away, said goodbye to our friends, and began our new journey and discovery of life in rural Ontario. Our house was one block away from a beautiful sandy beach on picturesque Lake Huron, known for some of the most beautiful sunsets in the world. But I was a teenager who knew little about how to be in nature, so besides the occasional swim, sun bathing, and rebellious beach party and camp-fire, I had little to do with the beauty at my doorstep. In fact, I could not wait to get back to the city. Fast forward 10 years, a stint in several major cities including Edmonton, Alberta where I met the love of my life, and we are back in Saugeen Shores, living in Southampton, starting a family. I used to say I would never get married and if I did get married, I would never have children, and if I did get married and have children, I would never live in a small town. My new mantra became never say never.

Our family grew quickly, three children in 4 years. Our days were full of discovery, wonder, and awe. Our daily ritual included a walk along the water's edge and hours of play on the sandy beach in spring, summer, and fall. In the winter, we climbed frozen waves. I was

beginning to learn how to be with nature in a new way through the eyes of my children. These were by far the best years of my life. We briefly considered home-schooling but quickly abandoned the idea for a variety of reasons, all rooted in fear. One by one, we enrolled our children in school and eventually, I accepted my first teaching position. Nature was back on a schedule.

How Did I Reconnect With Nature?

I include the following narrative as an example of both how far I have come in my ability to love and as an example of how much more I have to learn. After re-connecting with nature, I recognized the vital role nature plays in my ability to reflect and make connections (to love and be love) and yet nature was scarcely a part of my life in the last two decades and was especially missing in my practice. I cannot help but wonder how many of my students needed this vital connection with nature to help them flourish and grow and I wonder what a mandated professional development day would have inspired if we had an opportunity to experience something outside of the typical PD workshop or meeting. Reconnecting with nature awakened my spirituality and enhanced my understanding of the connectedness between all living things. If I am going to love more fully then it is vital for me to nourish this connectedness.

I have been in Cape Breton for 6 months now, 3 of them alone as my husband returned to Ontario to do some contract work and give me space to finish my PhD. I have been reading, writing, reflecting, and loving me. I started yoga and joined a book club. My paints are still in a box so I turn to the kitchen to release my creative energy. I am canning and cooking, playing, inventing, experimenting, and learning. I am living and loving simply. The folks here know something about hospitality, sustainability, and vulnerability. I am learning, slowly and sometimes abruptly. I wrote the following in my journal knowing that I had a significant experience and there was something for me to learn from it:

A storm was coming and it was the talk of the town. Everyone was preparing. Shelves at the grocery store were bare; cars lined up at the gas station. There was a strange buzz of excitement and a relaxed hurriedness. Traffic resembled that of the tourist filled days of mid-August minus the RVs and boats. A lonely shovel stands erect at the ready outside the door of the hardware store. Supplies of batteries, candles, salt, and sand are depleted—more empty shelves. I collect the mail and return to the refuge of the house on the hill. I sit in the rocker by the big picture window and watch as the traffic weans and the winds increase. And then an eerie silence embraces the village as the impending storm arrives exactly as predicted.

I am no stranger to winter storms having spent almost 30 years on the shore of Lake Huron. I am ready or am I? The power goes out. I light my candles. I take my casserole out of the oven feeling clever for having baked it early. I turn off my computer and my cell phone to conserve the batteries. I don't know how long the storm will last. I fill containers with water. There is enough heat in my home to last the night. I have lots of blankets. I'll be fine.

I share my dinner with my brother-in-law and his wife who live in the adjoining apartment. We part ways for the evening. Eager to show off my survival skills, I decide to make the trek out to the garage where we have a newly installed woodstove. I can make tea. I fill a thermos with water and collect a pot. I put on my winter coat, a woollen hat, my good grip boots, a pair of gloves and head out. The garage is about thirty feet away from the house on a slight incline. I can barely negotiate the door with my hands full and the wind threatening to lift me off the ground like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. I have to lean hard into the door to get it to open ... twice the wind blows it shut on me, but I am resilient and determined, I am clever ... I wait for a pause between the gusts and

eventually I make my way onto the step. I weave and stagger, drunk with wind ... down the steps, around the corner, my hood slaps me several times in the face. ... I tuck my chin in and forge ahead. Another battle ensues with the garage door ... again, I am victorious. I light the fire, place the pot on top of the woodstove, fill it with water from the thermos and wait patiently for it to boil. I carefully fill the thermos with the boiling water and secure the lid. My thermos is full and I am filled with pleasure. I am going to make tea. I pull my hood up and secure it by pulling my coat zipper all the way up. I won't be slapped in the face again. ... I head out.

I take a few steps and before I know what is happening, my feet abandon me and take flight. I land hard and my head hits the pavement with a thud that echoes in my mind to this day. My thermos, no longer secured in my hand, also smashes on the ground. I sit up ... I swear. I don't recognize my own voice ... my mouth doesn't work right. My speech is slurred. ... I remember the thud. I feel like I am going to vomit. I look about and see the thin coat of ice that arrived while I was boiling water. I failed to notice it earlier in my eagerness to return to the house. I see the lid of my thermos about 20 feet away on the opposite side of the driveway. I sit there for a moment, I swear again, this time it is a little more coherent. I wait for the whirling in my head to subside and I realize I could have died out here. I imagine the headlines: not in the comfort of her own home and surrounded by ice and wind and strangely, a thermos with no lid, woman dies. And I can hear the chatter: you know the queer one, with all the books, supposed to be smart, apparently she went out in the storm to make a pot of tea; foolish woman.

I make my way down the driveway without standing up. I get to the bottom of the steps that lead to the kitchen door and I wonder if it is safe to stand. Slowly, first to

knees, hand on railing, I pull myself up and very carefully edge my way up the stairs with both hands clutching the railing. I feel the wind whirling around me and I wonder, with great humility, will she let me in the house? (Personal journal, February 2018)

I have thought about that night many, many times and each time I think about it I learn something new, about myself, about nature, and I know I still have much to learn. When I re-visit *The Call of the Sea*, I now recognize I too was being called. My walks to the Brook changed after the night of the storm. Burch (2015) claims that we cannot talk about or know sustainability unless it is rooted in love, which can guide our hearts and our spirits in a way that “we avoid consuming everything that sustains us. ... It’s been observed that when we love the Earth we tend to behave in life sustaining ways. When we are indifferent to it, we seal our own extinction” (p. 30). I almost killed myself because of my indifference, my ego, my fragmented understanding of my place in this world. Burch’s notion of sustainability extends the limitations of environmental steward as he invites us to be love in the world holistically: “The love we need to sustain in the world is not sentimentalism for a few photogenic species, but rather love as the practice of self-awareness, insight into the origins and dynamics of our own desires, and some measure of wholesome discipline in how we live” (p. 30).

I realize the path my husband made was, and still is, my new path as it invites me into the woods to form a new relationship with Nature. My evolving understanding of love includes the Earth and all its inhabitants. I have a deeper understanding of interconnectedness and interdependence. Nature, whether in the form of howling winds, dense woods, gurgling brooks, or the water’s edge, is my sanctuary, teacher, confidant, and mirror. Being in Nature allows me to nourish my spiritual well-being. When I am paying attention, I feel the energy of the earth and the

wind and the water. I know I am a foreigner in this space but I also know I am welcome. I have a sense of belonging and unity here. I feel more fully alive as I learn to love nature more fully.

Where Do I Go From Here?

Teaching is my vocation. I am passionate about learning and assisting others where I can to learn what and how they want to learn to contribute to the flourishing of humanity. I believe in the hope that our world can be better; we can be better, one person at a time. There are many ways I can do this and I will continue to seek out and accept opportunities to do so. Every day, I see a bright yellow school bus pass by on its way to collect the children for the local elementary school and in that brief moment, I am overcome with a feeling of uneasiness in the pit of my stomach as I wonder how many of those children will suffer at the hands of another today?

In the song I wrote for my husband there is a line about bringing your fine lass and her gifts aplenty, which may sound a little vain; I certainly felt a little uncomfortable writing it, but it was in conversation with my husband as we contemplated our move to Nova Scotia that the idea for this line evolved. He was genuinely excited with the plan of moving back to his birth place and bringing his wife who he felt had something to offer a very unique community. He loves the way of life in this little village and the people in it and he was genuinely pleased to introduce me to this on a more permanent basis. I was quite moved when he shared this with me and it made me realize I do have gifts to bring to this community and I am happy and humbled to do so. I also know that being able to be here is a gift that I accept and know that there are many more gifts to receive if I remain open-minded and open-hearted.

I used to tell my students about the different cultural views of giftedness. For example, according to Ojibway culture, we are all born with three gifts and it is our responsibility to recognize these gifts and honour them by sharing them with others. What I found was that my

students could easily identify their shortcomings but had a much harder time recognizing their gifts. Publicly acknowledging that I have gifts to share has helped me to love myself more fully which enables me to accept the gift of love from others more readily.

I wasted a lot of time and energy in the past thinking about whether or not I regretted becoming a public school teacher. With every compromise I made with administration and every time I complied because I did not have the energy or courage to confront or challenge, I lost a piece of my spirit; my soul was wounded. As I loved the learners in my care more fully in the last 5 years I began to heal but it was not enough. I know that I can heal more as I live with more love for self, others, and every living thing in my world.

Or So It Seemed: Interlude Six

Is it time to rip the bandage off? While sharing my dissertation with a friend, I was asked, can you not see how wounded you were by schooling? I have given this question much thought and although I know that I was wounded, and I think that I knew I was being wounded at the time as well as contributing to the wounding of the learners in my care which in turn wounded me further, the question that haunts me today is why did I allow this and how deep are those wounds? Can I heal? Now that I am retired and I have the time and courage, I decide it is time to rip the bandage off and examine the wounds and scars that I have been ignoring.

How was I wounded and how did I wound others? I believe I was wounded because I was unable to love my students fully. I recognized that bells, timetables, testing and grading, mandated curriculum, and excessive supervision undermined the ability of my students to experience genuine learning—to take control of their learning—and prevented me from supporting my students in the way they wanted to be supported. The hidden and overt messages in these actions and policies were a direct proclamation that students cannot be trusted which

ultimately undermines their sense of worthiness. Holt (2005), writing about how school is bad for children because it separates learning from living and children are very skilled at living before they enter school, claims that the first thing children learn at school is that “learning is a passive process, something that someone else does to you, instead of something you do for yourself” (p. 11). Holt goes on to explain that confident, active, curious, energetic children quickly become bored, lazy and unsure. They also become very deceitful and strategic as they search for the “right answers.” Writing about the effects of compulsory schooling on children, Holt (2005) states that:

In a great many other ways he learns that he is worthless, untrustworthy, fit only to take other people’s orders, a blank sheet for other people to write on. Oh, we make a lot of nice noises in school about respect for the child and individual differences, and the like. But our acts, as opposed to our talk, says to the child, “Your experience, your concerns, your curiosities, your needs, what you know, what you want, what you wonder about, what you hope for, what you fear, what you like and dislike, what you are good at or not so good at—all this is of not the slightest importance, it counts for nothing. What counts here, and the only thing that counts, is what we know, what we think is important, what we want you to do, think and be.” The child soon learns not to ask questions—the teacher isn’t there to satisfy his curiosity. Having learned to hide his curiosity, he later learns to be ashamed of it. Given no chance to find out who he is—and to develop that person, whoever it is—he soon comes to accept the adults’ evaluation of him. (p. 11)

Although I was aware of the importance of students directing and determining their own learning and I knew they knew more than any test or assessment could accurately measure and I developed a variety of diverse, creative strategies to provide more opportunities for my students,

I was still “doing to them and for them” and not “with them.” Even though my words reflected the idea that I believed they were capable, competent human beings worthy of respect and trust, my actions contradicted my intentions. Regardless of how much control I tried to relinquish, I was still the authority with the power in the classroom and I was in a building where others had authority over me who were part of an institution that had power and authority over them. There is a well-established, and in many instances, well respected, hierarchy that governs public schooling and I was very naive to think that I could eliminate this hierarchy in my classroom.

I recall one year when I invited my students to write their own exam question for philosophy class. I would have preferred if we did not have an exam but there was no way around it at the time. I was mandated to have a final exam so I tried to be as creative as possible. I was completely surprised by the reaction of my students. After much discussion, they decided by unanimous vote to have me write the exam question. Although I was surprised by their response, I was also pleased. I told myself they responded this way because they trusted me (ego raises its ugly head yet again). I appeased myself by noting that I had given them a choice but I realize now it was not a real choice as they did not have the option of not writing the exam. Perhaps I was subconsciously aware of this at the time as I know I was still troubled by the fact that they did not want to write their own questions. The question on the exam was something like “You were given the opportunity to generate your own question for this final exam and you opted not to. Why?” I wonder now how many of them were consciously aware, perhaps more so than I was, about the imbalance of power and authority. Perhaps this was their way of telling me that no matter what I said and did, the fact remains that I am part of the system that is oppressing them and killing their curiosity. Why should they bother to put any extra effort into something they did not want to do in the first place? If I was not so pre-occupied with convincing myself

that my students trusted me perhaps I would have identified the real reason they did not elect to write their own questions. I agree with Holt (2005) who states:

And so, in this dull and ugly place, where nobody ever says anything very truthful, where everybody is playing a kind of role, as in a charade where the teachers are no more free to respond honestly to the students than the students are free to respond to the teachers or each other, where the air practically vibrates with suspicion and anxiety, the child learns to live in a daze. ... It is a rare child who can come through his schooling with much left of his curiosity, his independence or his sense of his own dignity, competence and worth. (p. 18)

I was wounded by being forced to implement strategies and policies I knew were harmful to my students. The external pressures to comply and conform undermined my ability to trust my instincts. I was fearful of speaking out against a system that exerted power over me and fearful of judgment from my colleagues. I came up with creative ways to generate grades; I eliminated testing when I could; I tried to run a democratic classroom; I tried to love my students, but anything I did was not going to make a sustainable difference unless I could recognize that I was oppressed and I was contributing to the oppression of my students.

Why did I allow wounding of self and others? *I may have to simply learn to live with and learn from this question as I do not think I am going to be able to resolve it now. I can think of many reasons, or perhaps excuses is a more appropriate term, for why I did what I did and did not do but I cannot seem to identify one specific reason that would explain my actions other than I was a product of the system I was a part of and I believe it is very difficult to separate the person from the institution.*

As I mentioned earlier, I had a reputation for speaking out and asking difficult, uncomfortable, questions so perhaps I thought this was enough as I often felt like I was pushing the boundaries as it was and I was afraid to do more. I think I was afraid of being disrespected and discounted and I thought that if I was going to have any influence at all I needed to maintain some degree of loyalty to the system I was questioning. I also think I was very afraid to look stupid in front of my peers and I now know after many private conversations that I was not the only one who felt this way. There was no space for vulnerability that was perceived as weakness and when I do not feel safe to be vulnerable, I cannot be authentic. How could I encourage my students to take risks and speak out and exercise their curiosity freely when I could not do the same?

There was also an unspoken culture of tolerance and passivity among staff. In over 20 years of teaching, I can recall on one hand the number of times I heard someone say something that indicated they were looking forward to a staff meeting. The consensus was that staff meetings and mandated professional development were a waste of precious time and that the best we could do was attend to receive our directives and then get on with our jobs. If someone asked too many questions, especially controversial questions, they were sometimes treated rudely and publicly humiliated or received a response so rhetoric ridden that it did not invite further dialogue. On one occasion, after asking a question about mandatory lunchtime literacy test practice, I was accused of not being a team player and I was so shocked by the response I simply sat there speechless. This was hurtful as I believed I was very much a team player as I wanted what was best for all, especially my students. I should have asked if students were a part of the team being referenced.

In general, staff meetings were an opportunity to deliver Board and Ministry directives modelling the top down approach we were expected to deliver in the classroom not a place for

dialogue about the purpose of schooling and our teaching / learning values. Knowles and Cole (2008) claim that “the most meaningful insights often come by surprise” (p. 40). It might be possible for these kinds of insights to occur in a space that honours spontaneous, authentic, and sometimes vulnerable, discussions, but when every minute of the time is pre-planned and accounted for there is no room for surprises.

For over 20 years the most predominant concern I have had and have heard others (teachers and students) express is that there is not enough time to reflect and collaborate. Making time for the unique voice of individuals to be unveiled and heard is more important than any new policy or mandated curriculum. When I felt my voice was valued like I experienced during my Master’s research, then I am more able to value the voice of the other. I rarely felt that my voice was valued in my teaching career unless I was saying something that confirmed the agenda of the current administration. At some point, and I am not exactly sure when, I surrendered; I gave up even trying to have my voice heard. I thought I had re-directed my energies to efforts that I believed could make a difference but perhaps that is simply one of the lies I told myself.

In my 20 plus years of teaching, I constantly sought out new challenges and opportunities. I thought I was looking for new and different ways to affect change but I wonder now if I was simply distracting myself from the truth I was unable or unwilling to confront. Faced with this possibility, I am overcome with embarrassment. How naïve of me to think that I alone could make any significant difference in anything but myself. I became a teacher because I suffered as a student and I thought this would make me a more humane teacher and now I think that my idealism actually did more harm than good. How dehumanizing of me.

***How can I heal?** When I read what I have written about my encounters with nature I recognize that being more fully in nature is part of my path to healing. Plotkin (2008) writes: “Nature, too, supports our personal blossoming (if we have any quiet exposure to her) through her spontaneities, through her beauty, power, and mirroring, through her dazzling variety of species and habitats, and by way of the wind, Moon, Sun, stars, and galaxies” (p. 20). As I attend to what nature offers and I seek out opportunities for quiet exposure, I am attending to my wholeness. I am more attuned to the whole me including my spiritual, psychological, intellectual and physical needs. I am beginning to recognize that my human nature is intertwined with nature. Recognizing, embracing, and acting on this insight enhances my connectedness to others, the Earth, and every living thing. I am more fully alive and this is an ideal place for healing and growing.*

The recognition of my dehumanizing actions is the catalyst for my healing. Plotkin (2008) claims that it is in this moment of great crisis that the time is ripe for individual and collective transformation:

In this tiny interval of the twenty-first century, we, the human species, will either learn to become a life-enhancing element within the greater Earth community ... or we will not. If we fail, humanity will be reduced to a small number, we will have forsaken our potential as a species (this time around, at least) and we will have perpetrated the extinction of many thousands of species, perhaps millions—beyond those that have already perished at our hands. And yet we now behold the possibility of a radical and foundational shift in human culture—from a suicidal, life-destroying element to a way of life worthy of our unique human potential and of Earth's dream for itself. What lies before us is the opportunity and imperative for a thorough cultural transformation—what eco-

philosopher Joanna Macy calls the Great Turning, the transition from an egocentric “Industrial Growth Society” to a soulcentric “Life-sustaining Society,” or what economist David Korten in The Great Turning calls the transition “from Empire to Earth Community.” The cultural historian Thomas Berry refers to this vital endeavor as the Great Work of our time. It is every person's responsibility and privilege to contribute to this metamorphosis. Transformational. (p. 3)

As I transition from an egocentric phase to a soulcentric way of being I am accepting my responsibility and honouring my privilege to be a part of something greater than me—the Earth's dream for itself. This is a space and place where I can live out my values more fully and where I can experience becoming. I have always known instinctively that being in nature is essential for my soul—my essence—but it is only now that I recognize the damage I have done to myself and my world by ignoring this and/or discounting the significance. I agree with Plotkin (2008) who claims:

Soul has been demoted to a new-age spiritual fantasy or a missionary's booty, and nature has been treated, at best, as a postcard or a vacation backdrop or, more commonly, as a hardware store or refuse heap. Too many of us lack intimacy with the natural world and with our souls, and consequently we are doing untold damage to both. (p. 6)

I realize that I need to embrace the natural world fully to awaken an intimate relationship that laid dormant for far too long. O'Donohue (2004b) refers to this experience as “clay returning to clay” (p. 17) and notes that it is quite common to forget bodied experiences and the fact that we belong to the earth. Simply thinking about the return to clay makes me feel both fearful and hopeful. The natural world, just like human nature, is full of contradictions, paradoxes,

uncertainty, and unpredictability as well as patterns, cycles, complex interconnectedness, and rhythms and as I step into the discomfort of this unknown or long forgotten territory I know I will feel extremely vulnerable but I also recognize that in this heightened state of awareness I am more attuned to my own human nature, to my wholeness. Nurturing this wholeness is how I will heal. In this fertile and wild land exists the potential to create opportunities for greater connection and a space and place to be love so that I can flourish in whatever environment I find myself immersed in as I unveil and embrace my future calling. The journey excites me as well as intimidates me as I contemplate shedding and/or challenging much of what I have previously focused on (mostly intellectual and physical) and develop my spiritual and psychological self to reawaken my curiosity and imagination. I will begin with small steps for what will be a lifelong journey.

Chapter 8: Final Pause

I am reluctant to conclude because it sounds so definitive and rigid; instead, I offer a final pause as I know that even as my words land on the page I am changing and so is my world.

Kierkegaard (1952) writes that:

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other propositions, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over the proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting place from which to understand it-backwards. (p. 3)

As I rest here I acknowledge the conundrum Kierkegaard highlights and instead of providing conclusive ideas, I share final, in-the-moment thoughts.

This has been a very daunting and difficult journey for me as I did not expect it to be so disturbing. I thought I was going to focus on how love influenced me as a teacher, researcher and learner, and how I loved my students into learning. Although I have shared some of that process, writing about that has revealed to me that the micro-moments of connection and the spurts of soul-centric being were simply not enough and may have contributed to the dehumanizing of the learners in my care as I perpetuated a superficial sense of choice and an illusory understanding of education and freedom. I agree with Gatto (2005) who writes:

One...thing I know is that eventually you have to come to be a part of a *place*—part of its hills and streets and waters and people—or you will live a very, very sorry life as an exile forever. *Discovering meaning for yourself*, and discovering satisfying *purpose* for yourself, is a big part of what education is. How can this be done by locking children away from the world is beyond me. (p. 62; emphasis in original)

Locked away in the classroom with me could not provide my students with the environment they needed to develop no matter how creative, courageous or loving I was; especially when I did not even realize that this very same environment was interfering with my own flourishing.

I came to the realization that I have a significant amount of soul work to do so that I can love myself into wholeness and unveiling this insight became the focus of my research. Although the process of coming to this awareness was excruciatingly painful and difficult at times, it was indeed a worthwhile journey as I am now more hope-full.

Hope

One of the key discoveries in my research and the writing of my dissertation was the addition of hope to my previously identified key values of love and joy. West (2008) writes that “To be wise is to opt for a costly hope, an earned hope, a blues-inflected hope that grapples with despair. ... We emerge with new energy from our wounds, new wisdom from our scars, and a new name from our bruises, equipped with a new armour of truth and justice” (p. 217). As a result of my harrowing journey, I am now more prepared to enter the next phase of my personal development to wholeness.

My personal scars and wounds have revealed to me the importance of authentic choice and the recognition that I do have options. Previously, as a teacher in public schooling, I was trapped in what Plotkin (2008) calls the adolescent phase, which according to Plotkin, most of society is stuck in and a place where:

Arrested personal growth serves industrial “growth.” By suppressing the nature dimension of human development (through educational systems, social values, advertising, nature-eclipsing vocations and pastimes, city and suburb design, denatured medical and psychological practices, and other means), industrial growth society

engenders an immature citizenry unable to imagine a life beyond consumerism and soul-suppressing jobs. (p. 6)

It is only by attempting to explain how love influenced me as a teacher, researcher, and learner that I was able to recognize that I was in a state of arrested personal growth and as a teacher in the public schooling sector, I was contributing to the suppression of the personal growth of my students. Again, I am embarrassed by my naivety. I thought I was challenging the oppressive environment so that my students could have more meaningful, relevant, self-directed, and determined learning opportunities but this was simply my ego trying to out-smart a dysfunctional system. I too was oppressed as a cog in the wheel of a system created in the height of the industrial era and instead of trusting my instincts more fully, I allowed my ego to seduce me into thinking I could make a difference. I am not suggesting that I did not make some small differences along the way; I know I did but they were not enough and possibly did more harm than good by prolonging the inevitable. Plotkin (2008) writes that:

As soon as enough people in contemporary societies progress beyond adolescence, the entire consumer-driven economy and egocentric lifestyle will implode. The adolescent society is actually quite unstable due to its incongruence with the primary patterns of living systems. The industrial growth society is simply incompatible with collective human maturity. No true adult wants to be a consumer, worker bee, or tycoon, or a soldier in an imperial war, and none would go through these motions if there were other options at hand. The enlivened soul and wild nature are deadly to industrial growth economies—and vice versa. (p. 8)

Plotkin's words give me hope as I embark on the next phase of my journey seeking to enliven my soul. What concerns me now is that it is quite possible I would never have recognized this

without making an explicit effort to think about and explain what I do and why and to imagine other possibilities.

I have spent in an ordinate amount of time thinking about what I would do differently if I was just starting a PhD and I have been asked this question by several people so it seems worthy of addressing here, now. Obviously, I cannot ignore what I have learned and so it is a little difficult for me to imagine what would make sense if I did not know what I now know. It is easier for me to imagine what I would do if I had the opportunity to conduct post-doctoral research. As I completed this dissertation, I recognized that I had never explicitly asked my students if they wanted me to love them and if their parents / caregivers wanted me to love their sons/daughters and I think it would be interesting to interview students and other stakeholders and ask these questions. I also think it would be beneficial to interview secondary school educators about their thoughts on the role of love in secondary education. I know that there are people who think differently than me and believe we could all benefit with more open dialogue.

Time and Choice

In the hustle and bustle of life as a teacher in the public system there is little, if any, time for reflection and collaboration. In the chaos of life in the machine my actions were ruled by bells, timetables, timelines and accountability all designed to make me and my efforts more efficient. However, the opposite is what actually unfolded. As I strayed from the traditional dictates of schooling searching for opportunities to create more meaningful experiences for my students, I became a less efficient teacher by traditional standards. I did not keep a detailed gradebook or a compilation of structured lesson plans with objectives and expectations and I did not have clearly planned units of study for the term integrated with tests and assignments to assess and evaluate learning outcomes. Instead, I focused on getting to know my students and

guided them as they investigated and explored and encouraged them as they took risks.

Unfortunately, I now recognize that I was not as successful as I once thought I was as my alternatives to the traditional system were not very efficient either. The first problem is that the alternatives I was encouraging are not designed for efficiency but more for sustainability; nonetheless, my efforts were neither efficient nor sustainable.

In the brief scheduled time I had with my students (75 minutes per day when there was not a mandated assembly or scheduled drill), we often experienced so many interruptions it was extremely challenging, if not impossible, to create an environment for authentic learning. As Gatto (2009) explains,

When time is tightly scheduled, we are compelled to attend more to the appearances of attention and concern than to the reality of those qualities; without uninterrupted time you haven't a prayer of synthesizing the fact bits thrown at you. It's possible to memorize the official meaning of those bits, but in the time available no possibility remains at arriving at your own careful conclusions. (p. 143)

I have discovered, in the free time available to me in my retirement and in the writing of this dissertation, that much of my classroom experiences were spent attending to the appearances of meaningful relationships and learning. Even though I was not expecting my students to memorize and regurgitate bits of facts, I was expecting them to explore, discover, be curious and to question. When I witnessed brief moments of this, I would feel satisfied and check off the little box on my mental checklist that I kept in the event I was questioned about my practice. Being preoccupied with accountability I was not able to be fully present for my students. And even if I was, and I believe there were times when I was, how could my students have any meaningful learning experiences when they knew they could be interrupted at any given moment

by a number of things, and in the worst case, the bell ringing denoting the end of the period and the abrupt end to the time to think that particular thought on that particular day?

“It’s okay,” I would say to my students, “finish your thought” and more often than not they would look at me a little blankly and I could see they were clearly preoccupied with the number of things (many of which they preferred to having a conversation with me if they had the choice) they had to do in the next 10 minutes (grab a snack, meet a friend, go to the bathroom, exchange their textbooks, make a phone call, check their text messages or social media accounts) before it was time to be seated in their desks in a timely manner, prepared for the next subject of study. There was no room for the slow movement in our schedules even if I pretended there was. There was no time for my students or me to draw our own careful conclusions, so how could any real learning take place?

The Slow Movement

The one place where I did have some control over the pace of the day was during Bluewater Action Research (BARN) days. Here we embraced the slow movement and created time for reflection and collaboration. One of the most common positive comments we received in our feedback surveys was how much participants valued and appreciated the time to imagine different possibilities and time to synthesize information and ideas. I recently discovered that the New Brunswick Teachers’ Association has a clause in their contract that allows teachers to take a sabbatical every 7 years. Following is an excerpt from that contract:

ARTICLE 41 - SABBATICAL LEAVE 41.01 An employee may be granted sabbatical leave for varying periods of up to one year for approved study or travel, or industrial attachment where direct application to the employee’s area of responsibility exists.

Employees covered by this Agreement shall become eligible for sabbatical leave upon

completion of seven (7) years of service with the departments or agencies covered by this Agreement, and shall receive allowances in lieu of salary of up to seventy-five percent (75%) of the employee's basic salary. (The New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees Group: Education; Instructional, p. 25)

The results of 4 years of BARN where teachers only had a few days to reflect and collaborate were outstanding. This combined with my individual experiences of unrestricted time to reflect in the last ten months causes me to ponder what might have happened if I had the opportunity to choose to take a sabbatical leave after 7 years of teaching. The participants in BARN choose to be there; I choose to do a PhD; my students did not choose compulsory schooling—most of them believe it is the only “choice” they have. It has become readily apparent to me that genuine choice is crucial to meaningful learning.

The Last Word Belongs to a Poem

Once again, and perhaps hopefully, for the final time in my life on this planet, I comply as I conclude. I agree with O'Reilly (1998) who suggests that

the task of our time—and really, it's a poet's task—is to find words again that will mediate between spirit and matter. But I do not have time or skill enough to write that poem, so I'm trying to find a diction that unsettles the issues just enough to let us see them new. Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it not a value-neutral language but a value seeking language. (p. 13)

It is time to talk about love, presence, reverence, awe, mystery, authenticity, soul, spirit, connection, community and values within public education. What is education if it is not about the things that will improve our world and all the members of its community. However, like Moore (1996, p. 338), I give the final word to the renowned Hadewijch, a poet far more skilled

than me and I offer no explanation or interpretation but ask you to let the poem wash over you
and speak to you.

All things by Hadewijch

All things

are too small

to hold me,

I am so vast

In the Infinite

I reach

For the Uncreated

I have touched it

It undoes me

Wider than wide

Everything else

is too narrow

You know this well

You are also there

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

There is potential for your self-identification in a research study entitled:

LOVED INTO LEARNING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HOW LOVE HAS INFLUENCED ME AS A TEACHER / RESEARCHER / STUDENT

This study is being conducted by Elizabeth Campbell from the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University. The results of this study will be used by Elizabeth Campbell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Educational Sustainability) at Nipissing University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my research supervisor: Dr. Carlo Ricci at carlor@nipissingu.ca.

The purpose of this study is to explore my personal experiences as a teacher, researcher and learner by examining the role of love in my life and my practice. In addition, I am conducting research to identify and explicate the other core values (e.g., authenticity, trust, hope, diversity) that influence me and my practice. I will be adding to the research on love in public education from the perspective of a classroom teacher. My study will offer an in-depth personal perspective to the existing research.

The data for this study was taken from my personal journals. In writing my manuscript, I have drawn on some personal experiences that were documented in my personal journals. All personal identifiers including personal vignettes, comments, names, physical descriptions, and locations have been removed. Any references to children, students, colleagues, family, and friends are generic references of a “child,” a “student,” a “colleague,” a “mother,” a “father,” a “friend,” and so on. However, there is potential for your self-identification within my manuscript.

I have included with this letter the section in my manuscript that includes references to my experiences with you. Please review this attachment and consider your consent to involvement in this study. This study is intended for use in a dissertation for partial fulfillment of a degree from Nipissing University; however, it may also be used in future presentations, articles, or other publications.

You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence; Participants are under no obligation to participate; are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements, up until publication.

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Participant consent:

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, and that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw from this project at any time, and that steps are being taken to protect me. I have read this Consent Form and have had any questions, concerns or complaints answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided a copy of this letter.

If you agree, please initial: _____

Parental or Legal Guardianship Consent (for minors):

As a parent or legal guardian of the child participating in this research study, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, and that I am free to decline my child's involvement or withdraw him/her from this project at any time; and that steps are being taken to protect my child. I have read this Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s) Consent Form and have had any questions, concerns or complaints answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided with a copy of this letter.

If you agree, please initial: _____

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Ethics Administrator, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7
or ethics@nipissingu.ca.

Appendix B

Ungraduating

Not a single soul in my work environment knows I did not graduate from high school and the reason for that is not because I was ashamed of myself; I am more ashamed of the system and to be a part of a system that would allow that to happen. I actually had enough credits to graduate, so it was a bit of a surprise when the call came, but in another sense, it was no surprise at all. The “system” had disappointed me my entire life; why should it be any different as I was preparing to finally leave? So, here we go, the story of “Liz’s Ungraduating” (apparently ungraduating isn’t a word—here it sits in front of me underlined in the all too familiar red—but it sure is a reality for me.)

Liz, telephone call for you.

Hello, this is Liz.

Hi Liz, this is Mr. Disappointing; I have some bad news for you.

Oh?

Yes, it seems that Mr. Doesn’t have a clue how to engage students, was disappointed in your performance and absenteeism in his class and has decided to take a half a mark off for everyday you missed, which means you fail the course and no longer have enough credits to graduate. (Silence)

Oh.

Were you planning on attending the graduation ceremony?

Yes, of course I was. And my family is coming too and I had a dress made especially for the event.

Well, you are welcome to join in the informal celebration, but you will not be able to come to the official graduation where we hand out diplomas, as we won’t have diploma to give you.

Oh.

I am very sorry Liz.

Yeah, me too. Sure would have been good to know about this sooner.

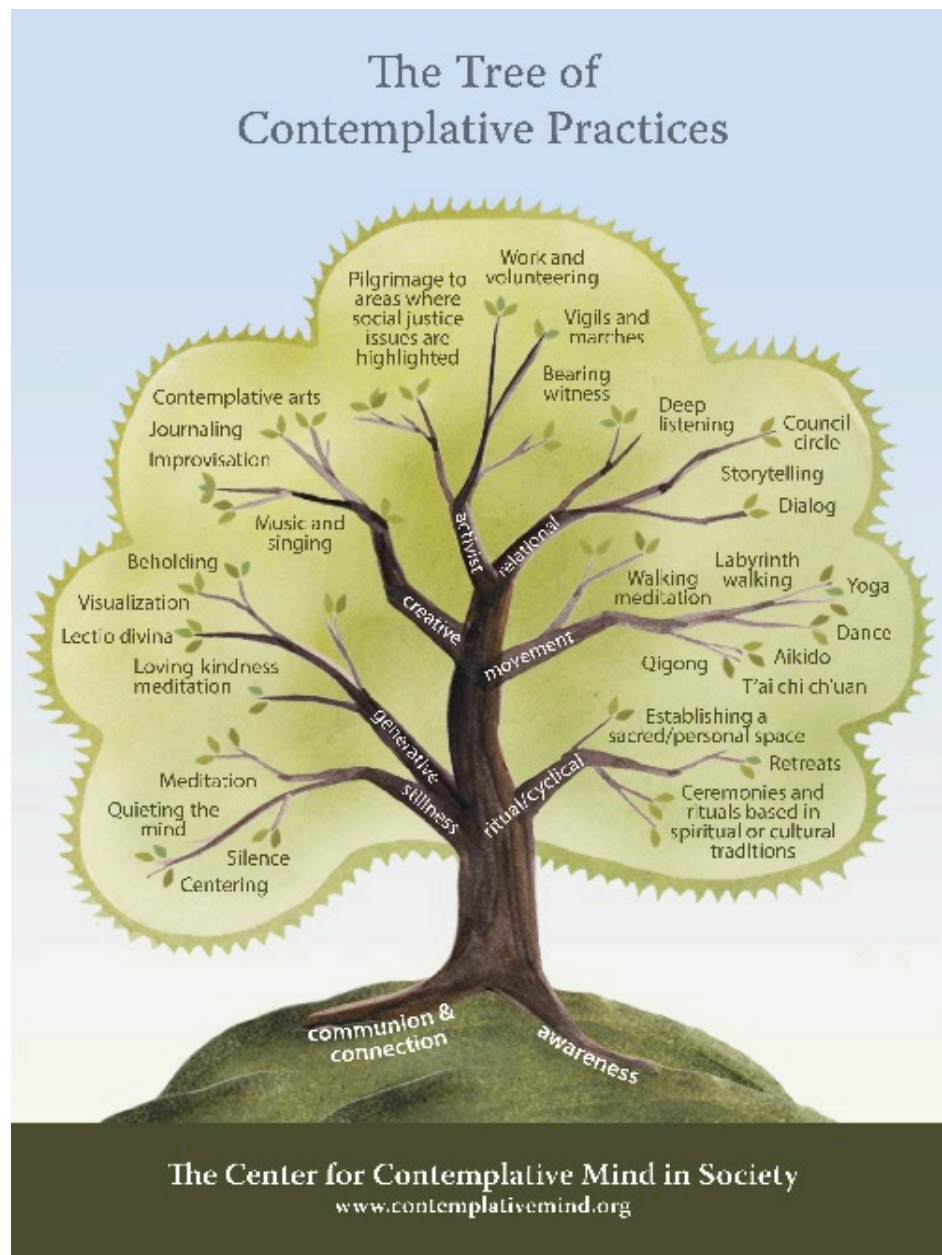
You and your family are welcome to come to the informal celebration.

Yeah, you mentioned that. (Stubborn me is thinking...screw you and your useless system, I am coming to the party. You will not have the last word.) We’ll be there.

As I write this now, tears are rolling down my cheeks and I feel sick inside; I feel like a frightened little girl. I don’t know that little girl and I am thinking it is time I got to know her. I need to find her and tell her everything is going to be okay—in fact, everything is okay. I never felt this way at the time and this certainly needs some reflection, but I will save that for later, when I don’t feel so nauseous. I need to let it resonate for a while and then I will deconstruct it as the numbness dissipates. Have I really numbed this for 32 years? Wow! What else have I not allowed myself to really experience? Perhaps this is the first time in my life that I am ready to truly deal with this and other issues.

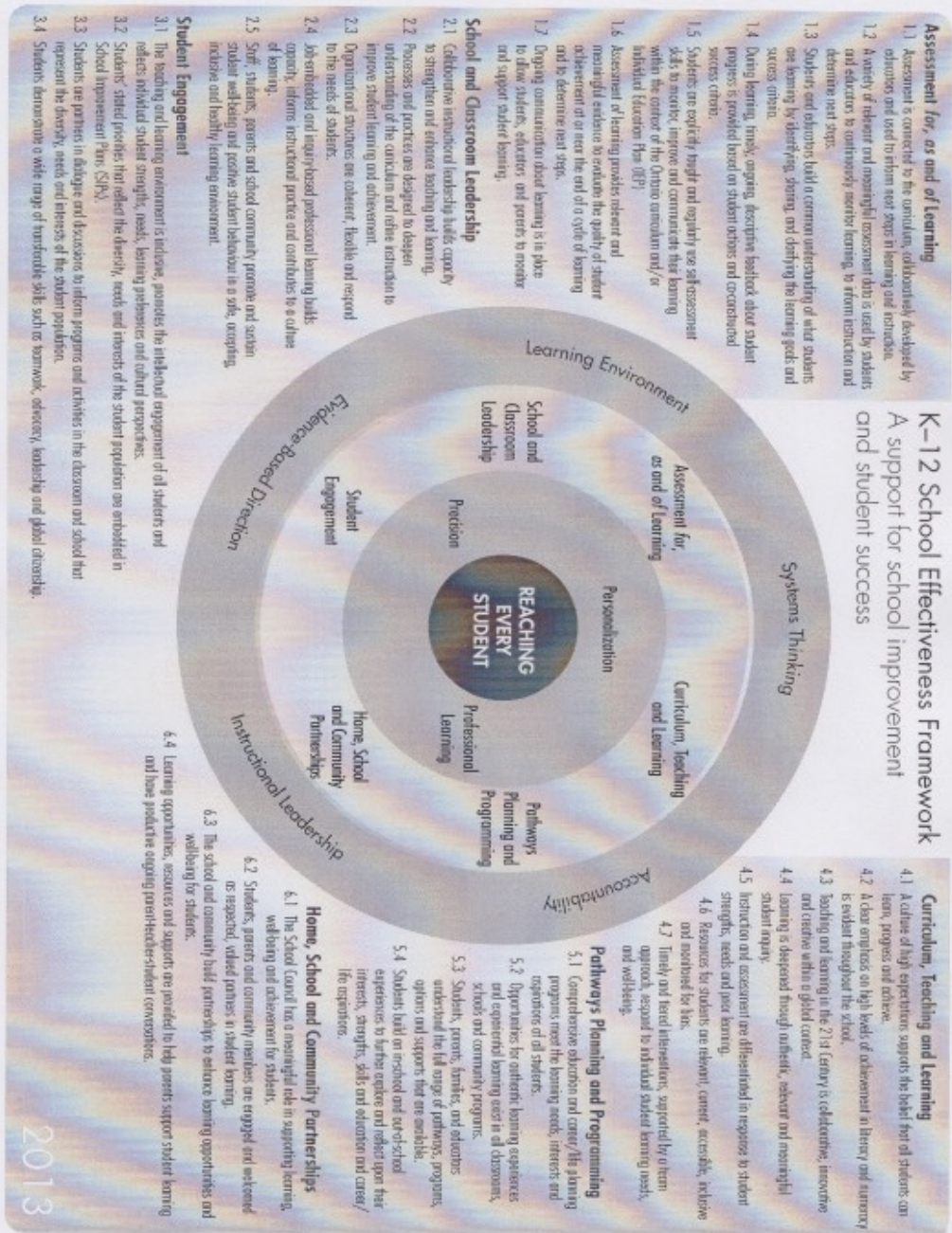
Appendix C

Tree of Contemplative Practice



Appendix D

K-12 School Effectiveness Framework



Appendix E

BARN Research Questions and Topics

2015

The use of feedback as a way to improve our practice and to improve student learning.

How can I improve my teaching techniques to ensure learning includes the key components of confidence and self-esteem, especially in the study of mathematics?

How can I improve students' ability to empathize with others using character development, creative journal writing, self-observation, and performance?

How does time to meet with colleagues, discuss new strategies and reflect on practice improve my own teaching experience in the learning of my students?

How can looking more deeply into my life and motivations enhance the way to teach and interact with my students?

Building my own resiliency, self-advocacy skills and self-confidence to be a better educator and in turn support my students.

Can I improve student engagement using open questions in my mathematics classroom?

How can I improve my authenticity in the classroom in a way that empower students to do the same?

Co-creating curriculum with students to develop a resiliency to increase students' self-worth, self-sufficiency and ultimately, improve their experience with learning.

2016

How can we use pedagogical documentation effectively to improve student learning?

Hanging in the balance: examining work/ life balance in a collaborative inquiry.

How can I help students to be mindful of the ways in which they use technology and to realize the effect it has on their mental well-being?

How can we (teachers and students) safely learn to express / be our true self using authentic communication?

How do we invite kindergarten students to reflect on and communicate their learning?

What is the impact of my instructional leadership practice and is it sustainable?

We are investigating how we can improve our relationship with classroom coworkers so that we can create a safe learning environment where everyone feels they can be their authentic self.

Will teaching students to read with musicality and rhythm in their voices strengthen their ability to become more fluent readers?

As a teacher, when working specifically with first Nations students, how important is trust in the student/teacher relationship? What can I do to ensure trust develops, and to do so in a timely manner to benefit the first nation students' success?

I am exploring how learning/ teaching the 10 ethical principles of yoga, the yamas and niyamas (which are things like compassion, focus, sustaining awareness etc.) can promote wellness and reinforce my rapport with students.

How can I modify the practices I used with intermediate students to address the social needs of my primary students to improve student achievement? (more specifically: rules of social engagement).

How can I improve my practice so that my contributions to the school environment promote inclusivity and considerations for the academic and social needs of students of the low German culture within our student population?

We want to know, through the use of success criteria, checklist, and anchor charts, can we teach our students specific strategies that will help them accurately assess their own work and identify areas for growth? In addition, we want to explore how these strategies affect students' self-concepts, self-confidence, and mindsets as learners.

2017

How can we develop a sense of place and connection to nature for our students that continues to provoke wonder in the classroom?

How can we use Mathies apps to improve students' ability to communicate their thinking?

How can I get my students and my son to OWN their own learning?
(and take the load off me)?

How to "let go" to let learning happen?

How can I create a culture of kindness that inspires?

How can we foster student self-regulation and mindfulness in Kindergarten?

Soccer Field Fun - Not Frustration and Anger

How can I incorporate Mindfulness into my teaching practice?

Empowering Math Confidence

How can I engage the 2P learner more fully in their learning?

How can we modify our school environment to support the educators and learners within it?

How will the students respond to attempts at building stronger relationships and how will this impact our program?

How can I engage my lowest literacy learners (SK/1) in an authentic way and give them a meaningful voice in their learning?

How can I build self-confidence and foster independence in my students?

2018

How can I meet the needs of my students? How can I help them advocate?

Compassion and You

How can using metacognitive strategies improve student and teacher learning?

How do we find and nurture our tribe? Understanding the role of personal culture in the creation of educator learning groups.

How can I keep my spark alive in teaching?

How can we create calm in the “chaos” of kindergarten?

Improving student engagement through problem-based learning.

How is self-esteem linked to self-regulation?

Creating an ideal physical learning environment.

How can I walk into the school every day and be the best that I can be?

How can I share my skills and experience as a drama and dance teacher with elementary schools & educators?

Morale within school communities.

How will focusing on our relationship affect ourselves and our students?

How can I best incorporate Reggio approaches in grade 1 and engage more parents?

Pedagogical Documentation of Outdoor Learning to Deepen Relationships.

Crisis in the Classroom: What to expect from a Behaviour Resource Teacher.