Creating Space for Contemplation:

Infusing Mindfulness and Awareness Activities in English Language Arts Classes

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**Dedication**

To Dr. Ingrid Johnston, kindest and gentlest of mentors,

without whom I would never have begun this project, let alone completed it.

To all beings, my mothers\*, most importantly my own mother, Mavis Jacobsen,

who, at 90 years, is still my strongest supporter.

\* “One of the unique aspects of Tibetan culture is that for hundreds of years, thousands of people have been meditating on the thought ‘every single being has been my mother’” (Thurman, 2015)

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**Abstract**

Influenced by broader societal trends, mindfulness training and movement meditation practices within disciplines such as yoga have gained rapidly growing acceptance in education. This project addresses initiatives to promote the cultivation of mindful awareness and compassion within public schools. In Part 1, the author describes the lived experience of cultivating mindfulness and other qualities important to well-being throughout over thirty years of contemplative practice in her personal and professional life as a secondary English Language Arts teacher. Part 2 provides an overview of the growing body of current research into Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBIs) involving school-age children, teachers, and college students and pre-service teachers which report promising results in a wide range of physical, emotional, and social areas. Arising from the recommendations that mindfulness training for students should be conducted by instructors who are well-established in the practice themselves, there is a perceived need for more trained professionals in the school setting. MBIs for teachers result in very high self-reports of efficacy and acceptability, leading to recommendations that this type of program should be integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher training. While a definition of mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4) is referenced by the majority of the researchers, various interpretations of this concept are discussed. The author encourages teachers to see mindfulness as a skill that is not only developed through meditative training outside of the classroom, but also as a way of being and attending within it. Part 3 of this project provides a variety of activities that expand beyond the scope of many currently popular mindfulness programs, falling into four broad categories: cultivating nature-awareness through sensory-based contemplative activities, including appreciation of indigenous ways of knowing; cultivating somatic awareness through contemplative physical activities; cultivating social, psychological, and emotional awareness through active imagination; and cultivating awareness and creativity through arts-based contemplative activities. The activities included are intended not only to promote an ability to focus attention and reduce stress, but to develop concentration through interested absorption, particularly in English Language Arts classes. These varied types of contemplative practice give permission to slow down from the usual harried pace of the classroom to create a classroom climate that fosters, more broadly, the tranquility of a contemplative life. This project encourages teachers to create space for silence, time, and inspiring subjects for contemplation. Cautioning that the current popularity of MBIs in schools is a trend that could be reduced to simply a method of more efficiently managing and regulating the behaviour and thoughts of the adults and students within the system, the author promotes infusing contemplative practices with the opposite objectives: wonder and openness to infinite possibility; a path to insights that transcend familiar reality; embracing complexity, ambiguity, and paradox; and cultivation of compassion and empathy through meaningful relationships.

**Key words: mindfulness in schools, contemplative education, mindfulness in English Language Arts, student and teacher well-being, contemplative activities in English Language Arts**

**Introduction**

I currently teach and supervise students in the University of Alberta Faculty of Education before and during their field experiences in local classrooms. These student teachers are understandably anxious about whether or not they will be successful in forming positive relationships and engaging their students’ interest while addressing their diverse needs, sharing their love of learning and of their chosen disciplines, and handling the demanding workload. Some of my students express the worry that they will discover they are not ‘meant for teaching’ after all. Once in the schools, most discover very quickly the joys that come from making emotional connections, watching eyes light up with new understanding, and sharing laughs and collaborative discoveries. Despite this, the various aforementioned challenges of this career remain, and many graduates leave the profession within a few years (Roeser et. al., 2012). One topic that is capturing the interest of some of these new and aspiring teachers is ‘mindfulness in education’. They wonder what mindfulness is, whether it may help them and their students to respond to the stresses of contemporary school life, and how they might implement it as teachers. This graduate project is my response to the question, “What can I, as a long-term practitioner of meditation, and an experienced secondary English Language Arts teacher, offer to fellow teachers who have become interested in mindfulness in education?”

My career began when I completed my own Bachelor of Education at this same university in 1981; I have worked as a teacher in Edmonton ever since. In addition to teaching junior high and senior high students, my roles expanded over time to include serving as an English Language Arts department head and, briefly, a literacy consultant for our large urban public school district. Throughout my career, including my current two-year secondment to the university, my heart has always been in teaching, whether I am instructing in a grade 7 *Humanities* class, a grade 11 *International Baccalaureate English Language Arts* course, a postsecondary seminar in *Language, Literacy, and Educational Contexts,* a community yoga and meditation workshop, or a professional development session for fellow teachers. Having spent my life in the classroom, my desire is that this project be of practical use to my colleagues, new and experienced, both in the crucial first step of helping them to develop a perspective on mindfulness and contemplative practice in general, and in the necessary next step of finding and using applicable resources for use in their classrooms.

Section One is intended to provide some information about my background, explaining the roots of my involvement with mindfulness, and the ways in which contemplative practices have influenced my teaching. In Section Two, I will provide information about the research to date that attests to the value of formal mindfulness training (MT) programs in schools and colleges. Section Three will provide potential scripts for guided meditations, active imagination, and visualization activities that can be used and modified by teachers wishing to incorporate awareness activities explicitly into their programs; the accompanying teaching suggestions that I provide are primarily applicable to English Language Arts classes, with which I am most familiar, but many principles can also be adapted and implemented in other subject areas. Section Four comprises some final thoughts on where we as educators may go from here in fostering an ongoing expansion of the benefits already being seen through incorporating contemplative practices and the teaching of mindfulness into the school setting. Throughout, I will emphasize the many other diverse, often informal ways in which a thoughtful and sensitive teacher can foster a contemplative classroom climate.

**Section One: “Why Mindfulness Matters to Me” - One Teacher’s Story**

True knowledge is existential knowledge. The act of Autobiography, above all, reveals to the student the truth of this proposition, and, in so doing, prepares him [or her] to become a responsible and responsive teacher. Who is better equipped to bring education alive than one who knows through his [or her] inmost experience what education is? (Abbs, 1974, p. 107)

Before answering the question of what I can offer to fellow educators, I feel I must provide some autobiographical details, on two premises. Firstly, I wish to provide a context for the remainder of the project: to describe how I developed the lens through which I view the modern Western interpretation of mindfulness and the research results reported in Section Two; to describe the lived experiences that inform the suggestions and ideas I share in Section Three; and hopefully, to provide a reference point for the conclusions that I draw in Section Four.

Secondly, I wish to honour tradition; over the years, I have participated in many ceremonies and teachings bestowed by Buddhist scholars and practitioners. By custom, the first step in these events often involved a delineation of the sources or the provenance, if you will, of the particular discourse or ritual. It is even more requisite for me than for my Buddhist teachers to avoid taking personal credit for insights regarding mindfulness or knowledge of contemplative practices that are shared in the following pages. Any mistakes and misinterpretations are mine, but the lineage of exploration of questions about teaching mindfulness and teaching mindfully goes back centuries before my life and career. To the extent that the ideas I offer are valid, I owe their inception and cultivation to drawing from the teachings of others whom I credit here.

Although mindfulness may be a relatively new term for many of my colleagues, I was fortunate enough to encounter this concept early in my career, first through coming to know Jim Kaiser, a fellow education student who later became my husband, and, through him, meeting my primary meditation teacher, Leslie George Dawson. This was in the late 1970s, at the same time that Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn founded the *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)* program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (2003), which arguably marked the inception of the current Western secular mindfulness movement (Boyce, 2011). MBSR, an 8-week group program comprised of weekly 2 ½ hour classes plus a one-day retreat and daily home practice exercises, (mindfulnessinstitute.ca, 2016) is one of the most commonly used programs for mindfulness based interventions (MBIs) in the research studies addressed in Section Two of this project, and Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4) is referenced by the majority of the researchers. However, there remains no single “correct” or “authoritative version” of mindfulness and the concept is often conflated with many common interpretations (Vago and Silversweig, 2012). Numerous scholars accept Shapiro’s (2006) proposal that there are three primary components in the process of mindfulness: attitude, attention, and intention. However, in different contexts, mindfulness may be described as (1) a temporary state of non-judgmental, non-reactive, present-centered attention and awareness that is cultivated during meditation practice; (2) An enduring trait that contrasts with ‘mindlessness’; (3) A meditation practice deriving from Buddhist origins; or (4) An intervention (Vago and Silversweig, 2012).

The first English translation of the Pali word *sati* as mindfulness was in 1882 (Vago and Silversweig, 2012, p. 2). Teachings on mindfulness in the West after that time primarily derived their origin from the *Satipatthana Sutta* - Discourse on the Arousing of Mindfulness (Thera, 1980). Described by some as the most popular and highly venerated of all of the Buddha’s discourses, this text is an extremely detailed exposition of developing what is referred to as ‘Right Mindfulness’ through bare attention, “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception” (Thera, 1980, p. 30). Although this concept, and meditation practices to cultivate insight through bare attention, had been a fundamental component of Eastern traditions for centuries, such practices had only become popular in European and North American counterculture as I grew up in the Sixties and Seventies, during which time my teacher actively participated in this movement.

Like the renowned Western Insight Meditation teachers, Joseph Goldstein (2014) and Jack Kornfield (2014), from whom Kabat-Zinn first learned meditation, my teacher, Dawson, had studied and practiced *Vipassana* (insight) meditation as outlined in the *Satipatthana Sutta* under the instruction of Mahasi Sayadaw in the 1950s; having been ordained as a monk in India, he also studied and practiced with other Buddhist teachers in monasteries in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma. In the 1960s, Dawson returned to the West, where he taught meditation; he was known then as Ananda Bodhi, his ordained name from the South Asian *Theravadan* tradition of Buddhism. However, by the time that I met him he was addressed as Namgyal Rinpoche, the title given him when he was formally recognized and enthroned as a reincarnated teacher within the Tibetan Buddhist *Karma Kagyu* lineage by its leader, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa.

Shortly after returning from Burma, Namgyal Rinpoche had founded the Johnstone House Contemplative Community in Scotland, which became one of the first Buddhist centers in the West; he and his followers had later transferred it to Chogyam Trungpa, who renamed it *Samye Ling* (dharmafellowship.org, n.d.). Trungpa went on to become one of the most influential figures in conveying Buddhist practices and understandings to Westerners; his book, *Meditation in Action*, written while he was living at *Samye Ling*, was, in 1969, the very first publication of *Shambhala Publications*, a company which has since become one of the largest publishers of works from Buddhist and other contemplative traditions. Trungpa also founded the *Naropa Institute*, the first Buddhist-inspired academic institution to receive United States regional accreditation; while Chogyam Trungpa was establishing Naropa in Boulder, Colorado, with a vision of taking the best elements of Western scholarship and combining them with an emphasis on the Eastern wisdom tradition (naropa.edu, 2016), Namgyal Rinpoche was likewise promoting cross-cultural teachings in Canada through founding *Centennial Lodge of the Theosophical Society* in Toronto, and the *Dharma Centre of Canada*, a 400 acre non-sectarian retreat centre in central Ontario dedicated to awakening, compassion, awareness and wisdom. This is where I first met him in 1978 and he became my meditation teacher; all of this history informed my training in mindful awareness. As Gunaratana emphasizes:

Buddhism is 2,500 years old, and any thought system of that vintage has time to develop layers and layers of doctrine and ritual. Nevertheless, the fundamental attitude of Buddhism is intensely empirical and anti-authoritarian. Gotama the Buddha was a highly unorthodox individual and real anti-traditionalist. He did not offer his teaching as a set of dogmas, but rather as a set of propositions for each individual to investigate for himself. His invitation to one and all was “Come and see.” ...See for yourself (Gunaratana, 1993, p. 38).

This orientation has made Buddhism an attractive philosophical system for many of us raised within the Western scientific paradigm. My motivation to learn meditation did not arise from a desire to relax, reduce stress, or learn a strategy for managing my students’ behaviours; I was on a spiritual quest for ‘enlightenment’ as I understood it - insight into transcendental truth. “Insight meditation is essentially a practice of investigative personal discovery” (Gunaratana, 1993, p. 39). Throughout the years that I spent teaching junior and senior high students, in an attempt to pursue this type of investigative personal discovery, my personal meditation practice has been continually refreshed through periods of more intensive retreat work during which we would dedicate all of our waking hours to meditation (and more, when we were practicing dream yoga and sleeping yoga). These retreats ranged from periods of a few days or weeks at retreat centres around the world, to six months of silent retreat at the Dharma Centre of Canada, to two years at a rural centre in southwest Ireland while on leave from teaching from 1998-2000. In this quest, my husband and I also sought out profound and inspiring teachings from heads of three of the four primary Tibetan Buddhist lineages - the Dalai Lama, the 16th Karmapa, and Sakya Trizin, as well as many other teachers. In the early 1980s, long before he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, we met the Dalai Lama and convoyed the small Alberta Tibetan refugee community to Wisconsin to attend his first major ceremonial teachings in North America. My husband and I were married in a Buddhist ceremony; we occasionally hosted Buddhist teachers in our home when their tours brought them to Edmonton on teaching tours. For many years, Buddhist practices were a very important, albeit private, part of our lives.

Beyond the personally rewarding insights gained through many hours of contemplative retreat work and intensive interaction with meditation teachers, these experiences have given me a touchstone to use in reference to the comparable states of mind that may arise during ordinary activities; as a result, I have greater respect for the diverse forms that meditation and other contemplative practices can take and greater confidence in the value of everyday ways that we can cultivate mindfulness in the classroom.

Meditation is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “a variety of private devotional exercise consisting of the continuous application of the mind to the contemplation of a particular religious text, truth, mystery, or object” (OED, 2015, n. 1a). The classic image of a meditator is in the cross-legged posture, leading to many Westerners equating ‘meditation’ with ‘sitting meditation’. Traditional Buddhist teachings, however, emphasized meditating in four major postures of sitting, standing, walking, and lying, then extending “to the point where the feeling of calming the body and of being aware is present in all the postures as well as in coming and going” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 188). As the Dalai Lama (2000) explains it:

Meditation is needed in developing mental qualities. The mind is definitely something that can be transformed, and meditation is a means to transform it. Meditation is the activity of familiarizing your mind with something new. Basically, it means getting used to the object on which you are meditating (p. 4).

In *How to Practice*, (2002), the Dalai Lama further describes various forms of meditation, all of which we learned and practiced:

Two basic types of meditation are *analytical meditation* and *stabilizing meditation*. In analytical meditation you analyze a topic trying to understand it through reasoning...In stabilizing meditation you fix your mind on a single object or topic...Another way of dividing meditation is between *subjective meditation* and *objective meditation.* In subjective meditation your aim is to cultivate in the mind a new, or strengthened perspective, or attitude [e.g. Cultivation of compassion]...In objective meditation you meditate on a topic...You can meditate in the manner of wishing...Or you can go one step further, into *imaginative meditation.*..The practice of deity yoga, for example, calls for meditating on yourself as an ideal being whose body is made from the light of wisdom (2002, p. 118-119).

This is a broader range of meditation activity than I find is often employed in current research literature where, of the above forms, stabilizing meditation through awareness of breathing is usually emphasized as the primary method to cultivate mindfulness. According to the Dalai Lama, “the aim of stabilizing meditation is to strengthen the mind’s ability to focus on a single object or topic, which in turn enables the mind to overcome problems at their root. It will also help you to be more alert and sharp in daily life” (2002, p. 119-120). When we were learning stabilizing meditation, we were not limited to focusing on the breath. We learned that one-pointed concentration can be directed to virtually any object - from a flame to a flower, which may be physically externally present, or visualized internally. Beyond this type of focused attention (FA) on a single object, some researchers acknowledge that meditation can also take the different form of open monitoring (OM). The *Mahamudra* and *Dzogchen* teachings in which we participated would fit into this category. Subjective meditation sometimes appears in Western MT programs in one particular form of loving kindness (LK) meditation: this is a practice, originally from the *Brahma Viharas* (divine abidings)*,* in which the meditator reflects on directing loving kindness sequentially to herself, or himself, a loved one, a stranger, and a person with whom she or he experiences conflict. While this standard practice is certainly beneficial, it is worthwhile to note that loving kindness is the first of four *Brahma Viharas*, followed by compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Our teachers emphasized the value of cultivating all of these states through meditation; while I see some MT programs address loving kindness and compassion, and most emphasize equanimity, I have seen no reference to sympathetic joy, an emotion that I propose would be well worth cultivating as an antidote to the competitive orientation frequently fostered in our society and its educational institutions. I feel fortunate during my mindfulness training to have encountered various types of subjective meditations, including forms of loving kindness practice that emphasized our interrelationship with other species, providing the foundation for a more accessible ecological mindfulness.

Of the forms of meditation addressed by the Dalai Lama above, the one that is perhaps most significant to my own meditative and educational practice, but least represented in many discussions of mindfulness in education, is *imaginative meditation*. In the Tibetan Tantric tradition, we became familiar with practising through studying the narrative of elaborate *sadhanas* (meditation texts) that involve multimodal use of *mantra* (sound), *mudra* (gesture), manipulation of a *mala* (rosary), and visualization of complex archetypal deity figures composed of multiple layers of symbols, while maintaining awareness of internal sensations. “Tantra is the weaving of many forms, shapes, patterns, objects of contemplation” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 221). The literal meaning of the word *tantra* is thread. “The tantric way of teaching is to take various threads of ideas and show you how to interconnect them” (1983, p. 221). This orientation is threaded throughout all that is shared in these pages.

My husband and I first learned and practiced these forms of meditation within a Buddhist framework. However, we were not only interested in Eastern spirituality. Encounters with First Nations elders while in university led us to several years of regular attendance at prayer and healing ceremonies in the sweat lodges of medicine men from the *Cree* and *Anishanabe* First Nations; it is with sincere gratitude that I recollect the generous hospitality and wisdom of elders George and Charlotte Callingbull, shaman Michael Thrasher and his teacher, elder Peter O’Chiese, during that period. At the time, these various spiritual activities were kept separate from my professional career. I felt that sharing them in a public education context was inappropriate for various reasons: out of respect for possible conflict with my students’ and their families’ own beliefs; the fact that these practices are not contained within the curriculum which I was employed to teach; and the requirement within these doctrines, that such teachings only be shared by those with appropriate qualifications in appropriate contexts. However, at the same time, to the extent that teaching is as much bound up in who I am as an embodied presence as it is involved with the content that I instruct, inevitably my intense involvement with spiritual teachings and meditation practices influenced my classroom practice.

Perhaps most significant during my first few years of teaching was the impact of my after-hours meditation practice on developing greater moment-to-moment mindful awareness during the chaotic school day.

Meditation is a *tool* to achieve post-meditation mindfulness. Regardless of how we get there, either through meditation or more directly by paying attention to novelty and questioning assumptions, to be mindful is to be in the present, noticing all the wonders that we didn’t realize were right in front of us (Langer, 2014, p. xxv).

Ellen Langer delineates this key point about the relationship between meditation and mindfulness (as mindful awareness or a dispositional trait) in the 25th anniversary edition of her seminal work, *Mindfulness*. In lectures, Namgyal Rinpoche frequently reiterated a similar idea, “Regardless of the meditation exercise, only one thing brings you to awakening and that one thing is awareness” (1983, p. 249). Therefore, he presented a variety of approaches to meditation, as well as alternative ways of cultivating awareness, for us to experiment with and pursue, according to personal inclination and observed effects. According to Namgyal Rinpoche, contemplative practices, regardless of their origin, can be seen as examples of one or more of

seven categories of meditation: breathing; point or cakra; visualization; sound or mantra; movement or mudra; devotional; and insight. By the development of the first six of these categories, or by the development of wholesome activities, one can establish calm. You cannot possibly be aware if the mind and body are tense. First you will need to establish calm, slow down; then you can extend the meditation to daily life (1983, p. 297-8).

An orientation to living more mindfully operated in the reverse direction as well; we were encouraged to “look at birds, examine the nature of water, get into positive, wholesome states of consciousness,” in fulfillment of the principle that “you must have wholesome states of consciousness if you wish to make progress in meditation” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 246). I found that the more I was able to experience beautiful sensory imagery, supportive natural scenery, healthy physical activity, etc., the easier and more enjoyable meditation became. I was able to more readily calm my mind, and when I did, the thoughts and images that spontaneously arose were more wholesome and supportive, if the time outside of meditation was spent engaged with positive stimuli. Just as with the body, ‘you are what you eat’, I found that with the mind, ‘you become what you focus on’. My mindfulness journey became a circular one, in which enriching sensory input gained through travel explorations, physical exercise, arts explorations and nature study fed into contemplative meditation, which provided me with a base of calm awareness to be more mindfully responsive. This mindful responsiveness helped me make better decisions in my daily life, both in the classroom and on my own time, which included healthy choices in my activities. The types of activities that I propose in Section Three of this project directly reflect this approach.

In workshops and retreats as well as travel explorations in which I participated, Namgyal Rinpoche used a variety of means drawn from not only meditation practices, but also from Western contemplative arts and psychology, to help students cultivate mindful awareness and promote mindfulness as an enduring quality. Throughout his life, Rinpoche maintained a connection with the Western Mysteries teachings of Theosophical traditions he had first encountered in his youth, and passed on these practices in various contexts. Having met Julian Huxley, Anna Freud, and R.D. Laing when he was a special guest speaker at the Fifth International Congress of Psychotherapists in London, Rinpoche continued to incorporate the insights of Western psychology into his books, lectures, and retreats throughout his teaching career. I had been introduced to Fritz Perls’ (1976) Gestalt therapy and Alexander Lowen’s (1975) bioenergetic therapy in undergraduate educational psychology classes and workshops, and I greatly valued the opportunity to later participate in courses and retreats led by Namgyal Rinpoche and other meditation teachers in which we explored the parallels between Eastern embodied practices and the work of these psychotherapists and theorists (Grof, 1988, Gendlin 1978, 1986, Bandler & Grinder, 1979). As an English major, I had become fascinated by Joseph Campbell’s (1972) ideas about mythology when I first encountered them during my undergraduate degree; reading his work laid the basis for an interest in archetypes that was fostered through meditative retreat work in which we explored parallels between Tibetan Tantric guided visualization practices and Jungian depth psychology. We engaged in contemplative retreats that were grounded in readings of C.G. Jung (1964), Marion Woodman (1980) and John A. Sanford (1980). As a result, it was very natural for me to look for ways to incorporate these insights from Western scholars into classroom study of literature and my understanding of the factors affecting the psychological and emotional health of myself and of my students. This further influenced my planning of lesson activities. For example, some of the projects that I have found consistently rewarding and inspiring for me and students in my English Language Arts classes are based on *mandalas,* symbols found in Tibetan iconography that Jung also explored. As described in the resource section of this project, mandalas can be used for personal and literary exploration, as well as to explore dreams, another important subject of study common to Jung’s depth analytical psychology and Tibetan Buddhism.

Other sample activities and lesson ideas included in the resource section promote arts-based learning, which I have found to be an ideal means to integrate mindful awareness. When I was teaching junior high Drama, like many other Drama teachers, I was able to explore awareness through a variety of activities, from improvisation games to centering activities to creative visualizations. Teaching English in a K-12 arts school for twelve years gave me the opportunity to explore with students various ways in which visual and performing arts could be integrated with not only the literary arts, but also the contemplative. I grew up playing the piano, and even now, sitting down to play is a wonderful way for me to relax and explore; my meditation teacher also studied music in his youth, and the power of Western classical music was shared in music appreciation evenings at his house as well as in his lectures, where he frequently drew parallels between the disciplines of learning to play an instrument and training the mind through meditation. I observed Tibetan monks as they spent weeks creating elaborate sand *mandalas* (spiritual geometric patterns) for ritual ceremonies, and also experienced the joyful absorption of sculpting *rupas* (sacred statues), painting *thangkas* (religious icons) and designing *mandalas* myself while in retreat. Freely expressive sculpting, painting, and creative visualization activities that I participated in during workshops with Namgyal Rinpoche provided me with a rich body of resources from which to draw in planning classroom activities; entire books have been published based on the art activities that we explored during these retreats (1982, 1997). All of these experiences informed my commitment to cultivating mindfulness through the arts. Frequently, our teacher would have a jigsaw puzzle set out on a table and play calm background music in the workshop space. Inspired by this, at exam times when I could move the desks to make room for a table, I would likewise set out a puzzle; stressed students and teachers who stopped by would sometimes join me in contemplative puzzle-making between writing or marking exams.

Perhaps even more abiding than the arts as a source of inspiration for my perspective on the contemplative life are the wealth of experiences in nature that I have gathered. Long before encountering formal meditation practices, beginning with a childhood on an Alberta farm where I was able to spend many hours of unregulated time alone outdoors in pastures and woods, my own introduction to contemplative activity was through spending time in nature. As Richard Louv (2005) describes in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, “Nature calmed me, focused me, and yet excited my senses” (p. 10). These childhood experiences gave me a touchstone to reconnect with through meditation practice as an adult. If it were possible, quiet time in nature would be the first mindful awareness experience that I would love to make available to all students, especially since, as Louv (2005) points out, far fewer children now actually spend time in nature and therefore are missing the opportunity to build this foundation of serenity. He describes not only the costs of what he describes as “nature deficit disorder… diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses” ( p. 36), but also many of the tremendous benefits that could be realized if we provided young people with more nature experiences, e.g. “Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses” (p. 7). There are good reasons that much meditative retreat work is conducted in a pastoral natural setting.

Throughout his life, my teacher emphasized the importance of outer exploration of the planet through travel and immersion in nature to accompany the inner exploration of the psyche. He taught mindfulness while on safari in Africa and on boat trips to the Arctic or Antarctic as often as in stationary courses and meditation retreats. Through many such international journeys, I discovered how travel naturally forces me out of a mindless state of habit, encouraging a more mindful awareness of what was previously taken for granted. Over the years, I valued the opportunity to take groups of high school students on international trips, confident that the novel experience itself was often supportive of greater mindfulness.

Over the years as a teacher, I was able to expand beyond core subject areas of English Language Arts, Social Studies, and French, to also teach a variety of complementary courses. I taught Tourism modules to lead up to our spring break trips, Creative Writing courses to supplement our English studies, an Ethics option such as is now being used as the context for introducing formal mindfulness training in one junior high school, and finally, a Yoga course. After having practiced yoga for many years and eventually completing yoga teacher training, I learned that Yoga had recently been approved as a provincially accredited high school course. Having led extracurricular yoga and meditation classes off and on for students and staff over the years, I was excited at the prospect of teaching this more formally; when I mentioned it to my IB students, they were adamant that we should request the necessary local board approval, and, with the support of my principal at that time, I did. Although I only had the opportunity to offer the course briefly myself before moving on to a different position, many local schools have now supported a member of staff to become trained and offer Yoga classes. These classes are an ideal venue within which to teach contemplative practices.

The concurrent explosion of popularity of *hatha yoga* in the West has introduced many people to mindful awareness of the body as originally developed through the Hindu Vedic tradition. Although I was first introduced to *hatha yoga* in the 1970s, for many years, my primary physical practice was not yoga, but martial arts. Throughout his youth, my husband had been involved in various martial arts; following his initiative, I spent several years exploring a variety of these practices, learning different forms of *tai chi* and *qigong*, and experimenting with *aikido* and *jujitsu*. Eventually, we both earned our black belts in *wing chun kung fu*. Through these experiences, I learned to value the calm, alert mindfulness and sensitivity to one’s sparring partner cultivated by the *tai chi* ‘pushing hands’ and *wing chun* ‘sticky hands’ practices that has also been shown through research (Vago and Silbersweig, 2012, p. 10). It wasn’t until I discovered the more vigorous *ashtanga yoga* style in 2003 that yoga eclipsed martial arts as my regular physical practice. My involvement with these physical practices has influenced me to have a strong commitment to including somatic awareness in any mindfulness training program, and integrating body awareness activities as classroom contemplative practices whenever possible. MBSR and various other programs include yoga postures and body scan awareness practices; some also incorporate *tai chi* or other movement meditations. I am particularly encouraged by recent research into treatment for high school students at risk for mental health challenges which integrates mindfulness treatment into the milieu of mixed martial arts and yoga training (Milligan et. al, 2016).

The meditation process outlined in the earliest Buddhist discourse on mindfulness, the *Satipatthana Sutta*, places the body first in its delineation of the four objects of mindfulness in this method, the remaining three being feelings, states of mind, and mental contents (Thera, 1980, p. 57). In my teacher’s monastic training, the first meditation given to novices when they were ordained was a meditation on the body (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 9), and subsequently, body work also became a foundation of the contemplative work he shared with his students. To support our study of the body, we spent many hours engaged with an *Anatomy Coloring Book* (Kapit and Elson, 1977); as a result of my experience with this absorbing activity, I am not surprised by the popularity of the current profusion of coloring books to promote meditation and relaxation appearing in bookstores (Mucklow & Porter, 2014). I like to have pencil crayons and a few such pages available in the room for use during classes.

Eventually, due to our rich background experiences and the growing public interest in learning about mindfulness meditation, my husband and I began offering meditation classes at a local yoga studio. We emphasized secular approaches to meditation that follow the principle of developing mindfulness through short and frequent awareness practices. We organized sessions according to themes, and the structure of the classes was often modelled after the popular ‘flow’ yoga format that involves mindful transition from one activity to another. Frequently we have incorporated activities in these classes that we have previously used with children, and I can see that many of the contemplative practices that we have shared with adults could also easily be adapted for student use.

From childhood experiences in nature, through schooling that cultivated a love of literature and inquiry, through experiential physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual learning, to my current experiences in teaching meditation to adults, I have developed my own personal understanding of and orientation to contemplative practices and mindfulness in education which will be reflected in the remaining sections of this project.

**Section 2 “In Case You Need Convincing” - Mindfulness Research**

Embarking recently upon graduate studies at the University of Alberta, I discovered that in the period since I first discovered mindfulness, interest in this topic had undergone a radical transformation. Within the past two years, at my own university, St. Stephen’s College and the Faculty of Education offered two new courses in this field: Dr. Norbert Krumins’ *Mindfulness for Teachers* for undergraduates and Dr. Claudia Eppert’s graduate course: *Awakening Education: Mindfulness, Wisdom, & Contemplative Pedagogies for a Compassionate, Just, & Sustainable World,* which I was able to take. Since December, 2014, a U of A Faculty Mindfulness Community of Practice has held regular meetings, and currently, the newly formed Integrative Health Institute of the U of A is conducting an ambitious research study of a wide variety of programs that promote social and emotional wellness through incorporating mindfulness and other practices in local schools.My own presentation on ‘Mindfulness in Education’ at the 2015 conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) was chosen as a Presidents’ Spotlight Session due to the perceived interest and relevance of this topic; ‘Mindfulness and Well-Being in Teacher Education’ was the topic of the Canadian Association for Teachers of Education CSSE Pre-Conference the same year. The large audience at a presentation by Dr. Claudia Eppert, Robert Piazza, and myself at the 2015 provincial English Language Arts Council Conference indicated a similarly high level of interest among English educators, however, little has been written in the specific area of mindfulness in ELA, a gap which this project seeks to fill.

One of the most influential early researchers and writers in this field was Dr. Herbert Benson, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, who was the first Westerner to research the effects of meditation on physiology. Benson published his first study in 1972, basing his work on the effects of Transcendental Meditation (TM), a practice that comes from Hindu yogic practice. Benson’s first book, *The Relaxation Response*, published in 1975, brought awareness of TM to the general public. Since that time, according to the International Foundation of Consciousness-Based Education, a TM-based mindfulness program has been implemented in over 400 educational institutions in 53 countries, involving over 220,000 students (2013); one such program was offered for two years at an Edmonton high school. After meeting the Dalai Lama at Harvard in 1979, Benson conducted subsequent research on Tibetan *Vajrayana* monks; their *tum-mo* or inner fire meditation practice allowed them to achieve what Benson himself referred to as “breathtaking results” which included: in some cases, lowering their metabolism by 64% compared to the usual 10-15% shown during normal sleep; in other cases, drying cold wet sheets with body heat or sleeping unharmed on a Himalayan mountainside in sub-zero weather clad only in light clothing (Cromie, 2002). Benson’s research gained widespread attention in the popular press; up to the present, over four million copies of Benson’s seven books have been sold worldwide, significantly impacting the public acceptance of meditation practices.

In addition to the more commonly studied *Theravadan* (teachings of the elders - including *vipassana* insight practices) and *Vajrayana* (diamond vehicle - including esoteric *Tantric* rituals) Buddhist traditions already discussed in Section One, *Mahayana* (great vehicle - emphasizing compassion) Buddhist practices have also been widely popularized - first by the books and teachings of *Zen* master Suzuki, who coined the frequently quoted phrase “beginner’s mind” in the title of his first book (1970), and by Vietnamese monk and meditation teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh since the publication in 1975 of *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, “one of the most important books in raising awareness about mindfulness” (Miller, 2014, p. 122).

Recognizing distinctions among the various types of contemplative practices being incorporated in mindfulness research can have an impact on interpretation of results, as evidenced by a recent study which is the first direct “comparison of the neurophysiological and cognitive correlates of Vajrayana and Theravada meditative practices” (Amihai & Kozhevnikov, 2014). The study’s authors reference Benson’s own previous reports of a contradictory and ‘unclear’ phenomenon: in his reports of ‘the relaxation response’, the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, while the *tum-mo* studies show evidence of increased arousal and activation of the sympathetic nervous system. In their study, Amihai and Kozhevnikov (2014) show that *Vajrayana* and *Theravadan* styles of meditation correlate with different neurophysiological effects, results which “undermine the prevalent view that all meditation practices bring about the same results,” (p. 1). Amihai and Kozhevnikov point out that an insufficient understanding of the theoretical and cultural differences between different meditative traditions can lead to inconsistent findings in the scientific literature. There is a risk of misinterpretation or misrepresentation of results unless scholars and researchers pay close attention to the distinctions among different practices and traditions in their work. As they do so, a more nuanced understanding of the various potential goals, approaches, meanings and effects of mindfulness meditation and other contemplative practices will no doubt develop. It is encouraging that research studies have begun to appear in which distinctions among different styles of meditation are acknowledged and studied (Manuello et. al., 2015).

Alternate definitions of the term ‘mindfulness’ have been proposed, as the study of this phenomenon has become more refined and increasing numbers of psychologists began to study the benefits of mindfulness training for psychological and emotional health. Some studies in this review reference an operational definition proposed by Bishop et al.(2004) as a result of the consensus emerging from a series of meetings of practitioners in the field of psychology. This definition involves a two-component model of mindfulness:

The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance (p. 232).

For Bishop and his colleagues (2004), a key purpose for developing an operational definition was “so that an instrument can be developed and questions concerning mediating role and mechanisms of action can be investigated” (p. 231). When analyzing research conducted on MBIs, it is therefore relevant to consider the relationship between the definition and instruments that are employed.

One such instrument, the Langer Mindfulness Scale, is based on what Ellen Langer (2000) refers to as a “western, social-cognitive mindfulness.” She defines this as “an active mindset characterized by novel distinction–drawing that results in being 1) situated in the present, 2) sensitive to context and perspective, and 3) guided (but not governed) by rules and routines” (Langer & Moldoveanu, p. 2). Langer (2000) contrasts *mindfulness,* a disposition which is characterized by novelty seeking, novelty producing, flexibility and engagement, and *mindlessness*, “a mindset of rigidity in which one adheres to a single perspective of distinctions/ categories drawn in the past and acts automatically, oblivious to context or perspective” (p. 6). In the recently published 25th anniversary edition of Langer’s seminal work, *Mindfulness* (2014), numerous scholars attribute a great deal of the impact of the mindfulness revolution to her groundbreaking research. With these considerations in mind, I now turn to the research itself.

**Current Research Involving School-Age Children**

Due to the significant amount of recent research interest in mindfulness, I focus here on compilations and meta-analyses of research studies within the past five years. Beginning with one of the earliest of these, published in 2009, “Mindfulness-Based Approaches with Children and Adolescents: A Preliminary Review of Current Research in an Emergent Field” by Christine A. Burke, there is considerable consistency in results and recommendations for future research, both within Burke’s paper, and among the subsequent reviews and meta-analyses. Burke (2009) reviewed fifteen studies employing MBSR and the related MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) models. She acknowledged the existence of other studies employing ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy) and DBT (dialectic behavior therapy), which teach non-meditative mindfulness techniques, but explained that exploration of these is outside the scope of her review. This is significant in that many other reviewers fail to even acknowledge alternative or non-meditative mindfulness techniques. Burke (2009) provides a detailed description of MBSR and MBCT programs in both clinical and non-clinical settings, a brief summary being:

MBSR and MBCT are experiential learning programs that include weekly group sessions, regular home practice, and the core curriculum of formal mindfulness practices (body scan, sitting, movement and walking meditations), and informal mindfulness practices (where participants intentionally bring mindful awareness to activities of daily living, e.g., showering, eating, gardening, shopping). (p. 134)

The objectives of both programs are to develop participants’ “mindfulness skills and attitudes, including focusing, sustaining and switching attention, and accepting their present moment experience, including felt sensations in the body, without judgment or elaboration” (Burke, 2009, p. 134). Burke concludes that these studies provide a reasonable base of support for the feasibility and acceptability of MBIs with children and adolescents. She points out that there is a need to develop validated measures for use with a younger population, previous measures of mindfulness having been developed for adults, and she recommends a more rigorous course of gathering empirically sound evidence to confirm the validity of the claims to date. These claims include reported success in addressing pain management with adolescents, and for depressive relapse prevention with adolescents. Some studies report significant improvements in some domains of executive functioning, self-reported measures of behaviors, goals, subjective happiness and mindful awareness, perceived stress, anxiety, and several psychopathological symptoms; teacher rated attention and social skills and academic achievement; and objective measures of selective (visual) attention, emotional reactivity and some areas of metacognition. Other studies report significant reductions in self-reported sleepiness, worry and mental health distress.

In another review, Mark T. Greenberg and Alexis R. Harris (2012) provide an overview of research into contemplative practices that generally fall under the labels of mindfulness, meditation, and yoga in treatment settings, health promotion contexts, and school-based programs. In “Nurturing Mindfulness in Children and Youth: Current State of Research,” Greenberg and Harris (2012) report research results that suggest that meditation and yoga may be associated with “beneficial outcomes for children and youth including decreased rates of absenteeism, suspension, hostility, and school infractions...improvements in outcomes such as attention, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, anxiety, and academic performance” (p. 162) and state “that yoga may lead to improvements in motor functioning, executive function (EF), spatial perception, muscle strength, and respiratory capacity” (p. 163); however, they caution that the generally limited quality of research tempers the allowable conclusions and highlight the key elements of high-quality research that they see as necessary to move the field forward. These include the need to identify ‘age-appropriate’ practices, for which they recommend an expansion of qualitative work. Significant is the recommendation of careful consideration of developmental theories. The authors identify the concern that different traditions of yoga and meditation employ different practices to varying extent and toward various goals; therefore this diversity of practices necessitates clear description of interventions in reports.

A more recent meta-analysis of “Mindfulness-based interventions in schools” (Zenner, Hermleben-Kurz, and Walach, 2014), concludes that MBIs hold promise particularly in relation to improving cognitive performance and resilience to stress. This is a systematic review of both published and unpublished studies found in 12 databases as of August 2012, as well as through hand search and contact with experts. The authors confirm that they went to great lengths to locate all relevant studies and get more detailed follow-up information from authors; therefore this review is considerably more comprehensive in its scope than Burke’s. Also, this is the first analysis of its kind regarding exclusively school-based MBIs. The reviewers offer a critique that “Studies are often underpowered and small. This is not a surprise, given the exploratory nature of the field. It means, however, that the findings are tentative and need to be supported by larger, more robust evaluations” (p. 26). Despite this limitation, their analysis suggests that MBIs for children and youths are able to increase cognitive capacity of attending and learning by nearly one standard deviation; they point out that one of the most important factors for variation across studies is the amount of practice that a mindfulness based program demanded.

Greenberg and Harris’ review, described above, appeared in *Child Development Perspectives*, which devoted an entire 2012 volume to the topic of ‘Contemplative Science, Education and Child Development’. Likewise, *New Directions for Youth Development* published a special Summer 2014 issue on ‘Mindfulness in Adolescence’. In Chapter 1, Robert W. Roeser and Cristi Pinela (2014) draw on a broad body of empirical and theoretical evidence to provide a ‘developmental contemplative science perspective’ on mindfulness and compassion training in adolescence. They address questions of whether secular mindfulness and compassion training might help adolescents fulfill developmental needs, emerging capacities and passions constructively, developing psychological and social skills associated with a healthy identity that includes and transcends self to also include caring for others.

Roeser and Pinela (2014) propose that adolescence may be one of the “*windows of opportunity* in the lifespan”(p. 11) when specific brain regions and networks are particularly modifiable and therefore the timely introduction of appropriate skills and dispositions might have life-long positive impact. They make valuable contributions to the expansion of the scope of mindfulness research, first by addressing the need for age-appropriate practices in applying a stage-environment fit theory of adolescent development, and secondly by explicitly discussing four types of practice—not only the FA (focused attention) practices, and OM (open monitoring meditation), and MM (mindful movement) such as yoga and tai chi, which are the primary models for previous MBIs, but also LK (loving kindness) meditation.

Pointing out that there were at this time almost no published studies examining the effects of loving kindness meditation practice with adolescents, Roeser and Pinela provide an extensive rationale for the inclusion of compassion training in conjunction with mindfulness training, particularly at the developmental stage of adolescence. Discussed effects include promoting compassionate evaluations of self and others, promoting empathy and social-perspective taking, and promoting prosocial motivation and behavior. The authors state that “whether or not mindfulness and compassion training for adolescents can cultivate motivational dispositions like kindness, generosity and altruism, and behaviors that follow remain open questions at this time” (p. 25) and they invite future research into these questions based on the research agenda that they have created.

In summary, research studies conducted thus far on school-aged children and adolescents report promising results in a wide range of physical, emotional, and social areas, while raising numerous questions about ways that future research can more reliably address developmental stages and needs.

**Current Research Involving Teachers**

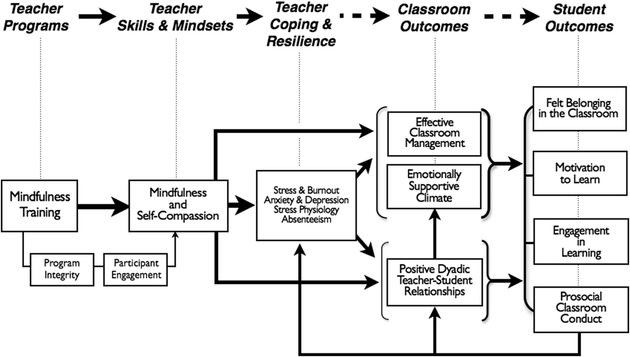
Several motivating factors influence current trends in research into MBIs for teachers. First, arising from the recommendations that mindfulness training for students should be conducted by instructors who are well-established in the practice themselves, there is a perceived need for more trained professionals in the school setting. Secondly, there is concern in the field about increasing levels of teacher burnout and attrition as a result of stress. Combined with the large body of evidence that MBIs have a significant beneficial impact on stress in other adult populations, and observations that teachers’ well-being impacts student performance and lived experience, a natural response has been to explore the question of whether mindfulness training may be beneficial for teachers, and, in turn, for their students.

In “Mindfulness Training and Teachers’ Professional Development: An Emerging Area of Research and Practice,” Robert W. Roeser, Ellen Skinner, Jeffry Beers, and Patricia A. Jennings (2012) open with an overview of key domains of professional knowledge and skills that have been identified by teacher educators and professional development (PD) specialists as necessary for improving teachers’ classroom teaching. These are: subject-matter or content knowledge concerning what is taught, pedagogical knowledge concerning how and when subject matter is taught, and developmental knowledge concerning how and when content should be taught to students of different ages. In addition, they discuss the importance of “professional dispositions” or “habits of mind” relevant to effective teaching. This article is an attempt to describe new teacher PD programs that “aim to cultivate such habits of mind through the practice of mindfulness” (p. 167) in order to facilitate emotion regulation, stress reduction, and healthy social interactions. A description of the nature of teaching as uncertain, emotional, and attentionally-demanding work is developed through reference to a wide range of previous studies. Roeser et al. (2012) point out that “surprisingly, neither teacher education nor PD programs currently prepare teachers for these kinds of job demands” (p. 170). They report that 25-30% of teachers find their profession very stressful, resulting in rates of attrition in the first five years that are estimated to be as high as 46%; and additionally, 52% of early retirements among teachers being caused by psychiatric and/or psychosomatic disorders (p. 170).

A convincing rationale is given for the potential benefits of mindfulness training in the teaching context.

For instance, teachers must often shift the focus of their attention in the classroom from particular students and their cognitive and emotional needs, to an overview of the entire classroom, and back again. By cultivating the habit of being flexibly attentive, teachers may be better able to respond to students’ needs proactively, a key contributor to effective classroom management (Roeser et al, 2012, p. 169).

The authors raise research questions that merit empirical scrutiny. Considering the time constraints of a busy teacher’s schedule, dose-response questions of what is the optimal feasible amount of training that is effective are pertinent. As with virtually all of the research reviewed here, the problem of relying on small samples of convenience is noted. Longitudinal designs are recommended to examine the long-term effects of MT on teacher outcomes, as well as the indirect effects on students. The authors encourage using active controls in research into a ‘systems approach’ of linking teacher- and student-focused MT programs. The following logic model from this study is of particular interest to teacher education.



(Roeser, Skinner, Beers and Jennings, 2012, p. 171)

In another study working from the premise of the same logic model, Robert Roeser (2013), together with scholars from several other American and Canadian universities, looked specifically at “Mindfulness Training and Reductions in Teacher Stress and Burnout.” Here, Roeser introduces yet another definition of mindfulness as “an attitude of warmhearted curiosity toward the present” (p. 789), and states that, throughout the 8 weeks of the MT program used in this study, they attempted to help teachers develop the closely related attitude of “’occupational self-compassion’ – a mindful, nonjudgmental, and accepting view of oneself and one’s challenges as a teacher” (p. 3). The purpose of the study was to examine whether or not MT that aims to teach mindfulness and self-compassion to teachers would be effective in providing resources for coping with workplace stress. The results indicated that MT is feasible and exceptionally well-received, with a remarkable 98% of participating teachers saying that they would recommend the program to peers and school principals. Researchers also concluded that it was efficacious in helping teachers to develop a more self-compassionate mind-set

characterized by a diminishment of self-judgment, self-criticism, and the personalization of stressful events and by an increase in self-acceptance, self-kindness, and a recognition of the shared experience of difficulty and setbacks that teachers experience in their daily lives on the job (p. 13).

As with the majority of the studies in this field, the key efficacy findings are based primarily on self-report data, providing a limitation that the authors recommend be addressed in future research through inclusion of behavioural measures, biological measures, and second and third person assessments and observational measures. A strength of this particular study is that it reported results that were by and large similar across Canada and the United States, providing a rare international perspective.

*School Psychology Quarterly* reports on another PD program designed to reduce stress and improve teacher performance with similarly positive results. Patricia A. Jennings (2013) and her colleagues at Pennsylvania State University studied the effects of the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program on 53 participants recruited from urban and suburban public schools in the northeastern US. The CARE program components include approximately 40% emotion skills instruction, 40% mindfulness/stress reduction practices, and 20% compassion practices within their program, which is designed to be presented in four day-long sessions spread out over four to five weeks (Garrison Institute, n.d.). As with the previous study, this one shows very high self-reports of acceptability (87% agreed or strongly agreed that this type of program should be integrated into preparation and in-service training) and efficacy (96% reported improvements in self-awareness; 92% reported improvements in well-being). In relation specifically to the teaching context, 77% reported that they were “better able to manage classroom behaviors effectively and compassionately” and 83% that they were “better able to establish and maintain supportive relationships with the children they taught” (p. 380). Participants in this study also reported improvements in their own students’ prosocial behavior, on-task behavior, and academic performance, an interesting downstream effect that several other researchers recommended be the subject of future research.

In the final article reviewed in this section, “Mindfulness as a Psychological Attractor: The Effect on Children,” Langer, Cohen, and Djikic (2012) address another potential reason to promote mindfulness in teachers, based on Langer’s definition of mindfulness as “a process of actively making novel distinctions about objects in one’s awareness” (p. 1114). This study consisted of 54 participants who were interviewed by 6 male adults in a baseball day camp setting. The adult interviewers were randomly assigned to conduct ‘mindless’ or ‘mindful’ interactions; the ‘mindless’ group were told that the students’ concerns were not very important, but they should ‘pretend’ to be interested in the child’s responses; the ‘mindful’ group were given coaching that encouraged them to observe and listen to the children with genuine interest. The mindless interactions were intended by the research designers to reflect the type of distracted interactions that adults may frequently engage in with young people, such as when the adult’s mind is engaged with something else while the child speaks. The results demonstrate that children aged 9-12 not only preferred to interact with ‘mindful’ adults, but also felt better about how the mindful adult perceived them, were in a better mood, felt better about themselves, and were more likely to help another child after interacting with a mindful adult than children who had interacted with a ‘mindless’ adult. Even though there were several identified limitations to the experiment, it was intriguing that there were significant effects for all four scales of measurement included in the study. The study concludes that “encouraging training in mindfulness for teachers, camp counselors, and other guardians of children would result in them having better experiences of themselves and the adults with whom they interact” (2012, p. 1121). When discussing bringing mindfulness into the classroom setting, it is interesting to look not only at mindfulness as a skill that is developed through meditative training outside of the classroom, but also as a way of being and attending within it.

**Current Research Involving College Students and Pre-Service Teachers**

A logical conclusion to be drawn from the wealth of research evidence supporting MBIs for students and MT for teachers is that it would be worthwhile to include mindfulness training in the education of pre-service teachers. In a December 2015 *Teachers College Record* review, M.A. Impedovo and Sufiana Khatoon Malik provide convincing support for including specific and tailored courses on contemplative practices in teacher training “to reduce stress and acquire the right mindset to manage difficult situations” (p. 3). This recommendation is reinforced by the body of research into the impact of MT on post-secondary students in a variety of other disciplines. (Mahani, 2012, Mapel, 2012, Oman et al. 2008); particularly pertinent are those that show effects of MT on students in the helping professions, due to the parallels with pre-service teachers (Beddoe et al. 2004, Schure et al. 2008, Newsome et al. 2012).

Research exists that addresses the impact of MT specifically on student teachers, but is not as extensive as in the contexts so far addressed. The final two research studies addressed in this review fit into this category. The first, “Mindfulness and the Beginning Teacher,” was published in the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, and reports on Ross Bernay’s (2014) dissertation work with beginning teachers who were introduced to mindfulness during their initial teacher education program. In a refreshing contrast to previous studies, the data in this doctoral dissertation were interpreted using hermeneutic phenomenology, focusing on the ‘lived experience’ of five pre-service teachers as they applied their learning of mindfulness in their first year of teaching. Also significant and unique to this research design was the fact that Bernay actually used his own practice of mindfulness meditation after rereading the interview transcripts and journal entries as a way to gain knowledge in the data interpretation cycle. He references Zajonc’s (2009) epistemology of love as a theoretical research framework; Zajonc, emeritus professor of physics at Amherst College, outlined a contemplative inquiry model incorporating mindfulness that he asserts is as important to gaining new knowledge as a scientific positivist research approach. Bernay concludes that mindfulness is a potentially valuable component of teacher education programs and that this research should be considered by curriculum planners who develop teacher training programs.

Closer to home, Soloway, Poulin & McKenzie’s (2011) “Preparing New Teachers for the Full Catastrophe of the Twenty-First-Century Classroom: Integrating Mindfulness Training into Initial Teacher Education,” traces the results of an initiative to introduce a core curriculum called Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE) within the initial teacher education program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. The purpose of the class, entitled ‘Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Applications’, was to address the identified problems of burnout and attrition among beginning teachers by developing a program of study “with mindfulness at its core” (Soloway, Poulin & McKenzie, 2011, p. 224), which would help teacher candidates cultivate competencies for coping with the modern demands of the teaching profession and thriving as a new teacher. “An emerging theme is that teacher candidates completing MBWE go through a deeper personal transformation that informs their overall pedagogy and teacher identity” (Soloway, Poulin & McKenzie, 2011, p. 224); after returning from practicum, they report an important link between their learning in MBWE and their experiences in the classroom.

Geoffrey B. Soloway, one of the three authors of this study, completed his doctoral research on mindfulness in teacher education under John P. Miller, who first included a meditation component in his graduate courses at OISE as early as 1988. Miller’s books, *The Holistic Curriculum* (2007) and *The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and the Workplace* (2014), provide an extensive explication of not only the types of practices included in his own courses and his research and observations, but also a broad range of relevant information about contemplative practices and respected practitioners. Quoted passages from interviews with former students illustrate the conclusions of his own qualitative research into the wide-ranging and long-lasting beneficial impact of learning meditation practices during a teacher education program. “Contemplative pedagogy and revitalization of teacher education” (Bai, H., Scott, C., & Donald, B. 2009, 319-334) in the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* is also recommended to readers interested in this topic.

Although not included in this research review, three educators whose scholarly work is perhaps most relevant to this section are Claudia Eppert (2004, 2010), Mary Rose O’Reilley (1998), and Robert Tremmel (1993, 1999), who all write from the multiple perspectives of English teaching, postsecondary teacher training, and contemplative practice. Their work is referenced in other sections of this project.

**Conclusion**

Adding to the evidence of exponential growth in interest in mindfulness, compassion, and contemplative practices in education shown by the articles in this review are entire issues of *Teachers College Record* (2006), *Child Development Perspectives* (2012), *New Directions for Youth Development* (2014), and several issues of *Paideusis: Journal of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society\** (ed. Eppert & Vokey, 2011-2014) (\*now entitled *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*) dedicated to related themes. Entire books recently published that contribute to the field include *The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and the Workplace* (Miller, 2014) *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (Barbezat and Bush, 2013), and *Contemplative Inquiry and Learning Across Disciplines* (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014), *Philosophy East/West: Exploring Intersections Between Educational and Contemplative Practices* (Ergas and Todd, 2016), *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness: A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything* (David, 2009) and *Teaching as the Practice of Wisdom* (Smith, 2014). All of these are beyond the scope of this discussion, but recommended to readers for further study.

Perhaps most representative of the importance of mindfulness as a cross-disciplinary area of study is the existence of an entire peer-reviewed journal, *Mindfulness* (2014), which “seeks to advance research, clinical practice, and theory on mindfulness.” Taken together, the articles and books reviewed here provide overwhelmingly supportive evidence for the perceived value of mindfulness training and contemplative practices among students and teachers who have experienced them, leading to a strong recommendation for inclusion of MT in K-12 education and in-service teacher professional development as well as in pre-service teacher training. Replicating similar effects demonstrated over years of research in health sciences, recent studies show positive effects on cognitive performance, resilience, and coping with stress (Zenner et al., 2014), increased metacognition and decreased negative affect in children (Vickery and Dorjee, 2016); other studies report improvements in test anxiety, attention, social skills, emotional reactivity, and depression (Burke, 2009).

A consistent refrain throughout the early analyses of research data was that study samples were small, and methodologies and designs were often weak, with a need for active controls, replication across multiple sites, and longitudinal evidence. As the research expands beyond small convenience samples, a more nuanced understanding of the various purposes, meanings, techniques, and about the effects of mindfulness meditation and other contemplative practices is needed.

Regarding purposes: meditation practices that were previously explicitly taught for the purposes of spiritual awakening and psychological transformation are often perceived to be designed simply for the purposes of relaxation or stress reduction. If participants experience results other than those that the media hype or program title imply (e.g. *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*), confusion and dissatisfaction may result. Only one of the articles reviewed acknowledged that “limited exposure to mindfulness practice may initially increase awareness of stress and emotional experience before observable benefits occur” (Greenberg & Harris, 2012, p. 165).

Regarding meanings: Now that several operational definitions of mindfulness are being used by different scholars, research into mindfulness meditation demands clear communication of the definitions of key terms that are being applied in each study. Researchers need to understand and express clearly the distinctions among the different types of practices being employed.

Regarding techniques: the expression ‘sitting meditation’ in some programs refers only to one particular type of breathing meditation, ignoring the many other objects of attention used in various traditions while sitting in meditation, from visualization to sensory input to mantra recitation.

Regarding effects: as Amihai and Kozhevnikov (2014) point out, “an insufficient understanding of the theoretical and cultural differences between different meditative traditions…has led to inconsistent findings in the scientific literature about the nature of meditation and its neurophysiological correlates” ( p. 1). There is a risk of misinterpretation or misrepresentation of results until scholars and researchers pay closer attention to the distinctions among different practices and traditions in their work.

Finally, there is a tendency in early scholarly and popular literature to conflate the purposes, techniques, and effects of different types of practices and to dismiss the value and significance of the above differences in favor of adopting a single approach that sees “MBIs as their own new ‘lineage’ which look to MBSR as their inspiration and original source” (Cullen, 2011, p. 186). here are hundreds of research papers on the effects of MBIs, and, as with the representative sample in this literature review, currently the majority of those are based on MBSR or outgrowths from that original program such as MBCT. As Cullen points out, this phenomenon is “both promising and perilous” (p. 186).

While using the same program for all educational initiatives may be appealing, since it makes it possible to replicate results and build a convincing body of evidence, it is important to remind ourselves that this 8-week program was an adaptation developed by a single individual based on his personal experience with yoga and meditation practices. While Kabat-Zinn’s contribution to the field has been invaluable, it is a bit disconcerting to see his method referred to by Cullen as the original source of a ‘lineage’ on the order of a religious tradition. The convergence of training and research to a narrowly prescribed, relatively recently developed, highly structured program such as MBSR and its offshoots can lead to an oversimplification of and limitation of the potential effects of rich cultural practices that have evolved over centuries. In adapting spiritual traditions to a single secularized program, one peril is that it becomes ‘ritualized’ in itself. Such critiques, and others which link MBSR to consumerism, dubbing it a form of ‘McMindfulness’, have led to the beginning of what I believe will be a healthy discourse and debate among Kabat-Zinn and others (Pelissier, 2015, Shonin, 2016).

There are numerous disadvantages of an extremely narrow definition of and approach to mindfulness. I believe it can be considered a disservice to extract only a small number of specific practices from wisdom traditions when they have evolved over centuries to include so many more components designed to promote questioning, to cultivate an openness to fresh perspectives and an ability to embrace ambiguity and paradox. By ignoring the existence of the *koan* tradition of posing ‘unanswerable’ questions while lauding the value of *Zazen* sitting practice, or dismissing the components of mantra, visualization, and teacher/student relationship that are integral to the *Vajrayana* practices that produced the ‘breathtaking results’ that Benson documented, Western scholars and researchers risk missing the opportunity to appreciate and understand the larger contexts within which these mindfulness practices became profoundly effective (see also Eppert, 2014, Eppert et al., 2015). An expansion of contributions to this field by practitioners and scholars with knowledge about and experiential background in a wide range of contemplative practices and applications of mindful awareness is recommended.

**Section 3: “Getting Started” - Resources for Teachers**

In the research into MBIs in education reported in Section 2, one of the most frequently mentioned needs is for experienced mindfulness teachers who are engaged in continuously deepening their own practice in order to offer ongoing support to students. I feel fortunate to have learned an eclectic body of contemplative practices while also having opportunities to delve deeply into established meditation traditions over several decades. I agree with Shonin and Gordon (2014) that “if we are going to call ourselves mindfulness teachers, then it is imperative that we follow a personal practice of mindfulness so that we can impart to others an experiential understanding of the principles of present moment awareness” (p. 952). Some interested readers may choose to search out opportunities for direct personal instruction and participation in meditation retreats or mindfulness training workshop among the many options, as these are becoming increasingly available. Others may experiment with any of a wide array of exercises and techniques to cultivate mindfulness found in popular books or online. To the extent that these teachers experience an embodied cognition of some of the positive effects of these practices, I believe that they will then find it natural, as I have, to find modest ways to share some of these activities. However, should teachers opt to lead their students in explicit mindfulness cultivation exercises, I agree with pioneers in this field that it is important to consider some of the following recommendations for best practices to ensure secularity: 1) use objects that are, to the greatest extent possible, devoid of religious associations (for example, choosing bells or chimes rather than a Tibetan singing bowl or *tingsha* cymbals to signal transitions); 2) avoid using words and symbols associated with a single spiritual or religious belief (for example, avoid using exclusively Sanskrit terms for yoga postures or to describe states of mind or desired qualities such as peace, and do not use OM or other Sanskrit seed syllables as the focus of attention during practice); 3) avoid identifying areas of the body with single spiritual interpretations (for example, emphasizing the Hindu system of *cakras* when practicing body scan or physical awareness practices); and 4) take care to clarify that in this context, the intention is to promote cultivation of qualities and experiences within the agency of the practicing individual, not to physically transmit spiritual or metaphysical energy (for example, when sharing the practice of loving kindness meditation, explain it as a way to generate positive and caring feelings for oneself and others within oneself, rather than as a form of telepathic communication or energy transference) (Jennings, 2015, Allen, 2015). In addition, mindfulness teachers need to not only provide students with instructions in methods to access states of calm, focused attention, but also be prepared to address discomforting and unfamiliar experiences that may arise for students, particularly those with prior trauma.

Long-term teacher educator, Robert Tremmel (1993), puts forth the opinion that “the way *not* to proceed is by teaching students and student teachers the practice of Zen” (p. 448-9), preferring instead to introduce them to a variety of ways to pay greater attention and engage in reflective practice informed by his own understanding of Zen, but that are accessible to anyone. This is not to suggest that teachers should conceal that associations between contemplative practices they employ and religious and spiritual traditions exist, but rather to “be especially careful to ensure that the nature of the practices they are introducing is indeed completely secular and science based, and to explain clearly that the rationale for such practices is based on science, rather than belief” (Jennings, 2015, p. 177).

My intention in Section Three is to offer a perspective and additional resources that resonate with readers regardless of whether or not they choose to engage in formal meditation. I hope that teachers have the opportunity to encounter the widest possible range of contemplative choices to offer to their students.

**Cultivating a Contemplative Classroom Climate**

As a result of my experiences, the following statement has become a guiding principle for me in my pedagogy:

If you are involved in investigation, that moment is wholesome, ennobling the being, causing immediate unfoldment. It is also stated that loving-kindness is present in every wholesome moment of consciousness. Reading a book without struggle, watching a bird with interest...that’s investigating consciousness (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 70).

Increasingly, my students find it difficult to read a book without struggle, to access what literary theorist N. Katherine Hayles (2007) refers to as deep attention: “the cognitive style traditionally associated with the humanities, is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods (say, a novel by Dickens), ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times” (p. 189). Hayles suggests that “we are in the midst of a generational shift in cognitive styles that poses challenges to education at all levels,” stating that this “shift in cognitive styles can be seen in the contrast between deep and hyper attention” (p. 187). Hyper attention, according to her, “is characterized by switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom” (p. 187). Research has provided evidence that “our brains are rewired every time we use a phone to search or surf or multitask” (Turkle, 2011, p. 296). I acknowledge that there is no turning back. The Internet has become integral to life in the 21st Century—a place for work, play, communication, and learning and the line between our digital and physical lives is blurring (Lemke, 2000, p. 243). I simply propose that now, more than ever, we need to provide the space, time, and means in our classrooms for contemplation. Small and Vorgan (2009), in *iBrain: Surviving the technological alteration of the modern mind,* assert that,“Mindful awareness or the relaxation response can be defined as the ability to turn off all technology and become more attuned to our present surroundings, feelings, inner thoughts, and physical state” (p. 142). Section Three is an attempt to not only provide a few alternative activities to take up during those times in the classroom when we temporarily turn off the technology; it is an attempt to foster a wide range of activities that foster physical, social, and emotional well-being, enrich our sensory, intellectual, and intuitive experience, and promote states of calm awareness that can lead to insight.

I believe that many teachers will find, as I have, that before introducing mindfulness activities which the students may experience as strange and foreign, a climate of trust and openness is required; if students are unable or unwilling to sit quietly as the teacher leads them to focus their attention on the breath, are too uncomfortable to close their eyes during a guided visualization activity, or feel threatened by the social dynamics of the class, attempts at formal mindfulness training can be counter-productive. I believe that the first priority needs to be in cultivating a classroom climate that fosters trust, openness to risk-taking and experimentation, and empathy and kindness for others. Once this is initiated, a recursive gain is possible, whereby the contemplative practices introduced over time reinforce these same values. There is no need to rush into using scripts or incorporating explicit mindfulness exercises; the context and readiness of the group will determine one’s emphasis as a teacher. With some groups, when I was new to the school and students arrived with resistance and trauma, I spent an entire semester developing a positive and accepting climate; in other classes where I had established a reputation over several years and students already knew and trusted me, I was able to lead students through guided awareness practices on the very first day of class. Once again, the teacher’s mindful awareness of the context needs to be the determining factor in selecting among the possibilities offered here and elsewhere. My intention is to provide a variety of activities that expand beyond the scope of many currently popular mindfulness programs and can be employed to create a classroom climate that fosters, more broadly, a contemplative life. To assist readers in understanding the range encompassed within the broader scope of contemplative practice as discussed in this project, the Tree of Contemplative Practices may be helpful. 

The roots symbolize the two intentions that are the foundation of all contemplative practices. The roots of the tree encompass and transcend differences in the religious traditions from which many of the practices originated, and allow room for the inclusion of new practices that are being created in secular contexts. The branches represent different groupings of practices. (The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2016)

It may appear to some readers that by expanding from discussion of the narrower scope of mindfulness training to the broader scope of contemplative practices, there is no limit to the subject. In one sense, it is true that mindful awareness can be directed to any object, which is in fact the goal of extending the practice to become a seamless experience of mindfulness throughout one’s day. In the standard approach to mindfulness, one is nonjudgmentally aware of whatever is happening. But the approach to mindfulness that I encountered and am passing along differentiates between different objects of attention, encouraging the practitioner to “look at birds, examine the nature of water, get into positive, wholesome states of consciousness” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 246). I was told that “The law is that you must have wholesome states of consciousness if you wish to make progress in meditation” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 246). Speaking within the context of this spiritual tradition, wholesome states are grounded in loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, previously referred to as the Divine Abidings. The contemplative activities here are intended not only to promote wholesome states of consciousness, they represent examples of ways to develop concentration through interested absorption. According to Namgyal Rinpoche (1983):

When tranquility is present, one is able to concentrate without obstruction. Real concentration is effortless. It is full absorption. Like reading a very good book no effort is involved because one is entranced. There is no discursive thought, no verbalization present in moments of pure concentration (p. 375).

The type of activities that are promoted in this section are intended to promote tranquility; what the varied types of contemplative practice have in common are a permission to slow down from the usual harried pace of the classroom. While it is entirely possible, and in fact, valuable to be mindfully aware while doing things rapidly--making it possible to respond quickly and appropriately while driving, playing sports, and reacting in emergencies--developing that ability typically demands that we first make a space for silence and slow down enough to pay attention to minute details. According to Namgyal Rinpoche (1983), “You should approach your practice as if you were a scientist performing an experiment in which he has total interest; collect data, pay attention to detail. Data will lead you to a quantitative leap of intuitive understanding” (p. 351). I have seen that anything and everything that we encounter in life comprises the data of our mindfulness practice. However, since our sensory input has such a profound effect on us, it makes sense to carefully select our subjects of study, our objects of meditation; therefore, there is an emphasis here on paying attention to nature, to aesthetically beautiful art, to empathy, ethics, and inspirational ideas.

In addition, the activities shared here are provided in the spirit of a multicultural food buffet. In my experience, meditation and other forms of contemplative practice are simply nourishing, like food - I couldn’t imagine living without them. But neither could I imagine eating only chicken noodle soup or practicing only breathing meditation, regardless of how wholesomely nourishing they each are. As a result, I wish to simply share some of the wide range of eclectic practices that I have been fortunate enough to encounter.

**A. Cultivating Nature Awareness Through Sensory-Based Contemplative Activities**

When incorporating contemplative practices, I encourage teachers to stand on the shoulders of others who are already experienced in the field; it is not necessary to begin by relying only on one’s own expertise. For instance, in the Edmonton area, one way to introduce grade 4-8 students to stillness through sensory-based contemplative activity is by enrolling the class in the award-winning Green School program at Devonian Botanic Garden.

The essence of the program is ‘slow education’ - giving children time and opportunity to observe, hear, smell and touch the natural world, to reflect on their experiences and to make personal connections to nature...Given time for reflection, each child can be a part of nature, rather than apart from it. Benefits to students and teachers alike are significant and lasting. (devonian2.ualberta.ca, 2016).

The first step in promoting stillness, contemplation, and in particular, nature awareness in schools, may be simply to recognize that it is worth spending time on ‘slow education’, whether it be a week at the Green School, or an hour outside during an English class or university seminar. “Like the Slow Food movement, Slow Education is about process: we believe *how* children learn is as important as targets and tests. By providing a range of rich and creative experiences, we can provide a healthier educational diet, where learning is deep and purposeful” (sloweducation.co.uk, 2016). Antonella Bell (2015), who initiated and facilitated the Green School program for several years, as a guest instructor in one of my university classes, asked pre-service teachers to pick a natural object in the grassy area of the campus where we were sitting, and slowly, attentively, mindfully sketch it. They reported genuine amazement and deep appreciation of the calm, centred feelings that they experienced.

I like to use a play on words to emphasize the difference between this type of *‘mind-fullness’*- the experience of ‘filling the mind’ with one focus - and the usual, more mindless way that we might do something, with a more diffuse or scattered awareness. For example, usually, when playing outside or gardening, we might touch the ground as part of the activity, but not really notice or pay attention to the actual sensation. By pausing all our activity for a moment and letting our minds become full of the single experience of touching the earth, we access a different quality of awareness. With practice, these moments may become more frequent, and the amount of our inner and outer experience that we can encompass in this experience of mindful awareness may expand.

I am not alone in feeling that, whether in retreat or not, one of life’s simple pleasures is mindfully walking in nature. Vietnamese meditation master, Thich Nhat Hanh, (1987) says, “I like to walk alone on country paths, rice plants and wild grasses on both sides, putting each foot down on the earth in mindfulness, knowing that I walk on the wondrous earth. In such moments, existence is a miraculous and mysterious reality” (p. 12). David Abram (1996) describes how, after much time spent “walking in a forest, we peer into its green and shadowed depths, listening to the silence of the leaves, tasting the cool and fragrant air...we may come to feel that we are a part of this forest, consanguineous with it” (p. 68). Even if taking students on walks in the countryside is not feasible, any interaction with nature can be a counterbalance to the unhealthy amount of time that students currently spend indoors, both in the relatively sterile classroom setting, and nowadays, in their extracurricular hours as well. Abram (1996) proposes that

it may be that the new ‘environmental ethic’ toward which so many

environmental philosophers aspire--an ethic that would lead us to respect and heed not only the lives of our fellow humans but also the life and well-being of the rest of nature--will come into existence...through a rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us (p. 69).

As part of this larger environmental ethic, empathy and compassion for animals should be, in my opinion, one of the highest aspirations of our work with students. Travelling, scuba diving, birdwatching, and nature photography - these activities became and remain among my most cherished activities. It is not always possible to introduce students directly to these interests, but they provide me with contemplative principles that are key to the entire orientation I wish to share in these pages. Integral to my teacher’s approach to mindfulness was a quality of loving care for the animals and the ecosystem that can be cultivated through both study and meditations on compassion. Traveling the world with his students, he transmitted mindfulness training unconventionally through promoting scuba diving and wildlife viewing as contemplative awareness activities.

When trying to convey the qualities of calm, open interest that I understand to be essential to any meditation practice that cultivates mindfulness, I often use birdwatching as an analogy. While I scan the trees for distinctive shapes or movements, I slip into the calm, yet alert state that allows for bare attention. As I listen for a particular bird song, I am aware of the breeze, the warmth of the sun, and the smell of the leaves underfoot. While my intention may be to see a particular species of warbler, if a western tanager flies into my view, I welcome the unexpected arising and gently direct my attention to it until it flits away, leaving me again resting my gaze on open sky. After being introduced to birdwatching on field trips to the ravine near their school, a number of my husband’s former elementary students became avid birders; his current students enthusiastically report their weekend sightings. Especially combined with photography, it is an ideal way to cultivate a calm, alert, appreciative awareness of our surroundings.

When it is not feasible to go outside, I propose bringing life indoors - the warmth that a pet brings to a home or a classroom is immeasurable. Growing up on a farm, I was surrounded by animals; I find it hard to imagine a life without a cat or a dog, a tortoise or a parrot, an aquarium of fish or a family of guinea pigs - any kind of nonhuman friend to love and care for and share my environment. At our university, therapy dogs are brought into the library at exam time to combat students’ stress; students in junior high school read to my colleague, Winnie’s pet pug to improve their literacy; my high school students loved the ambling presence of our class tortoise as they worked and became truly absorbed simply watching him eat; for me, the warm, calm and content state that is one of the positive effects of meditation is fostered simply and directly through the presence of animals.

***‘Touching the Earth’***

*The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees, and the Earth. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise -- then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish* --Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (ecobuddhism.org, 2015).

The 20th-century *Vedantin* sage, Ramana Maharshi reportedly said that the Earth is in a constant state of meditative absorption, (Stanley and Loy, 2015) and I can imagine this is true when I kneel and touch the earth with my hand. I personally find that by the simple act of physically touching the ground, I feel an immediately tangible centering and calming, literally a ‘grounding’ of my jangled energies. Researcher Susan Goldin-Meadow, speaking about how gesture promotes learning, states "Not only does gesture reflect our thoughts, but it may play a role in changing our thoughts” (Law, 2005, p. 32). In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, gestures are referred to as *mudras*, and they are not only a form of communication, but also an important aspect of some meditation practices that reinforce embodied cognition (McNerney, 2011). The iconic “earth witness” *mudra* in which the traditional Buddha is seated, reaching to touch the ground with his right hand, is a depiction of the central experience from which the entire Buddhist tradition has unfolded--the moment of enlightenment. In Buddhist mythology, this is said to have occurred immediately after demonic forces issued a challenge that the Buddha produce a witness to his enlightenment experience; he responded by touching the earth, and the Earth itself said, “I am your witness.” For this reason, and because I, along with many scholars (Abram, 1996, Seidel & Jardine, 2014) believe that perhaps the most crucial connection that all of us, including our young students, need to make at this point in history is an ecological one with the earth itself, I propose that an ideal introduction to contemplative practice might be through the gesture of touching the earth.

Ideally, I recommend that as an ELA teacher, you take students outdoors to a beautiful spot in nature, but you may even use a patch of grass or soil outside the school where they can sit comfortably and feel what it is like to touch the earth. Once the group is comfortably seated, ask them first to simply pay attention to what it feels like to be outside, to notice what is different from being in the classroom. Share observations about the sounds, feelings of wind or temperature, not ignoring examples of distractions and discomforts, recognizing that this may be an unfamiliar and uncomfortable experience for some. The key principle to instill from the very beginning is a validation of each individual’s direct experience rather than requiring them to have one ‘right’ response. As students become more familiar with being outdoors, you might encourage them to gradually become more and more attentive to what it physically feels like to sit on the ground, perhaps saying something like:

*Reach out with your hand to touch the earth. Notice what your whole body feels like as you continue to just keep your fingertips in contact with the earth. You might place your whole palm down or grasp some grass or soil in your fingers to feel stronger contact. Notice which hand you have reached out with first, and now touch the earth with your other hand; notice if this feels different. What about when you touch the ground with both hands at once? Really pay attention to what all of your senses tell you about the texture, the temperature, the colour, and the smell of the earth where you are. Try closing your eyes to focus on how this experience makes you feel--not only outside, but also inside. Before we stand up and move again, spend a few more moments breathing calmly, anchoring this experience in your memory, noting the whole ‘felt sense’ of being here and touching the earth. When you are ready, open your eyes, take a piece of paper and a pencil, and find a natural object - something small like a pebble or a part of something large, like one leaf or small branch of a tree - to draw. Spend some time trying to see every small detail and draw it on your paper; the most important thing is not how beautiful the drawing will be, but how attentive to detail and sensitive to nature you can be.*

If students cannot go outdoors, nature can be brought to them; bring flowers, plants, and other natural objects like stones, pieces of wood, water fountains, etc., into the classroom not only to serve as objects of mindful attention, but to contribute beauty to the classroom environment. In the midst of the straight walls and regularity of desks and screens, simply introducing the irregularity of natural forms can support interest and contemplation. *The Mandala Book: Patterns of the Universe* (Cunningham, 2010) is an exquisitely illustrated exploration of the mathematical principles embedded in many natural objects that also form the basic components of the traditional concept of a mandala. From blooming flowers to patterns in flowing water, from the geometry of the Golden Mean to fractals, this book could be used in almost any class to induce wonder and cross-curricular connections.

***Nature Awareness: Literary Resources***

Nature awareness activities link effectively with a wonderful short story that I regularly use for study in English 10 ELA classes: “Antaeus” by Borden Deal (1987), tells the story of a young boy who moves to the city and leads a gang of friends in creating an illegal rooftop garden; the title references a mythological figure who was unconquerable as long as he touched the ground. One year, after reading this story, I engaged my English 10 students in a collaborative gardening project with a grade one class in our K-12 school; the older students paired with younger students to discuss and draw their imagined ideal designs for rejuvenating the landscape of the school’s outdoor areas. These were as realistic or as fanciful as they chose - the resulting drawings were magical collaborations of adolescent skill and childish whimsy. They then worked together to plant tulip bulbs in the garden plots around one playground area. The feeling of aware connection with the earth can be enhanced through activities such as gardening that allow students to embody caring for the earth and linking with its energies. We discovered numerous wonderful picture books that relate to gardens, some of which the older students and younger children read together; a few lovely examples are: *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown (2009); *Uno’s Garden* by Graeme Base (2006); *Grandpa Green* by Lane Smith (2011); *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney (1994); and *Potatoes on Rooftops: Farming in the City*, a nonfiction picture book by Hadley Dyer (2012).

For mature readers, such as English 30 IB students, the play, *Arcadia*, by Tom Stoppard (1993), is a brilliant work that incorporates the motif of gardens and landscape architecture into a sophisticated exploration of physics and metaphysics, addressing the relationships between past and present, order and disorder, certainty and uncertainty; the enrichment provided by contemplative practices would be a perfect match for this work. In my opinion, poetry links more directly to all types of contemplative experience than any other type of literature. One anthology that links with the nature awareness theme is *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* by John Felstiner (2009); another is *The Speaking Earth: Canadian Poetry*, selected by John Metcalf (1973).

***Cultivating Environmental Awareness and Appreciation of Indigenous Ways of Knowing***

Bringing children in contact with First Nations elders and storytellers can be a powerful way to link students’ imaginations with environmental awareness. Some teachers invite local indigenous elders as ‘living libraries’ to share their stories, thus emphasizing how the wisdom gained through direct experience and held by these elders, although sometimes dismissed in modern society, is at least as valuable as the knowledge found in books. Numerous schools now employ aboriginal liaison workers who can also lead students in sweetgrass smudging or other ceremonies. Contemplative awareness originating in First Nations wisdom traditions can also be incorporated through storytelling, which has been developed to a very sophisticated level. Although *Anishanabe* author Richard Wagamese (2016) reports great success in fostering students’ storytelling abilities by setting an artificial indoor campfire in the centre of a classroom story circle, bringing students to outdoor settings gives the greatest support to indigenous storytellers. Recently, I was invited along with a high school English class on a river walk led by Dr. Dwayne Donald on which he stopped to relate the history of our area that pre-dated Fort Edmonton; he also recounted animal stories that, in keeping with indigenous tradition, carried messages which he left to the audience to discover. These stories made me see my environment and those who share it with me (human and non-human) in a fresh and more complex way, and it appeared to have a similar effect on many of the students.

Acknowledging that readings cannot match this type of lived experience,I feel that the stories in *Keepers of the Earth: Native stories and environmental activities for children* (Caduto and Bruchac, 1989) are worth exploring as an alternative. Chapter 1, for example, introduces the importance of storytelling with a Seneca tale. The story is followed by an explication of the historical relationship between the beliefs of aboriginal traditions and of science, and the links that can be found in the science of ecology; this could be an excellent starting point for a class discussion that incorporates principles from both the ‘relational’ and ‘activist’ branches of the tree of contemplative practices. Such discussions can lead to genuinely fresh insights, I believe, if they are enriched by a discovery and validation of indigenous modes of environmental awareness. This type of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary exploration was a key feature of a recent symposium, *Sharing Knowledge: Western and Indigenous Sciences,* hosted by the University of Alberta’s Faculties of Sciences and Native Studies; the keynote speaker, indigenous curriculum scholar Gregory Cajete, has written numerous relevant works, including *Life Lessons Through Storytelling: Children’s Exploration of Ethics* (2010) and *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (1994).

To address not only ecological issues, but also numerous other relevant social justice issues, I believe that it is important to include examples of excellent literary works by indigenous authors in the English Language Arts syllabus. Doing so provides an occasion to address with students the still prevalent issue of racism against First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples in Canadian society. Suitable novels that my colleagues and I have successfully used for related study in high school classes include *Keeper ‘n M*e (1994) and *Indian Horse* (2012) by Richard Wagamese and *Three Day Road* (2006) and other works by Joseph Boyden. Stepping beyond the borders of Canada, Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, *Ceremony* (1977), insightfully explores the intersections among social issues, aboriginal spirituality, and healing (Eppert, 2004). Any of Thomas King’s works are excellent for study at the secondary level; his range of work provides an opportunity for teachers to lead students in the valuable experience of reading excerpts from a variety of genres by the same author: a nonfiction work, *The Inconvenient Indian; A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2013), a novel, e.g. *Medicine River* (1989), a short story collection, e.g. *One Good Story, That One* (1993) and a picture book, *A Coyote Columbus Story* (King & Monkman, 1992). I make frequent use of picture books with adolescent learners, not only to collaborate with younger classes as discussed above, but also to explore visual literacy and themes in sophisticated ways. Just a few examples that relate to the current topic are: *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* (Wood & Muth, 2003); *The Desert is Theirs* (Baylor & Parnall, 1975); *The Name of the Tree* (Lottridge & Wallace, 1989); and *Whisper from the Woods* (Wirth & Banfill, 1991). In the poetry genre, my colleague, Bill Howe (2015) , has found the work of Marilyn Dumont (1996) to be a rich source of inspiration for contemplative inquiry in his classes. The opening and closing stanzas of her poem, “And With Second Sight, She Pushes,” beautifully evoke the contemplative nature of beading, a practice that is having a positive impact as it is being introduced in many local schools. Not only as a celebration of cultural traditional values, but as a provocative call to greater humanity, this poem as well as many other of Dumont’s works are worthy of close reading with students.

sitting close to light

falling through a window

glancing down a needle

along a thread

to the centre

of a bright bead

is her belief

in petal, stem and leaf

…

each bead a birth, she listens

each bead sewn down, a word in prayer (Dumont, 2013)

**B. Cultivating Somatic Awareness Through Contemplative Physical Activities**

Mindful awareness of the body can be approached in many forms. Yoga, tai chi, and martial arts classes abound in most communities, making it easy for students and teachers to have access to these approaches to physical awareness. In this area as well, teachers can rely on the expertise of guest instructors who have training in teaching tai chi, martial arts, or yoga to children or teens; this is an excellent way to introduce exercises and activities that cultivate mindful awareness of the body. These forms, along with walking meditation, are examples of contemplative practices that are categorized as movement meditation (MM) in the research previously addressed in Section 2. Even when sitting in stillness or engaging in other categories of contemplative work, I strongly recommend that teachers direct students’ attention to their present physical awareness in order to become centered at the beginning of any guided practice. This is in keeping with the historical meditation tradition rooted in *Satipattana* which included mindfulness of the body as one of the four key elements of meditation practice, but also is very relevant to current awareness of the mind-body connection.

From *yoga nidra* practice while in the corpse pose at the end of a yoga class to exercises that are a key component in 8-week MBSR programs, a passive body scan is a common way to develop mindfulness of the body; in this practice, the practitioner mentally scans the body, spending time sensing what is happening in each body part, starting from the toes and working to the top of the head, or vice versa. Other approaches uses the same attention to detail while encouraging a more active introduction of positive feeling through imagination, such as in the following example.

***Inner Smile Meditation***

A few years ago, after a back injury curtailed my physical activity, I found *Taoist qigong* practises such as the ‘inner smile’ meditation to be invaluable for pain management; I have since frequently shared this combination of breath work and energy visualization with students of all ages. To begin, I ask participants to imagine they are gazing at an adorable kitten, puppy or other animal. The smile that spontaneously arises to their eyes and mouth forms the basis for the rest of this body scan practice (Chia, 1985). ‘The Inner Smile’ is one of the most popular guided visualizations that I teach. I believe this is not only due to our natural love of adorable baby animals (think of the plethora of cat videos on the internet!) but because it is grounded in bodily sensations. It is a *qigong* practice that comes from the *Taoist* tradition which also gave rise to *tai chi* and elements of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), all of which, like mindfulness, have become increasingly accessible and respected in the West in recent years. The meditation proceeds as follows:

*Contact a gentle smile in the eyes and in the back of the throat. Feel it permeate throughout the entire face, spreading to the mouth and cheeks, and also throughout the inside of the head, as if the brain is all liquid light smile energy. Feel that the saliva in your mouth is like this, liquid light smile energy, and swallow a bit of saliva, feeling the smile go down your throat and into your stomach; then smiling energy spreads in ripples throughout your stomach and heart and into your entire chest and torso. Feel the smile spread into your shoulders and trickle down your arms. Smiling energy flows down through your entire digestive system and also from your brain down through your spine, filling your entire back, middle and front of your torso. Then many smiles flow down through your upper legs, through your knees and lower legs, spreading throughout your feet and out your toes. Scan through your body again from top to bottom, feeling the unified, refreshing feeling of being filled with smiling energy. Then just sit and breathe within this feeling for a few minutes. End the meditation with the following thought:*

*May I be well and happy. Just as I am, my all others be well and happy.*

***Peace Meditation***

Another type of active body scan practice that can be used in the classroom, particularly to counteract the many assaults to the senses experienced daily, is this meditation on peace, which focuses on the senses themselves. It is a condensed version of a much more detailed practice which finds its roots in a practice found originally in the *Vimuttimagga, The Path of Freedom*, (Upatissa, trans. Ehara, Thera, and Thera, 1961) the earliest known book of practical instruction on meditation. Rinpoche (1987) describes the meditation as follows:

*Have the impression of peace, serenity, above the head. You can mentally or non-verbally say the word ‘Peace’ or a phrase such as ‘Peace in the World’... You can also use the Pali word ‘khema’ (kay-muh) or ‘shanti’ (shun-ti). Or you can use the word Nibbana or Nirvana.*

*Sight/Eye - Consciousness*

*What is unique about the world’s most ancient form of meditation on peace is that you begin with your eyes. Choose one of the eyes--the right or the left--and enter that eye area with the thought of peace. Repeat the word for peace until you feel an embodiment of peace within that area, feel a radiant and happy state there...Then you go over to the other eye and proceed in the same way. After you do each eye you do both together. You want to calm and clear the senses and in the process balance them. While you are doing this you might feel one part of your face is calm while the other part has stored anger…*

*Sound/Ear--Consciousness*

*When the eyes feel radiant, go on and do the ears, first one at a time, then both together…*

*Smell/Nose--Consciousness & Taste/Mouth--Consciousness*

*Do the nostrils one at a time, then both, centring the awareness bringing peace to the area. Go on to do the lower lip and jaw area, next the upper lip and jaw area, then both. Balance the tongue...Work your way through the senses bringing peace into each area until all the senses are radiant, open and balanced.*

*Touch/Body--Consciousness*

*The sense of touch should be done last. The way of approach is to go through the entire body searching for stored war, for areas that are not peaceful. There are two ways to proceed. Normally you would work from the ground up but you can work from the head down* (Rinpoche, 1987, p. 8).

***Awareness of Breathing***

I believe that it is valuable to recognize that, as with the body scan, there can be, broadly speaking, two general approaches to many types of meditation practice: 1) passively watching or 2) actively bringing about change. In breathing meditation, the first is often called *anapanasati* and the second, *pranayama*. In the first, gradually calming leads to subtle shifts in the chemical and hormonal states; in the second, depending on how intensely one practices breath retention and variations of rapid and forceful inhalations and exhalations, physical reactions can be experienced more quickly and intensively. Therefore, in yoga traditions, vigorous *pranayama* practice is typically discouraged except under the direction of an experienced teacher; however, gentle practices such as the following can be simple and effective ways to quickly and safely calm and centre oneself.

***Pranayama*: *9 Breaths***

When I was meditating for many hours a day in retreat, it was possible to track the subtle shifting of my breathing over the course of the day, alternating between primarily breathing through the left nostril and primarily through the right. Periods of about 3-4 hours on each side would be separated by a transition period during which the breath flowed with far more balance through both nostrils. Non-meditators have also, no doubt, noticed a similar pattern when they have a cold and alternating nostrils are congested for a period of time. Typically, one may experience that a calm meditative absorption is more easily maintained during a period of balanced breathing, therefore different techniques have been developed to induce it. One of these, the ‘9 Breaths’ practice is often done as a brief pre-meditation exercise to accelerate the shift into a more balanced breathing pattern; this may promote a more centred feeling for any meditation practice that follows. Many versions are taught, and various instructions are available from online videos, often describing the particular finger positions with elaborate precision; personally, I find that the simple guidelines below are sufficient. I usually pass around a box of tissues to allow participants to blow their noses first, making them more comfortable with proceeding. As I describe the practice:

*In a comfortable seated position, hold the left nostril closed with one finger while breathing in through the right nostril with a long, slow inhalation. Pause at the top of the inhalation, and open the left nostril, closing the right nostril with a finger or thumb. Then exhale slowly through the left nostril. Pause briefly at the end of the exhalation, then inhale again through the left nostril. After the inhalation, pause, change the fingers to close the left and exhale through the right nostril. This is one full round. Repeat this pattern two more times; that totals six breaths. Then rest the hands in the lap and take three more long, slow inhalations and exhalations. After these nine breaths, allow the breathing to return to a natural rhythm, and follow the breathing passively for a few breaths. If you prefer, you can extend the number of alternating breaths as long as you wish, taking care to stop if you begin to feel woozy.*

***Anapanasati*: *Mindfulness of Breathing***

Passive awareness of breathing, in which the meditator places the attention on one point of the breath, for instance where the breath passes at the tip of the nose, or where the abdomen rises and falls, is referred to in Sanskrit as *anapanasati* and is very common in the widely known meditation tradition of *vipassana*. Breath is a natural point of focus once we are paying attention to the body - our body’s interaction with the environment in a very direct way is through breathing. Our breath is always with us, making it an ever-present meditation object; it should therefore come as no surprise that breathing meditation has become one of the most widespread forms of practice. Some meditation teachers instruct students to repeatedly count from one to ten as they breathe, or restart counting at the number ‘one’ every time their minds wander, as methods to return the mind to one-pointed focus. As a means to develop concentration, this can be very effective. Often, when I teach breathing meditation, I begin the practice with a few minutes of counting practice, then introduce other approaches as well. In the traditional treatise on breathing meditation, the *anapanasati sutra*, and related commentaries, the instructions affirm that the experience should feel good (Rinpoche, 1992). The Buddhist traditions delineate many different qualities of blissful experience, emphasizing the importance of joy, contentment, and bliss as results of meditation. I have found it easiest to experience these feelings by engaging with the breath in a way that fosters calm and curious interest. Standard instructions for breathing meditation are available from many sources; here is a simple introduction:

*Take a comfortable, yet alert posture, in which the spine has a natural curve and the chin is slightly tucked to create an open feeling in the back of the neck. Eyes can be closed, but for this breathing meditation are kept half open, with the gaze falling gently a few feet in front. Typically, this practice is done with mouth gently closed, and the breathing is through the nose; attention is placed on the breath for the chosen period of time. In personal practice, this may be 20 or 55 minutes, which are standard meditation session lengths, but in the classroom, where I sometimes introduce breathing meditation as a way to calm and focus for stress reduction or relaxation before exams, 1-5 minutes are recommended.*

“*Anapana-sati* is not, in fact, a meditation on breath, but on in/out *prana*. That’s what this energy is for - awareness of energy flow” (Rinpoche, 1983, p. 88). Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) has developed a series of breathing meditations that link key phrases to the in and out breaths. I have found these to be very effective guided meditation practices to help people to connect the breath and the feeling of energy flow with positive emotions and bodily sensations. To lead students in these practices, the teacher first reads aloud the entire phrase for each inhalation and exhalation; after repeating this for a number of breaths, then the teacher reads just the abbreviated word or phrase to accompany each breath. Finally, the students silently mentally repeat the word cue as an anchor to their mindful attention as they continue breathing for a few more minutes. The first, and shortest example in Hanh’s book, *The Blooming of a Lotus: Guided Meditation Exercises for Healing and Transformation* (1993) is as follows:

*1 Breathing in, I calm my body. Calm*

*Breathing out, I smile. Smile*

*2 Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment. Present moment*

*Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment. Wonderful moment*

(p. 15).

Much of the poetry of my favorite poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, corresponds to profound contemplative experience; one of his poems expresses the exchange of breath energy in breathing meditation so eloquently that I like to simply recite aloud to a group after breathing practice. It begins with the following lines:

*Breath, you invisible poem!*

*The continuous pure exchange*

*of our existence with the world’s space.*

*Counterweight to the rhythm in which I am*

*Single wave*

*through the slowly forming sea of me;*

*among seas the most frugal of all,*

*conserving such space...*

*- Rainer Marie Rilke*  (Gass, trans., 1999, p. 140)

**C. Cultivating Social, Psychological, and Emotional Awareness Through Active Imagination**

***The Wise One***

I like to introduce students to a variety of guided visualizations or fantasy journeys to uncover memories, explore symbolism, evoke insights, and promote creativity. These are sometimes based on my own experiences such as scuba diving or hiking, and sometimes on scripts created by others, such as the following example, which comes from a fascinating book by Marlene Halpin (1982), a Dominican Sister with a doctorate in philosophy from the Catholic University of America. She introduces each exercise with a brief set of instructions to help the listeners settle into a calm and settled frame of mind and follows it with detailed descriptions of the psychological insights of clients using the visualization in her therapeutic practice. In the following example, ellipses and bolded questions indicate points at which the teacher should pause in reading to allow participants a few moments to explore the visualization.

*Picture yourself out in the country on a lovely summer day. You are alone and feeling quite well. A well-defined path is just to your right. It disappears among the trees. You decide to take a walk following the path…*

*It’s pleasant in the woods. There are the usual sounds of birds and insects. A rabbit runs across your path. Sunlight makes pretty shadows among the leaves. You continue to walk along the winding pathway...*

*A clearing comes into sight. It’s rather sunny. On a log to one side, under a tree, someone is sitting. Somehow you know that this is indeed a wise person. With some delight, you approach the person and stand there a moment. The person becomes you to be seated on the log. You do so…*

*After some silence, you turn to the wise person and ask something that’s been on your mind.* ***What do you ask?***

*There is silence again. Then the wise person turns to you and answers.* ***What is the answer?***

*Remembering that anything is possible in imagination, you begin gently to experience a change. While you remain seated on the log, you also become the wise person. As the wise person, look at yourself.* ***How do you feel about you? Do you say anything to you? If so, what?***

*Now you are entirely you on the log and the wise person is back. You look at each other intently.* ***What happens?***

*Now bid the wise person good-bye. Cross the clearing, find the path, reenter the woods. Follow the path back to where you began your walk. When you are there, come back to this room. Sit or stand slowly, stretch, and yawn if you want.*

*Begin to think or talk about the phantasy* (p. 47-48).

The fantasy journey above can be a surprising way for students to encounter their own inner wisdom; it could be used while studying the profound, philosophical novel, *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn (1995), which one of my colleagues, Robert Piazza, has been using with tremendous impact in his secondary English class. Since the sage in this novel is actually a gorilla, the script may benefit from modifying the words from ‘wise person’ to ‘wise teacher’. The documentary, *I Am,* by director Tom Shadyac (2010), includes interview footage with Daniel Quinn, among other influential writers and thinkers, in a moving film exploration of meaning and purpose. Coleman Barks, interpreter of Rumi’s Sufi poetry, is also featured; many of Rumi’s poems are also perfectly suited to contemplative study at the secondary level, and make a welcome addition to the syllabus from an alternate wisdom tradition.

***Phenomenological / Poetic Awareness of Felt Sense***

The use of the term, ‘felt-sense’, as a form of embodied cognition or way of knowing with and through the body, originates with Eugene Gendlin’s (1982) phenomenological psychotherapeutic ‘focusing’ work. While some scholars emphasise the importance of addressing children’s felt-sense, Jacqueline Watson (2013, p. 121) argues that a pedagogy for authentic education needs an equal, or greater, emphasis to be placed on the development of the felt-sense of the teacher who, through the development of body wisdom, can ‘be’ with children and young people, and be an “open, grounded presence in the midst of their play” (Allen and Mononen, 2009, p. 307). I first encountered ‘felt sense’ through the Holistic Clearing Meditations developed by Namgyal Rinpoche (1990)as an extension of Gendlin’s work. I can attest to the profound impact that this particular approach to meditation had on my teaching practice and presence once the awareness of felt-sense transferred to my ongoing mindfulness in the classroom. A condensed description of this practice follows:

*Begin by settling into a meditative posture and frame of mind. Select a memory or type of experience that has a strong emotional quality to it and direct your attention to really feeling it in your body. Try to distill the experience down to a word or short phrase that describes or encapsulates it. Silently repeat this word with a quality of questioning. You may coordinate saying the word in your mind with the rhythm of your breathing. You are looking for the feeling of a ‘body within the body’, a ‘felt sense’ which is a deeper impression or psychic presence in the body that includes but is also beyond the surface physical feeling and emotion. Various scenes or dialogues often come to mind in association with the word; notice them, but don’t get carried away in distractedly thinking about them.*

*As you rest in a kind of relaxed openness, the felt sense may shift; mentally probe at the feeling and, particularly, the texture of the felt sense and try to name it. The new word you are searching for is a distillation of the particular experience or memory. Probing with all your senses, including your internal feelings, keep searching for a finer and finer sense of the essential quality or texture of the experience; the word that eventually feels ‘right’ for the ‘felt sense’ may be illogical, e.g. the whole body may feel ‘jittery’ or it may feel like ‘sugar’ or ‘velvet’, but the ‘concretizing’ experience of finding the right language for the felt sense can lead to a release of previously locked energy, and a feeling of liberation.*

*You may now move on to conclude the meditation with a review; reflect on why the one word was selected. If curiosity remains, this word can be the new starting point for a meditation at a later time* (p. 9-11).

This process of concretizing a felt sense and naming the totalizing experience with carefully chosen language is also, in essence, the work of a poet. Zajonc (2009) quotes Emerson’s eloquent description of this process from his essay, “The Poet”:

This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucid to others...The condition of true naming, on the poet’s part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that. (2009, p. 180)

In the English Language Arts classroom, this technique can be used to help young writers develop powerful written works that communicate meaningful personal experiences; I only recently discovered the related work of Sondra Perl (2012); although her original work, *Felt Sense: Guidelines for Composing* (2004) is no longer available, a brief outline of her composing guidelines, which I highly recommend reading, is available online (focusing.org, 2012). My own experience with secondary students, and my husband and colleague, Jim Kaiser’s experience with elementary students, has been particularly rewarding when the activity is introduced by sharing emotionally evocative, sensorially descriptive poems as models. I sometimes introduce the activity with the famous story of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem, “The Panther.” Suffering from severe writer’s block, Rilke followed the advice of his mentor, Auguste Rodin, and repeatedly visited the Paris Zoo, writing draft after draft as he contemplated the panther in his cage. The eventual final result has become one of the most beloved classics of modern poetry. Providing several different English translations to compare and evaluate allows a class to take the issue of word choice into discussion and debate. As enrichment, I have taken groups of students on a field trip to the local zoo, where they followed Rilke’s model, spending time in silent contemplation of an animal of their choice, then attempting to capture its essential quality in words and images. This was for some students a discomforting experience, leading to further deep questioning of social justice issues related to animal rights.

Among an array of resources for teaching poetry too vast to list here, I strongly recommend Steve Kowit’s *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet’s Portable Workshop* (1995). Although I could reference a portion of this book throughout Section 3, I will simply include the following classic lines from the opening page, which I feel capture the essence of contemplative practice:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour.

--William Blake (in Kowit, 1995, n.p.)

**D. Cultivating Awareness and Creativity Through Arts-Based Contemplative Activities**

***Contemplation of Space in 10 Directions***

Just as a work of visual art begins with a blank canvas, I approach creativity and exploration of the arts from a starting point of empty space. When I was teaching arts students, I spent time on the very first day of class pointing out that in an English Language Arts class, our curriculum involves not only close reading of texts, but also of contexts. While the context was still fresh, due to being new and unfamiliar, I asked them to ‘read’ the classroom, identifying what it communicated to them about the course, the teacher, and their future activities in the physical space. We discussed the various pressures that create stress in this new situation and I encouraged them to reflect upon what had influenced their choice of seat upon first entering the classroom. Then I led them in their first contemplative practice, exploring the physical space through active imagination. This was followed by creative personal writing. Prior to closing our eyes, we would blow bubbles, a wonderful way to contact the imagery. I would tell them:

*Please close your eyes so that you won’t be distracted, but throughout this activity, imagine that you can see or sense the distance between you and objects around you as if your eyes were open. Start by becoming aware of the feeling of sitting in your chair with your feet on the floor. Imagine that your body is empty and spacious, like a bubble. Feel the empty space within, and imagine your skin is like the iridescent bubbles we just created.*

*Try to get a sense of the space between the front of your body and the closest other object, perhaps your desk. Then imagine that you are able to have a direct perception of reality at the level of quantum physics that you might have learned about in science class - that at the subatomic level, an object like the desk is made up more of space than matter. Imagine that your sense of the desk’s solidity dissolves into spaciousness as you project your awareness in front of you in space. Try to continue to sense the space in front as far as it goes before it encounters the next object in the room, perhaps another student, or the wall. Try to sense the space more than the molecules of form of that object, and every person or thing that you know is in front of you, as you project your mental awareness further and further. Can you imagine spaciousness beyond the school building, right through the city, the countryside, and even out into the atmosphere and outer space itself?*

*After spending a few minutes extending this visualization, bring your awareness back to the right side of your body. Begin to project your imagination outward in this direction, following the same procedure. Then do the same from the left side, then behind you, expanding as far into space as your imagination will allow. (Take some time for each of these steps.)*

*Next, feel spaciousness in between the front and right sides, extending out in a pie shape to feel space throughout that entire quadrant. Follow this with each of the other corners - right-back; back-left; and left-front.*

*Next, feel space extending above your head to the ceiling, and then through the roof, out like an umbrella through the atmosphere, and throughout space. And finally, extend the feeling of spaciousness below you, knowing that you are safely suspended like a bubble. Feel the space through the floor, and right through the earth’s layers to the other side of the planet and once again, into space. After a few moments, allow yourself to become aware of the feeling of sitting in your chair, and experience the solidity of this room again. Notice how you may feel different from before the activity; open your eyes.*

After this activity, I ask students to spend some silent time free-writing, using the word ‘Space’ as a prompt. The writing is usually richly creative, personally insightful, and aesthetically rewarding for the students, coming as it does out of a direct and unusual experience. Frequently, students marvel at how their sense of the physical space in the classroom is transformed by this brief exercise. Particularly in September, some students are very aware of the contrast between their summer freedom and the feeling of being crammed into a room with 30 or more other bodies; afterward, even though there are still other students sitting only a few feet away, often they write or speak of feeling less claustrophobic. Instead, they are aware of a feeling of calm that is usually hard to access amid the anxieties of the first day of class.

I believe that creation of a clear space, an open mind, a ‘blank canvas’, is far more important to promoting arts-based contemplative work in the classroom than specific crafting processes or techniques. Many of my students who have been able to tap into their own creativity and experience the world through an artistic orientation have easily transferred their skills from one art form to another; it is the quality of perception that seems to make the most difference. As an avid wildlife photographer, I can attest to the effectiveness of the art of photography as a way to develop this quality of perception. The elementary students in my husband’s photography club demonstrate how quickly one can learn the necessary skills and create work that demonstrates tremendous sensitivity.

***Contemplative Photography: Clearing Your Mind’s Eye***

In *The Practice of Contemplative Photography*, Karr and Wood (2011) provide numerous examples and exercises designed to strengthen a photographer’s connection with nonconceptual awareness through a three-stage practice. “First we learn to recognize naturally occurring glimpses of seeing and the contemplative state of mind. Next we stabilize that connection through looking further. Finally we take photographs from within that state of mind” (p. 41-42). The following instructions are an excellent introduction to mindfulness through photography.

*Try this: Go outside and pick three points in a loose triangular arrangement. Look at one object, then move on to the next, then move on to the third. Repeat this over and over again in a relaxed fashion. Eventually, your mind will begin to clear of all the extra “noise,” and only those three things will become the focus of your attention. As you move your focus from one object to the next, notice what differences you begin to see between them--textures, colors, patterns, and so on. Also, what things nearby have been trying to distract your attention? What sounds have you heard? Notice those, too. By doing this you can increase your awareness and your perception of things around you.* (Tharp and Manwaring, 2012, p. 31)

Excerpts from the following non-fiction texts are also recommended as additional supportive readings: *Reading Pictures: what we think about when we look at art* by Alberto Manguel (2002); *About Looking* (1991) and *Ways of Seeing* (1972) by John Berger; *How to Look at a Painting* by Francoise Barbe-Gall (2006); *On Photography* by Susan Sontag (2001). These all promote close viewing and deeper thinking about perception.

***Cultivating Mindful Awareness of Colour***

The ancient meditation manual, the *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimagga)* (1961), “the earliest known book of practical instruction on meditation” (Rinpoche, 1987, p. 8) puts forward the paradoxical idea that we meditate on the colour yellow in order to see yellow in the world; my experience has been that I do in fact cultivate a greater sensitivity to any object to which I have devoted mindful attention, and this is most obvious with colours. A traditional approach to meditating on colours involves moving through a progression from calming colours - blue, then green - before moving on to more stimulating colours - yellow, red, as described here:

*Imagine a colour of light pervading your body. Feel comfortable and good with this colour. Then imagine your body filled with a different colour. Go through a series of pairs of colours in the following order: blue then green, red then yellow, brown then violet (or mauve), and finally, white then black (or deep indigo).*

*After this you might visualize these pairs as blended lights: blue and green as turquoise, red and yellow as orange, and so forth. This exercise is for balancing the energies. If you experience an aversion to a colour, you may have too much of it, an overdose of that vibration in your being. If you are very attracted to a colour, probably you need more of it.* (Rinpoche, 1997, p. 53)

A quick internet search invariably turns up a range of popular science and psychology articles about how we are affected by colour. *The Secret Language of Color* (Eckstut and Eckstut, 2013) is a richly illustrated supportive resource, as is Victoria Finlay’s *Color: A Natural History of the Palette (*2004). After reading excerpts from such samples of nonfiction, my students frequently enjoyed conducting their own playful, informal research by doing muscle testing in groups. While one student held sheets of different colours of paper in another student’s field of vision, a third compared the effect of the different colours on the subject’s arm strength. Students were typically fascinated by the results, and we had thoughtful discussions about the possible factors affecting the variations. Picture books were once again rich resources for exploring colour as an aspect of visual literacy in my classes. We bought a class set of Shaun Tan’s brilliant, *Lost and Found* (2011), in order to allow my grade 10 and 11 students to do close readings of this three part work. The first of the three works within the book, *The Red Tree,* is particularly rich in its use of colour and symbolism to reinforce its poignant exploration of the theme of depression. The spectacularly imaginative, *The Sound of Colors: A Journey of the Imaginatio*n, by Jimmy Liao (2006), like all excellent picture books, is a visual feast which depicts a young blind girl’s subway travels through her city, opening up contemplative awareness of not only colour but also soundscapes.

***Cultivating Awareness of Music: Gesture Drawing and Free Writing***

A simple, yet effective way to encourage an awareness of the effects of different types of musical sound on our experience is to encourage students to respond, while listening to brief musical selections, by drawing and writing. The following is based on an activity that Alex Thomson, an art teacher and former colleague, conducted with my grade eleven English students in 2013. A series of contrasting musical clips can be cued up; before playing it, ask students to prepare paper (possibly a large single sheet divided into squares, or several smaller sheets) and a pencil or coloured crayons. When the music plays, instead of *thinking* about what to draw, encourage students to spontaneously respond with the kinds of lines and shapes that seem to suit the music, e.g. a very discordant, rapid piece may evoke jagged, bold lines, whereas a soft, flowing piece may result in curved, gentle shapes on the page. Once students have become more comfortable with allowing more spontaneous nonverbal responses to the music, free writing - responding verbally with the same unfiltered spontaneity - can be introduced. Many students enjoy discovering the range of responses evoked by different styles of music. For a group that struggles with fluency, the writing can be guided with text frames: i.e., the teacher can provide words or phrases between each musical segment that all students incorporate into an ongoing story, the details of which they fill in as they listen to each clip. There was a great deal of laughter when these usually reluctant writers shared their stories during Alex’s workshop. With more confident writers, I have found that playing music that evokes a particular mood for five to ten minutes while students free-write is very effective, and results in remarkably evocative writing.

***Writing as Contemplative Practice***

The technique of free-writing, as explained by Peter Elbow (1981, 2011) in his influential books on writing, is a natural way to link writing with contemplative practice, and I incorporate this activity in a wide variety of ways into the English Language Arts classroom. I explore the merits of free-writing in more detail, particularly as a creative entry point to essay writing, in chapter two of *Beyond Five Paragraphs* (2015). Robert Tremmel (1992) likewise cites free-writing as the first of three ways that he uses to introduce student teachers to paying greater attention and engaging in reflective practice. The second is to explicitly address questions of mindful awareness when providing feedback, encouraging student teachers “not simply to become more adept at the basic skills of teaching, but also to pay attention, to avoid getting caught up in thoughts as they arise, and to return to the present moment, to the classroom and the students right ‘here and now’”; Tremmel acknowledges the common ground between these comments and basic teachings of Zen. Particularly interesting to the English Language Arts classroom is his third way to foster paying attention - writing what he calls ‘slices of classroom life’. These are two-part pieces of writing, the first part consisting of a detailed concrete narration of some specific and limited event in school in somewhat the style of phenomenological ‘lived experience descriptions’ or anecdotes (Van Manen, 1997), and the second part composed of reflective writing that expresses the thoughts and feelings evoked during and after the event.

Tremmel’s own poetry, and his full-length work on *Zen and the Art of Teaching English* (1999) are important additional contributions to this field. Well worth reading is his argument against the mindless reification of the writing process in “A Habit of Mind” (1993). Likewise, the extensive work of Canadian scholar, Carl Leggo (1997, 2009, 2012) is worth studying as a model for creative and life writing, research, and English teaching.

There are numerous other texts that promote developing one’s writing as a contemplative practice; a few that stand out for me are the classics: Brenda Ueland’s, *If You Want to Write* (1987) and Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones* (2005); for working with adolescent students, I can also recommend the less well known *Spiritual Journaling* by Julie Tallard Johnson (2006) and *Writing the Life Poetic* by Sage Cohen (2009). Kelly Gallagher (2011) and Penny Kittle (2008) also both provide very helpful and practical advice for enacting a sensitive approach to supporting students’ exploration of and through writing.

***Multimodal Exploration of Dreams***

There are various related ways in which an initial creative expression can become the subject of further reflection and contemplative inquiry. Arthur Zajonc (2009) describes a process that I also experienced frequently during retreats where

the words we write and sketch we draw become the focus of our attention …[and] the words and sketch are taken as the object from which an inner image will arise...As we move back and forth between focused and open attention, the inner image gradually strengthens to the point where it can become the basis for the next stage of the contemplative inquiry process” (p. 203).

Any material that arises from meditation or other contemplative practices can serve as the stimulus for this process; I have stacks of paintings that expressed an image, felt sense, emotion, or insight that arose during meditation and that I subsequently used as the object of focused attention to explore further. Dreams are a particularly fertile source of writing and imagery that can be explored in this way; both traditional Buddhist and contemporary psychotherapeutic practice encourage recollection and mindfulness of dreams.

In a reverse approach, my meditation teacher introduced a dream mandala exercise as a way to explore the relationship between the left and right brain hemisphere activities and compared it to the mental processes involved in dreaming. I sometimes introduce it as follows:

*On a sheet of blank paper, draw a large circle. As I say different categories of objects, try to draw the very first example that comes to mind without censoring your choice. I will give you a few minutes to briefly sketch each one before going on to the next, but don’t worry about the artistic quality or where you place the object within the circle; the primary importance is that you capture a sense of the object so that you can refer to it later in some writing that you will do. (Provide time for students to silently sketch each of the following after you introduce them.)*

1. *a creature with sharp teeth*
2. *a kitchen utensil*
3. *something from nature*
4. *something handmade*
5. *a type of vehicle*
6. *any other object of your choice*

*Once you have all of these objects in the circle, turn the paper over and write a short story that incorporates all of them. Some people believe that, when you do this, you are mimicking what happens when you dream: unrelated images surface from the right hemisphere, and the left hemisphere attempts to create a coherent narrative linking them. This may explain the illogical connections that sometimes happen in dreams. Take your time in writing your dream story.*

Typically, when I have led this activity in my classes, students have created wildly imaginative stories which they sometimes also found psychologically revealing. Most greatly enjoy the resulting creative products and their own personal insights. This activity, and writing about their own dreams, can be a way to encourage fluency and overcome writer’s block, and is also an interesting portal to the genres of fantasy or magical realism.

***Sun/Shadow Mandalas***

Another of the most consistently successful activities in my junior high and senior high classes has been the Sun/Shadow Mandala, which I first discovered in *Drawing Your Own Conclusions: Graphic Strategies for Reading, Writing, and Thinking* (Claggett, 1992, p. 13-37). I introduce the Jungian concept of the *shadow*, and lead students through the activity as an artistic exploration of personal identity; I have expanded the parameters of the original two-dimensional visual products created by Claggett’s students to allow my students to create 3-D sculptures and multimedia works that extend into the fourth dimension (i.e. musical compositions, dance performances, and film versions, which are experienced by the audience over a period of time). Once they are familiar with the form and purpose of this type of mandala, students can then apply the same artistic process to exploring a character in a work of literature; this is an extremely effective strategy for promoting close reading and insightful character study in any type of fiction text. Claggett makes excellent suggestions for simple contemplative warm-ups that help students develop skills in visualization. A key component of the creation process is completion of sun/shadow mandala charts. Some instructions I give to students are as follows:

*The second and third columns compose your “sun” symbols. These are the qualities that are conscious to you and usually apparent to others. Avoid simplistic choices that emphasize physical characteristics (giraffe = tall) and consider instead comparisons which show numerous subtle similarities; most important is providing precise details in column 3. For instance, three different students might choose cat as a sun symbol, the first thinking that he is cute and cuddly like a kitten, the second believing she is elusive, mysterious and exotic, the third describing herself as independent.*

In the class, we explore the categories of students’ completed sun/shadow mandala charts (Claggett, 1992, p. 33) with great precision. For instance, rather than simply choosing which element - air, earth, fire, or water - they feel they are most like, I challenge them to use this as an opportunity to precisely identify the ‘felt sense’ that resonates with them, asking:

*What kind of air are you? The fresh breeze we breathe at the top of a mountain hike? Or the air inside a refrigerator that has been unplugged and closed for a month? What kind of water? The frozen ice of a massive iceberg? The tiny droplet in a raincloud? The trickling of a stream? The torrent of a waterfall? The massive ocean? I point out that earth can also have a wide range of forms, from dust to mud to rock, and that it can be fun to consider whether they might be a raging forest fire or a flickering birthday cake candle or even a star in the sky*.

This precision helps in the next step. For each category, I ask them to look at the qualities listed in the third column, then consider their opposites; basing choices on these characteristics, they determine their “shadow” symbols. Where a student described the cat as independent, she might write dependent in the next column, then consider what type of animal seems to her most dependent--perhaps a baby kangaroo. That choice would go in the last column. Note how different the result is from the shadow symbol someone might choose if he skipped a step and tried to simply think of an animal that is the ‘opposite’ of a cat. The hope is to discover how the shadow symbols may represent aspects of personality that are more hidden and subconscious.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SUN SHADOW MANDALA CHART** | | | | |
| Category | Sun symbol | Sun symbol qualities | Opposite qualities | Shadow symbol |
| ANIMAL |  |  |  |  |
| PLANT |  |  |  |  |
| COLOUR |  |  |  |  |
| SHAPE |  |  |  |  |
| ELEMENT |  |  |  |  |

The chart is just the beginning of the expressive process. Using the imagery generated in this way, the students create artistic works in their choice of format that create a synthesis of the various elements; sometimes it is a two-part design like a yin-yang symbol including all of the images, with one side emphasizing their sun colour and the other their shadow colour. I encourage them to consider how the entire design can itself be symbolic of their life or identity. Examples have included a chess set with the shadow pieces and sun pieces on opposite sides, in the forms of their animals, plants, etc. The student explained that the form of the mandala as a whole represented how she experienced her life at the time as a game, with pieces being moved without her full control. Another student chose to woodburn her design into an oak lazy susan table centre which represented how her identity had been formed around the family table. For her, the bonus of the activity was that it gave her a reason to learn a new craft. Each mandala is accompanied by an artists’ statement, in which the student explains in detail the significance of each aspect, and also the experiential process of creation. As with all the representational assignments in my class, this was at least as important as the actual product; in a language arts class, the students were not primarily being assessed on their artistic skill, but on their critical thinking, metacognition, and expression of ideas.

Once students are familiar with sun/shadow mandalas, students can then apply the same process to characters in the literature they are studying; I have found that such an in-depth multimodal exploration results in a much deeper identification with and understanding of characters than more standard approaches to literary analysis such as character sketches. Interesting exemplars are provided in Claggett’s text.

Related poetry writing also allows an embedded exploration of metaphor and simile. It is incredibly valuable for students not only to explore concrete metaphors for themselves, such as an animal or plant, but also to struggle with abstract ones, e.g. What number am I? I use sample poems, particularly with junior high students, to model poetry writing using the imagery from the mandala process. Here are some examples of sun-shadow haiku included in Claggett’s book:

*Wing-damp butterfly*

*Rests to dry on the whale’s back*

*Migrating island!*

*Seven pelicans*

*Triangulate the heavens--*

*One vanishing dot!* (Claggett, 1992, p. 23)

In writing classes, haiku is often reduced to a syllabic exercise that misses entirely the contemplative, insightful quality that I feel is essential to this poetic genre. *Wabi Sabi* by Mark Reibstein (2008), is a wonderful picture book that includes English and classic Japanese haiku poems that honour the traditional ideals of this art form on every page. Wabi Sabi is the name of the main character, a cat who is on a quest to understand her identity. However, wabi sabi is also

a way of seeing the world that is at the heart of Japanese culture. It finds beauty and harmony in what is simple, imperfect, natural, modest, and mysterious. It can be a little dark, but it is also warm and comfortable. It may best be understood as a feeling, rather than as an idea (Reibstein, 2008, p. 1).

The themes of identity, art, sensory awareness, and haiku are all links that make this a perfect companion piece to a sun-shadow mandala project. The clear explanation of haiku at the end of the book closes with a translation of one of the most famous haiku ever written, a perfect artistic expression of the experience of insight. For further inspiration, see Seidel and Jardine’s commentary on this picture book, “Wabi Sabi and the Pedagogical Countenance of Names” (2014, p. 25) and Sato’s (1983) remarkable exploration of 100 translations of this poem.

the old mere!

a frog jumping in,

the sound of water. (trans. Reibstein and Young, 2008, n.p.)

**Section 4 “Where Do We Go From Here?” - Final Thoughts**

Creating a project of this sort is somewhat perilous. In narrating my experiences to others, there is the danger that events that were just part of my life become exaggerated, not only in the minds of the audience but in my own as well. In our martial arts club, we used to joke about our memories of past sparring matches, saying, “The longer it’s been since I practiced, the better I *was*!” The same can happen when describing past classroom activities--they often sound so much more successful in the retelling than they seemed at the time. I’ve never felt that I could comfortably explore mindfulness activities and contemplative practices as fully and explicitly as I would have liked. For example, I experimented with ‘mysteries questions’ and ‘personal symbols’, modelling my activities after those of Rachael Kessler (2000), but couldn’t even begin to craft an entire contemplative program as she did. But I always was, and continue to be hopeful that, as Kessler states, “Ordinary activities--easily integrated into school life--can have an extraordinary effect in meeting needs long neglected for so many teenagers” (p. 16). I am optimistic that the current awareness and acceptance of mindfulness in schools can provide an opportunity for teachers to expand upon the instruction that students may receive in MT programs, or to cultivate these skills more openly and deliberately in subject area classes than has been possible in the past.

My personal and professional question continues to be, “what happens when we strive to surround ourselves and fill our lives with things worthy of, quite literally, spending our lives on”? (Seidel and Jardine, 2014, p. 89). I have spent my life on contemplative pursuits and on teaching in the classroom with my students. I concur with Jackie Siedel’s experience, described as follows:

From children, from being with them in schools in both friendship and fellowship, from walking the road of life together for one or sometimes two years, I learned to live life more graciously, more deeply, more slowly, more compassionately. With more breath. I learned to expect miracles and also to create space for miracles to happen (p. 7).

By creating space for silence, time, and inspiring subjects for contemplation, I believe that we can enable our students to learn more than just how to focus and manage stress in order to succeed on tests. Secondary students have more to discover than the content of the curriculum at this point in their lives. In their proposed stage-environment theory for adolescent development Roesler and Pinela (2014) identify the adolescent needs for ‘competence’, ‘belonging’, and ‘autonomy’ with which we as secondary teachers are familiar, and propose that addressing these is assisted by mindful parenting, teaching, and coaching. More innovatively, they detail three somewhat parallel adolescent needs that are less frequently discussed but, in my observation, have been even more important to my students.

Roeser and Pinela (2014) propose that, in addition to knowledge and skills that enable competence, young people also need ‘wisdom’; certain social affordances in family, school, and community contexts can foster this, including wise mentors, wisdom texts, myths, stories, poems, and philosophical debate and discussion. Over and above a need for belonging, I have observed in my students’ passionate involvement with social justice causes, a need for ‘mattering’. The social affordances Roeser and Pinela propose to address the need for mattering include “service to others with reflection, youth-led conflict resolution, and community kindness projects.” And finally, we may sell young people short if we only honour their need for independence and autonomy without addressing societally a corollary need for ‘self-transcendence’. Roeser and Pinela (2014) list affordances that have been recommended throughout the pages of this project: “mindfulness and compassion practices, physical practices (for example tai-chi, yoga) mindful arts, music, dance, being in nature/quietude, silent retreats” (p. 13).

Based on her own experience over many years with secondary students, Rachael Kessler (2000) has developed a more extensive map of ‘seven gateways to the soul in education’, which are: 1) the yearning for deep connection; 2) the longing for silence and solitude; 3) the search for meaning and purpose; 4) the hunger for joy and delight; 5) the creative drive; 6) the urge for transcendence; and 7) the need for initiation (p. 17). To explore these further, I can do no more than direct readers to her entire book, *The Soul of Education,* which devotes an entire chapter to each of these, but hopefully the links between these objectives and my orientation are apparent.

Kessler (2000) is also articulate in addressing a concern that has received scant attention in the literature promoting the merits of mindfulness practices - the potential for opening a Pandora’s box of painful experiences. “When a teacher creates an atmosphere for adolescents that flows from the ‘milk of human kindness’, creative expression can become a vehicle for students to reveal their most joyful delights and their deepest sorrow and fear”, (p. 110). Many of us, youth and adult alike, are drawn to distractions in order to avoid direct encounters with painful feelings from trauma, memories of humiliation, regret for past actions, worries about pressing dangers. These can be triggered by contemplative activities and moments of silence, but not only teachers of mindfulness need to be prepared to respond; I have witnessed emotional outbursts in poetry sharing circles, heated political debates, sensitive discussions of close readings of literature, as well as after guided visualizations and breathing practices. These concerns are certainly not a reason to ban these activities from the classroom; however, they are a consideration to be aware of as we create a space for contemplative practice in the classroom and consider training of teachers. Students in schools that provide mindfulness instruction in classes have told me that it is crucially important that their teachers honour students’ right to choose whether or not to participate. They expressed their appreciation that, while they were expected to respect the rights of participants by being quiet during mindfulness practices, they were never forced to ‘buy in’. Additionally, knowing what supports are in place for students, and being mindful of our own reactions becomes crucial, reinforcing the importance of teachers themselves being practitioners.

This brings me back to the teacher’s experience of mindfulness, and once again, I refer the reader to the far more eloquent writing of another teacher, Jackie Siedel (2014), who says, “To bring mindfulness to the moment of teaching is to be able to respond to what is really going on, to life as it presents itself, with all of its surprises from moment to moment” (p. 177). Her chapter, “Some Thoughts on Teaching as Contemplative Practice,” (p. 171-183) is a poetic meditation on how teachers might respond to the current global crisis, where “children (and all humans, other species, life) can be seen as resources (or impediments to progress), and the living spaces of life, earth and sea, have become expendable in the names of profit, progress, and nation” (p. 172). She proposes that teachers

be among those who take up the most profound questions of human life and dignity. Bringing about in our classrooms a downsizing, toward more silence and fewer words. Showing how we might learn to find wealth and fullness in our relationships, in community, in dialogue. Unfolding toward more slowness, mindfulness, and heartfulness (p. 172).

Student teachers and colleagues who wish to ‘implement’ the newly popular ‘tool’ of mindfulness in their classrooms frequently ask me for recommendations of online meditation videos or practice scripts to use in their classes. I am torn between wishing to respond by providing support, as I have tried to do in Section 3, and answering,

We need to do something more than simply demand, “Tell me exactly how you do it?” We have to be adamantly wary that this sort of demand, and our assumption that the forthcoming answer should be simple and not require much of me...The worthwhile time of abiding in inquiry and coming to experience the gifts that can then arrive requires long, difficult, repeated, *practice*, and this requirement cannot be bypassed (Siedel and Jardine, 2014, p. 83).

These words resonate with my wary suspicion of the current enthusiasm for mindfulness programs among some educational leaders who are still embedded in a worldview in which those in power “really wanted working men to be focused, uncomplicated and compliant” (Boyle 2006 quoted in Siedel and Jardine, 2014); if we are honest, we might admit that this is often what administrators want of teachers, and what teachers really want of students. I can imagine the appeal of mindfulness training programs if it is thought that they can accomplish this focused compliance while making teachers and students emotionally capable of managing more effectively the increasing stresses of the classroom. Intimately familiar with these stresses, I am moved to share the methods that have been invaluable to me in weathering them for 35 years, and to even recommend new books such as Altman’s, *One-Minute Mindfulness: 50 Simple Ways to Find Peace, Clarity,and New Possibilities in a Stressed-Out World* (2011); yet, as a proponent of mindfulness in schools, I fear participating in a trend that may be reduced to simply a method of more efficiently managing and regulating the behaviour and thoughts of the adults and students within the system. My mindfulness training emphasized the opposite objectives: wonder and openness to infinite possibility; a path to insights that transcend familiar reality; and an embracing of complexity, ambiguity, paradox. Key to my experience was not only the importance of learning to mindfully be aware of what is happening in this moment; it was recognizing that what arises in my awareness in this moment reflects what has come before - as previously mentioned, in a way, we become what we meditate upon. Just as the oldest meditation text proposed that we meditate upon a particular colour in order to see it in our world, I propose that we can deliberately introduce inspiring objects of awareness and consciously direct our attention to them through active forms of visualization and meditation. By meditating on compassion and sympathetic joy, we can become more compassionate and joyful; by meditating on beautiful objects, we can see and hopefully create more of these in our environment.

My years in the public school system have made me careful to respect the secular context and to avoid creating any impression that I am promoting my personal spiritual beliefs, particularly considering my own background in Buddhist practice. As a result, I find that my colleagues without this religious background sometimes seem to feel more comfortable explicitly addressing the Buddhist roots of mindfulness practices than I do. Yet these practices have sustained me in large part due to their spiritual nature, and I am conflicted about presenting them in a way that is divorced from spirituality. Interestingly, our own provincial curriculum, as mandated in the Ministerial Order on Student Learning directs teachers to provide instruction that helps students learn to demonstrate “respect, empathy and compassion for all people; [and care] for themselves physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and *spiritually*” - my emphasis (archive.education.alberta.ca, 2013). Rather than sterilizing mindfulness training in the schools of all contamination by religious influences, I would prefer to see a more inclusive orientation that encourages incorporation of contemplative practices from as many traditions as possible in ways that maintain and reinforce their spiritual component.

In conclusion, I am grateful to those who have begun the process of introducing mindfulness training, movement meditation practices within disciplines such as yoga and tai chi, and activities that promote the cultivation of empathy, loving kindness, and compassion within public schools, and encouraged by the acceptance that these initiatives are meeting due to the growing body of relevant research evidence. More people are discovering that contemplative movement harmonizes the body, and that meditation can balance the mind and mitigate mental suffering. The value of various contemplative practices is slowly being confirmed by conventional science with the consequence that such practices are increasingly seen as ‘worthwhile work’. I hope that along with this trend there will be a rediscovery that “Good work takes time because good things are complex and demanding of us and our attention and devotion” (Seidel and Jardine, 2014, p. 84). In proposing to bring contemplative practice into our schools, we return to the roots of this word, from Greek *skhole*, “spare time, leisure, rest, ease, idleness...originally, a holding back, a keeping clear” (online etymological dictionary, 2016).

I am reminded of Mary Rose O’Reilly, (1998) who opens her inspiring book, *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice* by quoting another inspirational educator, Parker J. Palmer, -- “To teach is to create a space” (p. 1). It is my hope that by sharing my own journey as an educator and meditator, and offering a few suggestions in answer to the question of how to create a contemplative classroom space, fellow teachers who read this project will be inspired to engage with their students in a wide range of creative ways, living ever more deeply into their own questions.

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