

# Sweet Milk Years Embrace Us: an Embodied Ethics of Care

by

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## Abstract

This poetic and autobiographical narrative inquiry explores teaching through an ethic of care with particular attention to a breastfeeding practice.

Community begins at home; it is the bonds of attachment, like the ones within loving relationships, which are the basis of true community. The more encounters occur, the more the community will thrive to support others, as the depth of relation is built on encounters. The archetypal mother role and also the actual work of at-home mothers is undervalued in our society. Such an imbalance can only create malaise. Reclaiming a mother's engrossment is the starting place for building a school filled with care. This research on the experience of encounter through breastfeeding attempts to fill in the gap in feminist literature that focuses on "maternal thinking." The physical closeness of breastfeeding is the paradigm of the best and most intimate caring relationship between mother and baby.

Teaching in the paradigm of caring is an embodied practice. However, the body has not been acknowledged in academic educational settings. An education based on the senses is a starting point for interconnection; deep knowing comes from one's connection to one's sensual body. The most engaged act for a teacher is to be present in his/her own body and to speak in his/her own voice.

## Dedication

*For Oliver, Henry and Grace,  
who teach me much about how to care.*

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## Prologue

This thesis is a narrative inquiry into maternal pedagogy and ethics of care research tied into my own life experiences. It is a personal exploration, growing from my bodily experience as a breastfeeding mother. During my years nursing my children, I noticed a discrepancy in the way I related to them and the way I was expected to relate to students at school. While at home, I responded lovingly to my children's needs, at school I was expected to be authoritarian. In addition, I noticed that my children's teachers initially related to them in a less caring manner than I did at home. I began gestating some questions: could I ever return to the classroom in its hierarchical school setting? After all I had learned about attentive love and being present to the other, how could I not enact it at school? Further, could I become a change agent to make the schools I was involved with as a teacher and a parent more caring places? Could my home experience inform my teaching?

When our first born children turned four, my friends and I joked that now we had a BA in mothering. It was a joke because we knew that our hierarchical and production based society would never value our experiences at home:

nursing our babies, washing diapers, reading stories, cooking dinner. Years later, when I read Nel Noddings' work for the first time, my heart lightened; here was someone who understood! I dived into the literature on ethic of care and maternal pedagogy, only to lose heart again because my particular physical experience as a breastfeeding mother, the experience which informed my conception of care, was overlooked here. Breastfeeding is an embodied form of maternal care; the lactating body makes care imperative. I came to this inquiry first to address my missing experience in the literature.

I hope to begin filling the gap in maternal and ethic of care literature by calling to attention my experience and that of other breastfeeding mothers who are teachers. Moreover, I hope to gain what Parker Palmer calls inner authority in my own teaching by being able to draw on the whole of my life in the classroom. Putting my ideas into writing lets me explore each of my gestating questions one by one and try out answers. I hope that I will expand the thinking in the existing literature on caring, including maternal care, through the deeper strands of each chapter, showing that caring is multifaceted and that each of us brings to our teaching a depth of experience which, when explored, will allow us to teach who we are.

This thesis will move from the encounter of community and the path of caring who we are, to look at caring through three other lenses: mothers' bodies, breastfeeding, and embodiment. Each of these lenses will allow me to explore what I have learned about caring and working against fragmentation in my life, and how others have, and how these lessons can be applied to my teaching. These lenses shed important light on education at this time, which instead focuses on bureaucratic instrumental views, such as accountability.

First, I will address the fragmentation and erosion of community in our society, and how it is related to the denigration of home life. I will explore how encounters with others form the starting point of true community relations and offer suggestions for building community within and without, and how one is dependent on the other. In the second chapter, I will begin with the base of maternal literature, such as the writings of Nel Noddings and Jane Roland Martin. I will also outline an ethic of care approach; in both cases, I will relate my own life understandings of these ideas. This second chapter will focus on what presence is, and how far it extends, what mothers learn through their years of presence at home with their children, and how this can be translated into embodied teaching, a teaching from the heart.

The third chapter will address what I see as a gap in the maternal and embodiment literature: the experience of breastfeeding. In it, I will critique Ruddick's, Martin's and Noddings' overlooking of breastfeeding, an experience that I found central to mothering. I will explore what I learned about care through my decade of breastfeeding, and ask what teachers with breastfeeding experience bring to their classrooms. In particular, this chapter will focus on the engrossment of the breastfeeding dyad and how it can be translated into other caring relationships, especially at school.

In the fourth chapter, I will ask how far our bodies extend into the world and follow with an exploration of caring and our relationships with the ecosystem. Here writers such as Tim Lilburn, David Abram and David Orr will join the conversation to help examine how being in relation with the natural world is related to embodiment and presence. Where are the boundaries between

ourselves and the world? How can schools be rearranged to remove the artificial barriers between children and the natural world? I will look at poetry, the poetic stance and caring. How do presence, engrossment, the natural world and poetry combine? Together they may give us a subversive way of viewing the world, a 'subtler language' against fragmentation. Writing and teaching poetry writing, reading and responding to poetry are activities of liberation. Finally I ask, what would engaged, embodied teaching look like and how is it related to having inner authority?

When I became pregnant for the first time, and told my principal I would not be reapplying for my job because I wanted to stay at home with my baby for more than six months, he did not understand. When I showed no sign of returning after a year, my mother did not understand. For many years I have been misunderstood by many of my teaching peers: how could I have so little regard for my advancement up the seniority ladder? Why was I wasting my education staying at home with babies? This thesis offers a response to those who wonder what I could possibly gain nursing my babies and toddlers all those years. It is also a response to my internal questions, an integral part of my claiming my own authority, of building my own inner community. I hope it will help all readers see that our various embodied experiences in life can help us to be more engaged teachers.

# Chapter One: Community

## Introduction

Educators today are especially keen on community building. In part, this great interest is a result of the deterioration of traditional communities. Many educators believe that schools must supply what parents and geographical neighborhoods seem unable to provide - a sense of belonging, of caring for one another, of sharing in a coherent tradition. (Noddings, 2002a, p. 70)

What does it mean to live in community? I live in the same small town where I grew up. When I walk to meet my children after school, I see not only my neighbours, but also some faces I have known all my life. When I go shopping, I see some of my former students working in the stores, and when I teach high school here, I see my mother's former kindergarten students or children of my former classmates. Are a few familiar faces enough to create a feeling of belonging and community? I have not found so; it is easy to live as an atomist. I suggest that at the basis of community is encounter, and will focus on three related themes. To begin, I will explore the erosion of community and fragmentation of modern life using descriptive observations. Next, I will delve into the nature of community as encounter and critique some of the more prevalent definitions of community. A

collection of atomistic individuals gathering together for mutual protection is not a good enough definition for me. However, I do support the attempt at community building; my criticism is with the manner it is sometimes attempted. Finally, I will look at how to build community, including both the outer work of integration and inner healing work in the self, which must be in correspondence with each other. I propose that without the work of introspection and experiencing our own feelings, all the structural attempts at community building will be ineffectual. This is where encounter comes in. What does it mean to be in communion with another and how does encounter relate to education? As I shall explicate in detail in the pages to come, it is the bonds of attachment, like the ones within loving relationships, which are the basis of true community. In loving relationships, we care for ourselves while reaching out to another. To do only one or the other would not be healthy: here is an example of how the inner and outer work of community influence each other and go together.

## Fragmentation and Erosion of Community

Over the past fifty, or some say even two hundred years, our concept and models of community have become increasingly fragmented as we pursue our individual goals. Today we see fewer intergenerational gatherings, the death of small towns as more people move to cities, a non face-to-face culture governed by television and videos, and the further institutionalization of schools. In addition, Charles Taylor writes of how we will leave homes and relationships previously thought of as permanent for a new job, pursuit or love without a hint of remorse. Our modern government and economy push us in our fragmented view of life:

“The operation of market and bureaucratic state tends to strengthen the enframings that favour an atomist and instrumentalist stance to the world and others.” (Taylor, 1991, p. 111) Like a skeptical fifteen year old’s approach to school, we ask, ‘What’s in it for me? How much is it worth?’ forgetting that whatever we do affects countless others in a wave. A good friend and neighbour could move across the country; a spouse can take off with an internet acquaintance. In a culture where an instrumentalist view of life is prevalent at all levels, however, we can make small steps in our schools to work against fragmentation, towards wholeness and community, which I will explore.

The private school I attended leans toward tradition for help: the buildings, the uniforms, the familiar family names of students look traditional and permanent. Values and character development are important. I would be among the first to agree with Alasdair McIntyre that old stories provide a communal sense of who we are as a people and where we come from (in that school’s case, an English, Christian tradition) and thus help form a feeling of belonging. However, there are at least two limitations with this admirable attempt to create community. First, as Nel Noddings writes: “a self cannot be adequately described in terms of properly attached to eras and traditions. A self is rather, a product of encounter and response.” (Noddings, 2002b, p.159) Just as a baby or young child grows and is nurtured not primarily by traditions, but by being held and fed when hungry, comforted when scared, smiled at, hugged and talked to, an older school aged child or adolescent feels part of a community not as much because of school traditions as because of personal encounters with the people there. For example, a direct look in the eye, a smile, a hand on the shoulder, a human connection, as well as a personal response to student work will do much to make students feel ‘at home’. At my twentieth high school reunion, it was not the uniform of the student



at the gate handing me the day's program which warmed my heart, but his smile and greeting, "Welcome back." Dewey writes: "Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from the others." (1916/1997, p. 4) For instance, I am part of a world wide community of breastfeeding supporters through La Leche League, and it is through communication and occasional gatherings that the community is maintained. Nevertheless, it is the more frequent encounters which allow us to see our interconnection, and simultaneously, to see inside ourselves, as Nel Noddings reminds us: "Encounter is clearly paramount in the construction of a self." (2002b, p. 109) Every time a baby is picked up, held, rocked, sung to, nursed, changed, bathed, walked...a small part of the self is built. I know I am here because someone responds to me.

Noddings emphasizes the relationships in an ideal home as a starting place for community, over traditions and stories. An ideal home like I strive for provides children with "a rich community of relatives, friends and neighbours." Conversely, schools have seen community as located out in the world, away from home: "We educators have acted as though life starts 'out there' somewhere in a transcendent world of skills, information and ideas." (Noddings, 2002b, p. 174) While I may arrange desks in groups instead of rows, send introductory letters home to parents and take part in school based professional development, if I am still operating with the mind set that the real community is outside the home, that the home schooling families are antisocial isolates, I am missing out on a rich model of community. Indeed, part of the erosion of community in our time is because of the imbalance away from home and all the community-sustaining jobs home used to fulfill.

School districts fall into this imbalance when they send the message that staying home with babies and young children is wasted time for its teachers. When I returned to the classroom last year I was treated as a new teacher, going to new teacher seminars, and being evaluated, even though I had worked in this district before. There is a work of reclamation to do, for mothers have been encouraged to suppress a huge part of their identity, or at least to deny that it has anything to do their professional role; mothers are not supposed to think of their own children when they are at work. In order for me to have wholeness and integrity in my life, I need to acknowledge what I have learned in the nursing chair as well as in the graduate seminar. My approach to teaching through an ethic of care is rooted in my years of practice breastfeeding my babies. A home provides a model where intimate, repeated face to face encounters are possible, as opposed to the institutional school environment where we see hundreds of others for brief moments, or the television and video culture where thousands of recorded images pass by us even more quickly. At home, the internal goods I learned included the depth of relation built on encounters.

## Encounters

What is the nature of the community I seek? It is not one bound by traditions and regimentation, set up in a hierarchical manner. Carol Gilligan suggests that the hierarchical model is more male, while the female model of relations is quite different:

The images of hierarchy and web, drawn from the texts of men's and women's fantasies and thoughts, convey different ways of structuring relationships and are associated with different views of morality and self...As the top of the hierarchy becomes the edge of the web and as

the centre of a network of connection becomes the middle of a hierarchical progression, each image marks as dangerous the place which the other defines as safe. (1982, p. 62)

When Nel Noddings states, "...our emphasis is more on encounter and response than on community", (Noddings 2002a, p. 10) I interpret her meaning to be it is the individual interactions between people and other beings that matter more than the outward trappings of community. When we have eye to eye encounters with others, we see them as human beings, not just as part of a tradition, ours or theirs. This is how a baby learns to be human: by looking into his/her mother's eyes while sucking milk from her breast. "The bodies, objects, selves, and ideas that a child encounters become part of the self." (Noddings 2002b, p. 172) Mother and baby can fall into such a gaze that they are engrossed in each other. Meeting baby's needs becomes paramount in the mother's mind and heart, because they are in relation to each other. Noddings writes, "If relation is basic to an ethic of care, then encounter becomes crucially important, since a relation is filled out in an encounter." (2002b, p. 69) At school, we are unlikely to be as engrossed in each student as we were in our new born babies. Why does this difference in relating look so stark? Perhaps it is the institutional nature of the school environment which hinders our engrossment, and the warm home context which encourages it. Our local La Leche League group had been meeting in a large, cold church hall with hard flooring, folding chairs and old, dirty toys. One month, the hall was not available and we met in a home instead, where there was carpeting, soft chairs, clean toys and baby blankets, as well as tea and home made muffins. The depth of the conversation was so noticeably greater that we tried one month again in the hall and one in a home. We achieved such a feeling of a close knit community in the home meetings that we have switched. If school were warmer, softer, and more home-like, perhaps our encounters there would become deeper and feel more like

community. Today I saw the principal of my children's school sitting with a little girl on her lap. She is often on the floor talking to children. Perhaps more direct, sustained and authentic encounters, between students and teachers, and yes, even some administrators, could result in bonds of attachment which are, in essence, resembling those of a parent and child, and form of the the basis of true community.

Does our role as parents and teachers extend beyond providing positive encounters? According to Noddings, who writes about encounters most thoroughly in *Starting at Home*, "Our problem, as parents and teachers, is not to make our children autonomous..but to supervise their encounters, help them think about their encounters, and evaluate those encounters honestly." (2002b, p. 115-116) Besides us, students are having encounters with one another and all the characters of pop culture that reach them. Encounter is not something that happens only between people or between people and nature, but "we are influenced by encounters with cultural space as well as physical places." (Noddings, 2002b, p. 156) The school building and the youth culture which is transmitted everywhere are also forming the students we send there. An ideal school, like a home, would limit exposure to encounters of negative influence as much as possible, and try to structure those which promote growth. She writes,

Education may be thought of as a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation. (Noddings, 2002b, p. 283)

Some of these encounters will be with teachers, which over time may develop into nurturing relationships.

Building relationships is peace work, as Jean Vanier points out, and “implies something deeper than polite acceptance of those who are different. It means meeting those who are different, appreciating them and their culture, and creating bonds of friendship with them.” (2003, p. 41) It is well known that high schools in particular are not always peaceful, community feeling places, and that this is partly a result of their organization. With eight teachers a year and several hundred different faces a day, it is easy to feel alienated. Noddings cautions:

Too many encounters, too brief, may well be one source of the alienation and loss of community so widely recognized. If all sorts of encounters are available without community, why make the commitment community requires? (2002b, p. 159)

Perhaps the erosion of community in our times is directly related to the multitude of easy encounters available to us. Many middle schools make the effort to reduce the number of encounters for teachers and students by having one teacher teach the same group of students, like in an elementary school. For instance, in School District 59, Peace River South, Core 8 teachers teach the same group of students all their academic subjects in an integrated style. Smaller high schools may have more difficulty arranging classes so that for example, the English teacher of one class teaches them Socials the next semester, but it is possible to ensure that one teacher remains with the same students for at least two years at all grade levels. In elementary school, the duration could easily be four years. It takes longer to fall in love with your baby if the nurses keep him/her in the nursery, bringing him/her to you for twenty minutes every four hours. That practice has been banished from many Canadian hospitals; rooming in is now the norm. Why then do we still adhere to old models which work against the possibilities for engrossment and relationship in schools and leave so many students feeling uncared for, not belonging? If, as teachers, we want a peaceful society, we can start with building

relationships over time with students, if the structure of the institution will allow us .

Reordering the structure of school is an outer attempt at enabling encounters. A personal step we can all take is to accept ourselves with the same tenderness we hope to extend to our students. Rachel Naomi Remin writes:

Compassion begins with the acceptance of what is most human in ourselves, what is most capable of suffering. In attending to our own capacity to suffer, we can uncover a simple and profound connection between our own vulnerability and the vulnerability in all others. Experiencing this allows us to find an instinctive kindness toward life which is the foundation of all compassion and genuine service. (2000, p. 205)

If we have never cried for our own losses, it will be difficult to extend sympathy to others in tears. When I was a new teacher I knew less about what to do when students were crying, whether over the death of another student, or a broken relationship, because I had never allowed myself to feel my own pain. After losing two parents, and grieving other losses, I now recognize pain in others, and am not confused about how to approach them. However, Nel Noddings points out that it is important that we do not project our feelings onto others, thinking 'I felt this way and so must you'. She explains that this projection is the result of empathy, and is not reflective of attentive love: "But sympathy - 'feeling with' - more nearly captures the affective state of attention in caring." (2002b, p. 14) If we are able to experience sympathy for ourselves, we will be more able to feel with our students, attending to their needs, instead of trying to guess what they may be feeling from outside.

## Building a Community From Within and Without

Basically, service is about taking life personally, letting the lives that touch yours touch you. These days, many people seem to think that being touched is a form of weakness, even if the life that touches you is your own. (Remin, 2000, p. 197)

As we reach out in sympathy to others, building community with them, a parallel internal community building is occurring within us. I believe that in constructing the inner community which we need to support our growth, we provide a place for others, as well, and that without our inner community, we are hampered in our attempts at building outer community.

When my children were babies, they spent their days nursing in a sling held to my body and the nights nursing in my bed because I believed, as Nel Noddings does, that “the body is the organ of encounter and that, through its encounters, a self is developing.” (2002b, p. 127) They learned that life was safe, warm, full, and carry that expectation with them into the world. I do not agree with the view that we are all atomistic individuals and the sooner a baby realizes this, the better. We built our relationships from the beginning on the practice of repeated physical encounters. I also know that all my students did not have the same experience in their infancy. However, at this later date, I try to provide them with the same tone of care and acceptance I give my own children. Through my eyes, my voice, my posture, the way I set up and decorate the classroom, I want to make them feel ‘enclosed, protected, all warm.’ This is the starting place for community as encounter as defined by an ethic of care.

Some students, no matter how safe and accepted they feel at school, feel a growing disenchantment with their hopes to help the trouble of the world. Taylor calls this the slide into the iron cage of seeming powerlessness. Wherever they look, they see the institutions of their society pushing them towards fragmentation, regardless of what their teacher says. (Taylor, 1999) The necessary antidote is complex and overwhelming for many teenage students, who may need help finding opportunities for involvement. At Elphinstone Secondary in School District #46, some students are in the Leadership group, organizing assemblies, dances and theme days, and collecting food at Christmas. Some join the peace group, raising money and writing letters for Amnesty International and other initiatives. Some play music and perform for peers occasionally. A school with a healthy over all community will foster these kinds of democratic groups, who are on the look out for what their neighbour needs and how to provide it.

Here is Wendell Berry's definition of community:

In a viable neighborhood, neighbors ask themselves what they can do or provide for one another, and they find answers that they and their place can afford. This, and nothing else, is the practice of neighborhood...a viable neighborhood is a community; and a viable community is made up of neighbors who cherish and protect what they have in common. This is the principle of subsistence. (Berry, 2001, pp. 30-31)

David Orr's definition of community sounds similar: "By community, I mean, rather, a place in which the bonds between people and those between people and the natural world create a pattern of connectedness, responsibility, and mutual need..." (1994, p. 143) In many neighbourhoods today neighbours do not even know one another, let alone what one another needs. If schools may be viewed as micro-communities, we may ask how close to a subsistence neighbourhood they could come. Could schools run organic markets instead of signing contracts with



multi-national soft drink companies? They could certainly publish and sell books of student poetry along side yearbooks. The organizational layers of school districts are a long way from the practice of neighborhood described by Berry. Even so, schools can take some small steps, perhaps in partnership with homes.

The most basic step is looking at the people around you as neighbors rather than competitors and asking what they truly need. This is how a mother should approach her baby, and is just as good an initial stance for teachers. How does a parent or a teacher perceive a true need in a child as opposed to a want? With newborn babies, there is no distinction: a baby wants to nurse and needs nutrition and warmth. As children get older, wants and needs are no longer the same: a child may want to run across the road or stick a fork into an electrical socket but does not need to; indeed, s/he needs to be protected from danger. Sometimes, with older children, insight and a deep knowledge of the person are necessary to perceive if a demand is a need. The more sustained the caring relationship, and the more the parent or teacher is practiced in discerning his or her own needs, the better able s/he will be to see the needs of the child. This way, there is no one packaged way for creating community because the deep needs of each of the thirty students will always be so different, and could lead to organizational structures very different from standard classroom norms. There are no codified guidelines for a caring community. Yes, put their desks in groups, read them important stories, challenge their assumptions, take them on field trips, eat together, but don't forget to do your hard homework so that you can encounter each one eye to eye.

It is important to recognize that while I venture forth building outer community, I must pay attention to my inner community; first I have to be in community with myself. Parker Palmer writes about how traditionally, teachers

taught from an objective stance as experts delivering truth like talking heads. To teach from the heart requires us to look inside ourselves, to reunite our broken parts. Then we teach who we are. Palmer writes:

Remembering ourselves and our power can lead to revolution, but it requires more than recalling a few facts. Re-membering involves putting ourselves back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of our lives. When we forget who we are we do not merely drop some data. We dis-member ourselves, with unhappy consequences for our politics, our work, our hearts. (1998, p. 20)

One of the consequences is that we see our students as recipients of the truth, rather than complex people with needs. However, when we do the hard work of reclaiming what Taylor calls the ideal of authenticity, without the practice of narcissism, we are then able to be in true relation with another. This inner work against fragmentation is the first step in shifting our world toward community.

When I re-member who I am, I think of my time spent mothering. My self is relational and any self-analysis involves others. As Noddings reminds us, "The self is a relation. It is constructed in encounters with other selves and with objects and events in the world." (Noddings 2002b, p. 116) Just as my babies learned who they were at my breast, I live in a family and community and am part of a web of relationships. As Noddings returns to the home and the ideal family as a starting place for an ethic of care, when I look at my own caring practices and who I am as a carer, I look to my family, experiences and relationships in my home. My self includes my past experience as a daughter of an alcoholic father, my childhood on the beach and in the woods, my years as an at-home breastfeeding mother, my care of my dying parents, my work as a poet, as well as my degree in my teaching subject. From my encounters with family members in need, from my experiences of engrossment with those most intimately close to me, I learned to be open to the

other. I believe that this level of compassion is not easily found in our modern world. Luce Irigaray writes:

The transcendence of the *you* as the other is not yet, really, part of our culture. At best, the other is respected in the name of tolerance, is loved in God, is recognized as an equal or fellow human. But that does not amount to perceiving and respecting the irreducibility of the other, to recognize the irreducible difference of the other in relation to me. (Irigaray, 2002, p. 125)

By looking closely at our particular love, by encountering this *you* deeply, we also lean toward communion with the wider community. Compassion may be something we grow into as Lawrence Blum notes:

Compassion is not a simple feeling-state but a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person, an active regard for his good, a view of him as a fellow human being, and emotional responses of a certain degree of intensity. (Blum, 1994, p. 175)

Our growth through our caring, though focussed on the other, benefits us as well. Milton Mayeroff observes: "In caring for the other, in helping it to grow, I actualize myself. The writer grows in caring for his ideas; the teacher grows in caring for his students; the parent grows in caring for his child." (1971, p. 40) I note throughout this thesis that I have actualized myself through mothering; I also do through caring teaching, and even in writing this thesis gain clearer perspective on how to live well with and for others.

## Dogwoods

The extravagance of waxy dogwoods  
in April's sunlight is always a surprise,

driving along this coastal highway, like  
the forgotten smell of summer salt in

the air. They came out the week you died.  
The expected phone call stunned me too,

in the nursing chair - put the sleeping  
baby down - please wait until I get there -

the dogwood edged drive to the hospital,  
you a bloated deadhead: high tide in your

lungs, your every cell; pulled under by  
garbage bags of rye bottles, gasping for

breath, the shining dogwoods laughing in my  
face the whole way, blind to my impatient,

shingled mourning. Another promise broken.  
I no longer the frozen tree, paper

dogwood flowers in my long hair, spread  
across your slide projector screen. This year

the wait is over, but my blossoming  
freedom will baffle me once again.

## Inner Community

You have done your work and achieved unity within, and you face your classroom, your school with the wish and the intention for unity. Between the two lies the possibility for a shadow to grow. "Communities often fail to accept dissenting or unusual ideas. They demand conformity and punish dissent," reminds Noddings. ( 2002a, p. 72) Schools are among the communities which often have this trouble. When dissent is not acceptable, punishment and exclusion follow. Though we may not live in George Orwell's *1984*, we do live in a country which allows an innocent citizen to be tortured for the sake of 'security'. Carol Gilligan writes of how mothers are often forced to make an impossible decision: allow the inner freedom of their children to flourish and be rejected from the community or squelch it and be accepted. With boys it is harder, for "The separation between mothers and sons is mandated in patriarchy." (Gilligan, 2002, p. 74) I see this separation occurring when I try to encourage my sons to conform to cultural expectations. Teachers also face this pressure daily just to maintain order in the classroom. We post rules. The rules of order required for a smoothly running school, however, may be imposed with authoritarian style, or with the warmth and good sense of the best homes.

Teachers may expect good from their students, and students should be able to expect good from their teachers and administrators: "The expectation of good is exactly what a good home preserves. Life that is, at the outset, 'enclosed, protected, all warm' is the way life should be..." (Noddings, 2002b, p. 79) We can come to class prepared to meet our students with warmth and protection.

Often we have good intentions for helping the outsider, though our underlying motives may be to feel like a good person, as when I, feeling guilty about having new clothes, give some of my older clothes to a less fortunate friend whether she needs them or not. A worst case of 'helping' the unfortunate is residential schools in British Columbia and elsewhere. When I was a little girl, the Sechelt Nation children no longer lived in the brick building run by nuns where they were forbidden to speak their language, shamed and beaten to help them assimilate. However, children from Mount Currie were placed there and attended my school where they ate their sandwiches that smelled like cat food. Jean Vanier asks, "Is it possible to truly love people as they are, for themselves and for their inner freedom?" (2003, p. 31) As a mother and a teacher, I believe it is possible. To put away biases and agendas of all sorts, and to be really present to the inner needs of each student is a starting place.

In relation, in receptive attention to the other, Noddings believes it is important to ask, 'What are you going through?' to do the work of attentive love. She does not shy away from exploring tough questions with teenagers: "Teenagers need to study accounts of people gone wrong...How does it happen that 'good' citizens ignore the misery around them? How does patriotism become warped into cruelty?" (2002a, 152) For this reason she often uses Holocaust stories as examples of literature to use in high schools. It is crucial to connect this subject, as all others, to the learners' lives, as Parker Palmer illustrates:

I was taught the history of the Holocaust at some of the best public schools (and private colleges) in the country. But because I was taught the big story with no attention to the little story, I grew into adulthood feeling, on some level, that all of those horrors had happened on some other planet to some other species. (Palmer, December 1998/January 1999, p. 9)

My grade eight English class last year studied the Holocaust through literature and then visited the Holocaust Centre in Vancouver, where we listened to a Holocaust survivor. I told the students we were bearing witness. About the Warsaw ghetto, we asked *How could people outside walk by and see the suffering inside and not act? What would you do?* Why didn't more people lie down in front of the train? Why do we not help the African AIDS crisis? A year later, it is the unit they want to repeat. These questions and breathing and crying together through exploration of them, helps high school students know that they are not closed systems, but indeed, part of the main. In a caring environment, students may feel more able to extend care to others, as Peta Bowden notes: when we all feel cared for, perhaps we will be more likely to notice when someone else is not, "to attend to and hear the voices of those who are least powerful..." (Bowden, 1997, p. 181) In addition, "the question Who am I? must be encouraged," Noddings writes (2002a, p. 33) Other questions of identity she suggests for study include "Where do I stand in the world? What has my life amounted to? What might I become?...What is the meaning of life?...all are questions that should be explored in a true education." (2002a, 124) These questions get under the skin of students and help them to experience community within and among themselves. Noddings suggests that having students look at their own shadow selves is a crucial part of metacognition: "Self knowledge is as important to the moral side of education as it is the the intellectual side." (Noddings, 2002a, p. 116) Through both content and reflection, we can lead students in the same inner work of unity we have undertaken. But of course, if we have not looked at our own shadow, we will be unable to lead others.

## *The Oyster*

All manner of thing shall be well. The oyster is anchored by tough stamina to its family bed on the mild harbour floor, barnacles on its back. It cannot run away from its troubles, nor can it protect its children whom it sprays out into the large womb of the ocean. It can clamp down shut its fluted chalky shell until trouble passes, like I shut down my heart, though purple star fish and wading Black Oystercatcher can pry the shell open. And red tide seeps in undetected, like a poem. If an irritating grain of sand gets in, as we all know, beauty results, which it will keep hidden the rest of its life, as though it were a wound, a shameful wound. In my dream, I am giving birth. The baby's head comes out with the cord around its neck, and then pops back inside. I am frantically frightened that the baby cannot breathe.

On this frosty morning, do you ask what troubling beauty is hiding inside you, and at what cost will the luminous treasure emerge into the great green sea of this world? O do you ever wonder?

Our culture has a malaise, and because we are part of the culture, we are caught up in its malaise. A sick doctor cannot help patients; in order to be change agents in the education system and society, we must work on healing ourselves or be ineffectual or harmful. If we teachers have not asked ourselves 'Who am I?', how can we ask our students to explore this question? Therefore, our own inner work is often the best place to start if we want to build community. Parker Palmer makes this point about inner work in his reference to listening to the inner teacher and the community of truth: "...when we are unfaithful to the inward teacher and to the community of truth, we do lamentable damage to ourselves, to our students, and to the great things of the world that our knowledge holds in trust." (1998, p.



183) Yet, being change agents in our own little corner without reaching out to others will not produce sustained change. For this reason, I became a La Leche League leader after years of breastfeeding my children relatively alone. For this reason, I explored my ideas about education in a community of graduate students.

There is another way to look at the symbiosis of inner and outer work: from the point of view of the family, the basis of community. Jane Jacobs notes, "Two parents, to say nothing of one, cannot possibly satisfy all the needs of a family-household. A community is needed as well, for raising children, and also to keep adults reasonably sane and cheerful." (2004, p. 34) She makes her point by listing at length some of the duties society expects the nuclear family to provide for its children, then asks:

Who are the paragons that, unaided and unadvised, can earn a living and also provide all this and more? Few of them exist. Only membership in a functioning community makes handling these responsibilities feasible. Another thing: the neuroses of only two adults (or one) focussing relentlessly on offspring can be unbearable." (2004, p. 36)

When families are part of a healthy community where children run from house to house, playing, and parents talk over fences, at the mailbox and the grocery store, inner work and outer work can go hand in hand. My neighbour can even help me reflect on my inner work. The more exchanges occur, the more the community will thrive to support others.

## *Beach Glass*

Darkness comes early, the beach glass like tiles,  
milky white. The years of waves have beaten  
against rocks, as a sharp disposition's  
piercing edges are rolled to sand, to smiles,

are polished to a refinement by time.  
And I can hold you in my hand again  
without bleeding, admiring, your broken-  
ess with its soft luster of doubt sublime.

How the hues of your ancient bottled blown  
soul echo the waves that roll under, drive  
your willing fragments. And if we stay low

on this beach long enough, feeling the tow  
and smash of the currents against our lives,  
we may chip to a rough roundness and glow.

## Conclusion

Some 'communities' feel warmer than others. Some feel like a web of peaceful relations while some have the ice of atomism on their surface. Sometimes we need to begin building the community we are looking for because it does not yet exist. We start from the inside, making a safe place for ourselves, and being present to others, listening. At this time in education we are searching for ways to build community in school as the communities around us erode. Looking only to the traditional communities of the past is not helpful, however, as those were often based on models of hierarchy and division, or at best a collection of atomists, and were often exclusionary. A more authentic community, as Nel Noddings has pointed out, is built on encounters and responses, which over time,

form relations, as in the relationship between a baby and mother. I do not believe it is possible to build community without meaningful encounters. Through being cared for, a self develops. At the same time, through caring, the carer is actualized. The building of outer community and inner community go hand in hand and is thus healing work.

## Chapter Two: Mother Body

### Introduction

Discussions about marriage, home, family are missing as are discussions about society's reproductive processes - a category I define broadly to include not simply conception and birth but the rearing of children to more or less maturity and associated activities such as tending the sick, taking care of family needs, and running a household."  
(Jane Roland Martin, 1985 p. 67)

I have been focussing on the fragmentation of community as a lack of encounter. Feminist literature points to a more particular kind of erosion of community: the loss of the caring domestic sphere of life. What does a lack of community look like in some of the feminist literature I consulted? To feminist writers, it is out of balance, with a lack of attention to the reproductive side of life. Jane Roland Martin defines reproductive processes as "...not simply conception and birth but the rearing of children to more or less maturity and associated activities such as tending the sick, taking care of family needs, and running a household." (1985, p. 6) Our patriarchal society puts more of a focus on the productive processes of the economy, political and social life, these writers

contend. We have institutionalized so many aspects of life, from birth and education to sickness and death, that we forget that all those myriad life-making and life-sustaining activities traditionally carried out at home, especially by women, give meaning to what it is for us to live in community with and for one another. Community at its essence is being attentive and receptive to the needs of one another. I have found it at its most intense engrossed in the eyes of a newborn baby or my husband. Something equivalent, but less intense, happens when we look into our neighbours' eyes. Perhaps this recognition of community with our neighbours happens more easily when we are already lovingly looking at our babies and lovers/husbands, children, grandchildren and students. Compassionate connection is not necessarily easily replicated in institutional structures. Community begins at home.

In this chapter I offer one perspective based on my experiential background as a nursing mother and community leader. I do not offer a universal critique or application; I speak only from my own life. First will come a diagnosis of one malaise of modernity: a lack of maternal thinking, a discounting of the feminine way of knowing and relating as outlined by Nel Noddings, Jane Roland Martin, Sara Ruddick and others. Next will follow a remedy: an ethic of care, an embodied teaching and thinking, including my own practice of embodied teaching. A vision of a whole education learned from the communal practices of home will round out the treatment.

## Diagnosis: Lack of Maternal Thinking

Before I was a mother, I was a teacher. After becoming a mother, I am a different teacher. I am more likely to follow my heart than codified regulations and more likely to value caring as much as academic brilliance. Recently I received a phone call from one of my students before I was a mother, thanking me for having him write poetry and offering him latitude. I do not remember the particular circumstances, but I do remember that I felt threatened in making these small departures from the norm. Why did I feel guilty for caring under the pressure from other teachers to be more authoritarian? One of the main problems in institutionalized education is that the emphasis on codified rules and logic is reflected in the education system. Obedience and measurement of performance dominate school. It took me many years of mothering, home schooling and advocating for my children in the system to let me see that there was a neglected side to children's education in schools. As a teacher, I was aware that students came to school as whole beings with feelings and problems and the need for relationships, not just as intellectual beings. However, when I became a parent of a child in the school system, it became painfully obvious that many of his needs would not be met in school. I was greatly relieved to read Nel Noddings and Jane Roland Martin, who are among those educational theorists articulating the urgent need for a relational approach to education, modeled after a mother's attentive love for her baby.

These philosophers of an ethics of care write that ideally, a caring community begins at home. However, in many cases it does not and school is not picking up on this omission. Martin writes:

No one is born knowing how to be kind, let alone how to withstand contrary peer pressures. No one comes into this world with the skills needed to resolve conflicts nonviolently or the desire to take other people's needs and points of view into account. Nor do these traits and dispositions emerge full blown as a person matures. On the contrary, to be human is to acquire them through education, or not at all. (1998, 'The Poverty of Education', ¶ 8)

My children learn to care for one another and their parents through time spent together at home, and extend this caring to others outside the family, but because they spend time at school, they do not learn it perfectly. Home is where I have learned a particular kind of caring as well; my decade of at-home mothering has taught me about being present and loving attentively, and has allowed me to return to the classroom with this different perspective. I agree, against current societal norms, that in the early years, children need continuous care at home from a parent. By the age of four or five, some children are ready for an imaginative, sense filled early childhood program. Some, however, are ready at seven, or later. Many families homeschool until and even through high school. When I write of embodiment, attentive love and presence, I am referring to baby and parent in bodily proximity or attachment. What does a teacher who has had this kind of experience learn? I and many other mothers believe that being a mother with experience in intensive at-home caring practice is one special kind of teacher training which may result in a more caring classroom presence.

Reading feminist literature has taught me to see the lack of reproductive processes, traditionally the domain of women in the home, in society at large. Patriarchy represses and usurps these reproductive processes so that they are nonexistent in the outer culture; they are at the the very bottom of the community hierarchy. For instance, when a family approaches our church for a funeral, the

minister puts out an e-mail to all members asking if anyone is willing to bake for the reception. The “United Church Women” are now too old to bake for every event and there is no one to take their place. Similarly, I work as a volunteer La Leche League Leader to offer information and support to mothers who want to breastfeed their babies because the continuation of this information and support within families in many cases has been broken for at least two generations. In generations past, girls grew up seeing many mothers breastfeed and care for their babies. In modern society, this is no longer necessarily the case. A new mother may find herself with little experience, but surrounded by books by medical experts. La Leche League returns the “horizons of significance” to motherhood by offering public meetings where mothers can see other mothers nursing their babies and discussing breastfeeding and mothering issues. The leader, herself an experienced breastfeeding mother, with her LLL published resources, is there to answer questions and stimulate discussion. Meetings work on the recognition that people are naturally dialogical. It counters atomism by fostering a sense of belonging. Ruddick and Martin provide further evidence of the basic importance to community and schooling of the reproductive processes.

As an at home mother, my contribution to the economy is invisible. My work is ‘reproductive’ rather than ‘productive’. I have babies and do laundry, mop floors, cook oatmeal, make beds and of course, breastfeed. This work is quickly undone and in need of repetition. Even in the classroom, my work is more an act of reproduction than factory production. So pervasive is the instrumentalism of our society that I used to worry about not making any *thing* in my life’s work. On one level I knew that having babies and caring for young children was fundamentally important work, yet it is unacknowledged by the greater society, including the school.



The heart aches. We women have won tremendous victories in, finally, entering the realm of male-controlled public life, but much of the victory has come at the expense of the denigrating of our own traditional contributions. Were these contributions negligible? Were these occupations and ways of being so unimportant that no one needs to pursue them now? Or is it possible to start with what is learned in better homes and rebuild both education and the wider social world? (Noddings, 2002b, p. 299)

When I was a little girl, my mother, sister and I would spend long summer afternoons picking blackberries by the side of a dusty road. My mother brought a ladder and wore long sleeves and pants. We filled all our buckets and returned home. That evening, she suspended a large cloth bag from the ceiling which dripped purple juice into a bowl on the counter. I could hear it dripping from my bed. She was making blackberry jam for our toast. I never learned how to make blackberry jam, and she died before I had to learn from half memory and neighbours. The same is true for knitting. I did not have enough conversations about many reproductive processes of home and I never heard them in my years of schooling.

In *The Schoolhome* (1992), Martin writes more strongly about how domesticity has been repressed by the intellectual community, including schools. She writes of the linguistic conventions which “tell us that homes do not *educate* children, they *socialize* them; mothers do not teach their young, they *raise* and *train* them and in the best of cases *foster* their growth. (p. 135) The job of school, she writes, is to take children out of the private sphere of home into the public one where “any trace of the love, the nurturance, or the three Cs of care, concern and connection associated with home and domesticity will be regarded as counter productive.” (p. 138) Many home schooling parents recognize this aspect of schooling and therefore opt out.

It is taken for granted in many educational circles today that three and four year olds are better off in a junior kindergarten than at home, because many feel that even young children should learn independence from parents and attachment to peers. Indeed, many children that age spend full days in day care. Martin writes about the domestic vacuum in children's lives today and envisions a school where domestic values are central. She forms a chorus with Noddings asking where we will learn to care if not at home: "most of us learn to care in homes. When this doesn't happen, the school must be a second home." (Noddings 2002b, p. 167) How far we have to go here!

In "There's Too Much to Teach", Jane Roland Martin addresses the problem of cultural abundance and how to decide which cultural stock will be passed on to the next generation. In our narrow view of what constitutes culture, we have mislaid and forgotten large amounts of old knowledge, traditions and practices from which we may still need to learn. In defining cultural wealth, Martin looks to "the broadest sense of the term" and to "all members of society over the whole range of contexts." (2003, p. 46) For instance, "an old farmer's know-how, an artisan's craft, a mother's daily lessons to her offspring in the 3Cs of care, concern, and connection", (p. 47) as well as Holocaust memories are as important as traditional school subjects. In the past, the home has been responsible for preserving and transmitting the 3Cs and an ethics of care to the next generation but now with most mothers working out of the home this knowledge is being lost. It is therefore dangerous to presume that schools teach only the traditionally male public domain. Who will teach the 3Cs to the next generation of boys and girls? Like Mark Twain, Martin does not equate education with schooling, and would like to see educational agency broadened to include churches, museums and other groups. She would also erase the historic division between home and school, sharing

responsibility for educating children between them.

I have been an at-home mother for nearly a decade because I see the passing on of what Martin calls the 3Cs of care, concern and connection to be vitally important for my children's well being and education. I struggle to remember the 'old knowledge' I learned fleetingly from my mother about making applesauce, and gardening, though I remember the lullabies. When I returned to the classroom last year, not only did I try to make it look and feel as home-like as possible, but I also did my best to transmit the 3Cs to my students by caring for them.

Sara Ruddick defines mothers' work as preservative love, fostering growth, nurturance and training. She sees needs as "demands" of children, and holds that anyone who meets these demands does the work of mothering. Of course, I see the needs of a baby for closeness, warmth and food as more fundamental than demands and best met through breastfeeding. When a mother holds and nurses a baby, all needs are simply and naturally met. I see mothering, and in particular, breastfeeding as an embodied experience par excellence.

Two of Ruddick's foci with which I hold accord are about home and attentive love. She writes, "At the heart of a mother's arrangements is a 'home' ... Home is where children are supposed to turn when their world turns heartless, where they center themselves in the world they are discovering." (1989, p. 87 ) Being together at home, especially in the early years, ideally leads to attentive love, which according to Ruddick, "knits together maternal thinking." (p. 199) In attentive love, "a mother really tries to look at her child, tries to see him accurately rather than herself in him" and "to ask 'What are you going through?' and to wait to hear the answer rather than giving it." (p. 121) Perhaps learning to be receptive to a

baby's needs is good practice for close listening and looking as a child grows.

After I was at home for a few months with my first baby, my mother urged me to go back to work and not waste my education on “the backward” practice of breastfeeding. Conversely, I see my experiences of birth, caring for children and tending the sick as the deep fertile ground from which my educational philosophy grows. Madeleine Grumet writes that mothers should refuse the artificial distinction between our reproductive experience and our teaching: “We, the women who teach, must claim our reproductive labor as a process of civilization as well as procreation.” (1988, p. 29) She places great value in home experience and nurturing qualities. Perhaps this at-home experience should be sought out by school districts. The ‘3Cs of care, concern and connection’ would then have more voice in schools.

Nel Noddings is one of the leading educators today who would like to reorganize schools around themes of care. She believes that we want more from schools than academic achievement, and that all children need “to believe they are cared for and learn to care for others.” (2003, p. 59) Caring is important because it expands cultural literacy, and connects us to standard subjects, great existential questions, and to other people. It also makes us want to do our best work for those we care about. Noddings would like to see school organized for continuity of care, as well as include themes of care in the curriculum, which could be interdisciplinary or not. She gives as examples themes of care, trust, strangers and hope. She argues that care is best supported in small schools where one teacher remains with the same class over two subjects or a few grades, so that trusting relationships may grow. Also, teachers must take part in self education projects in

how to teach themes of care. Especially at the high school level, a fundamental change in attitude is necessary to make school more home-like.

Nel Noddings has written more than anyone else about an ethics of care which grows out of a feminine home experience. She writes in *Caring*, "The caring of mother for child, of human adult for human infant, elicits the tenderest feelings in most of us. Indeed, for many women, this feeling of nurturance lies at the very heart of what we assess as good." (1984, p. 87) My attending to my new babies taught me what selfless nurture is: I couldn't stop staring at them. I smelled the tops of their heads, adored their ears, listened to them breathing, and jumped at their tiniest sounds. I remember clearly my heartache when they cried, and my milk flowing in response. Noddings describes the receptivity of the one caring:

Mothers quite naturally feel with their infants. We do not project ourselves into our infants and ask 'How would I feel if I were wet to the ribs?'...*Something is wrong*. This is the infant's feeling, and it is ours. We receive it and we share it. (1984, p. 31)

Mothers care naturally, not because we feel we should, as in a traditional sense of ethics. We do not read about the 'seven habits of highly effective mothers' and put checklists on our fridges. "Caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours." (1992, p. 17) Caring says, go to the baby and be in relation to her. Ideally, teachers would feel the same way toward students, rather than focussing too much on particular strategies.

## *Unfolding*

I couldn't sleep that first night, though I'd pushed him for two hours after sunset like the longest run of my life. As he slept in his clear plastic boat beside me, wrapped tightly, I fell into a gaze of his puffy, canal-formed face, the foggy knowing that here was a nine pound one ounce blessing out of my own small weak body, falling into the hole of longing within me. As the fluid from his journey ebbed I watched his face unfold like a Georgia O'Keefe poppy in the sun, though it was midwinter, and his eyes came out like moons, then the stone plates around my heart started to unfold too, and the mother inside me began to bloom. When he opened his new eyes I unfolded his wrappings and we lay skin to newborn skin learning the art of latch. But if I fell asleep they sailed him away. I woke and pursued them down the hall like a seagull chases and dives at an eagle after her nest eggs. Then we would return and start gazing and unfolding our newborn ecstasy again.

I know what it feels like to be in relation with my family members, and with others outside my family, including my students. Again, I wonder if my experience as a mother makes me a more caring teacher than I was before I had children, and

strived to replicate specific behaviours, all the while feeling that I was absent from my teaching. Noddings writes that “giving birth is the natural beginning of the preservative love that guides parenting and teaching.” (1992, p. 80) I agree that giving birth taught me the basics of preservative love. My first night of being a mother, I wouldn’t let my baby out of my sight and followed the nurses down the hall when they tried to take him away, scolding me for not thinking of myself. I saw then a new side of my caring. More recently, Noddings writes how attentive love as well is learned through mothering: “With newborns, the first job of attentive love is to assure them that they are heard and that help and comfort can be reliably summoned.” (2002b, p. 177) Here is the basis of learning to trust that life can be good. My experience as a mother of newborns is that my breasts and arms supplied almost all the help and comfort needed. Time at the breast is time spent in attentive love. How many thousands of hours have I spent with babe in arms nursing, gazing lovingly at the tender sucking cheeks? Even when my mind was not fully attentive, reading, shopping or caring for older children, my breasts and body provided attentive love to my baby in a sling.

However, there is more to a breastfeeding relationship than physical supply and demand. There is a spiritual connection as well. Perhaps it was during breastfeeding that I realized that every person is as special as my own dear baby and started to see the sacred in the other. For, “every encounter between actual embodied beings matters. The particular response of the particular other is what is sacred.” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 133) When my baby looked up from my breast with a milky grin of gratitude I treasured the sacred response. Through so many loving encounters I grew as a mother as my baby’s capacity for love and trust grew. Noddings explains that “Both carer and cared-for develop as human selves through interactions in which the response is treasured.” (2002b, p. 134) So while I

will never receive professional development credit for my years as a mother, I have been developing along with my children through the countless treasured interactions. I believe that the the day in, day out continuous caring practice of mothering, particularly mothering through breastfeeding, is an intensive learning environment for caring relations.

At home, ideally, a child is cared for. At school, a child's most basic need is to be cared for. Most parents hope that each teacher will care for their child as a person, not an object. My children each have unique needs and gifts and are not blank slates on an assembly line. Being cared for soon "triggers a desire to care and enjoy the satisfaction and fulfillment. The need to care, then, may be the fundamental need of a developing moral agent." (Noddings, 2002b, p. 168)  
Home and school should help students to care.

The diagnosis of the malaise in modern education and society, then, is the missing discussions of the reproductive processes of society: the work of the mother paradigm, regardless of gender, including care of children, the sick and the entire household. The archetypal mother role and also the actual work of at-home mothers is discounted as worthless. Such an imbalance can only create malaise. The rest of the chapter will look toward a remedy for this problem.



## Remedy: Body Presence

My experience in caring for my babies and children has given me a particular way of looking at the world. It has compelled me into the depth of living. Thomas Merton writes:

Living is not thinking. Thought is formed and guided by objective reality outside us. Living is the constant adjustment of thought to life and life to thought in such a way that we are always growing, always experiencing new things in the old and old things in the new. Thus life is always new. ( 1956, p.16)

Often, living with a baby is not thinking. Sometimes it is automatic pilot; other times it is a depth of feeling. Here is my baby in my arms, I have read and thought about babies and their care. However, head thinking is not what is needed in caring for a new baby. Here is mine, not managed on a schedule of clocks and calendars, just held by me all day and night long, with a heart full of gratitude for the wonder of the gift of life. "You are struck by the generosity of things being what they are: you are enlarged by this generosity," (1999, p. 65) writes Tim Lilburn about contemplating nature. Nursing puts me in the stance of being so struck: here is a baby, being kept alive and nurtured by my body. Life is generous. I am full of love, joy, compassion and balance, restored with every nursing. I am at once present in my body and contemplating the sacred in another. This living readjusts my thoughts about life.

A nursing relationship is one of intense encounter. Noddings writes, "If relation is basic to an ethic of care, then encounter becomes equally important, since a relation is filled out in an encounter." (2002b, p. 69) For instance, a baby whose mother responds to the baby's cues, holding, nursing and comforting him or

her, will have repeated skin to skin, eye to eye encounters throughout the day, which will lay the foundation of the relationship. Living in a breastfeeding family is to be steeped in encounters which continue after weaning, for breastfeeding relationships are often based on meeting the needs of the one cared for. I know now that “the self is a relation. It is constructed in encounters with other selves and with objects and events in the world,” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 116) as Noddings explains. I cannot say that it is not possible to see life this way without breastfeeding; I only know that, for me, breastfeeding and attachment parenting make it hard to see life any way else. Also, some teachers who have not experienced the intensity of staying home with small children do not seem to understand my deep love for my children and wonder at them. Alasdair MacIntyre notes that internal goods “can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question. Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods.” (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 188-189) Only women with breastfeeding experience are able to see the internal goods I have gained through this practice; nevertheless, for the benefit of other readers, including attentive fathers and mothers using artificial feeding methods, and I will attempt to outline some of the internal goods of embodiment and compassion I have experienced in my breastfeeding practice. I include them because I have not found them in academic literature.

When I meditate on each part of my body and my gratitude for its work, I am most aware of my womb and my breasts. Their transformation through nurturing motherhood has transformed my sense of self, my spiritual outlook and my work in the world. For the last decade, the story of my body has been the story of the Mother. For over ten years, my body has been intimately interconnected, nourishing, sustaining and protecting my children. I was never lonely during this

time, nor felt the pain of the illusion of separation because I was almost always in physical contact with a child. In the last months of my nursing relationship with my daughter, I was teaching in one town while she was in preschool in another, yet my breasts made milk for her in one place and her body digested my milk in the other. Even though we were miles apart, we were still physically connected.

A few days after my last baby was born, I sat cross legged on the end of my bed and looked at my full dripping breasts resting on my still round belly and felt like my body had been inhabited by a fertility goddess. As I held my three day old daughter, skin to skin against my chest, two years to the day after my mother died, I felt my grief evaporate in the July heat. My belly was still very full and round, as were my dripping breasts. Although this was my third breastfed baby, the reflection appeared so unlike "me" that it seemed as though I embodied the mother archetype: abundant, life-giving, overflowing with more than enough nourishment for one tiny baby. Holding my daughter and looking in the same mirror, I felt the continuity of generations, in one direction to my no longer living mother and grandmother and great-grandmother and in the other direction to not yet born future grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Grace and I, the only ones present, were the link in a long line of relatives. It was a sudden and momentary awareness of the continuity of life.

### *Red Full Moon*

You call me to see the red moon  
and on the cold driveway we stand  
together, leaning into its murky  
lambency, never so clearly spherical before,  
above the cedar trees. There is a crescent  
of light shining along the bottom,  
an eclipse. You wrap your little arms around

my waist once again today and I say  
"See the face of the man in the moon?  
Remember this night, remember."

I expected you at the full moon,  
but you waited until it was a new  
crescent, as thin as a newborn's fingernail.  
I stood on this same dark driveway  
wrapped in lavender air, leaning into  
the hot waves against the porch railing,  
my longing for you as sweetly sorrowful  
as the long high notes in Chopin's nocturne.

Those early days were yellow and blue  
as the summer sun in the clear hot sky:  
your blue birth skin turning to a jaundice tan,  
the colostrum dripping from my nipple  
over the veins in my engorged breast,  
and you glowing in your sunny  
layette on our new blue sheets.

I caught sight of myself in the mirror,  
sitting cross legged on the bed  
but I had been eclipsed  
and did not recognize my full visage.  
Long gone were the protruding hip bones  
and flat chest of the runner;

here sat a goddess of fertility and abundance,  
the dripping breasts resting on the round belly.  
And I saw enfolding me the shadows  
of my dead mother and grandmother,  
and all the mothers before us,  
and my unborn granddaughters and  
great granddaughters and all the mothers  
after us in the generations to come  
in this world. Remember.

Even huge moments go, and when we go  
out after dinner, the moon is a bright  
white empty plate, though illuminated  
more brilliantly than I remember before.

In "The Lonely Body", Susan Moon writes that "We suffer because we forget that we are all interconnected." (1997, p. 223) She calls birth "the big separation," (p. 223) and notes that one of the best ways to blur the edges is to get really close to another body - a kind of skin-to-skin transmission." (p. 224) My experience of motherhood has been of blurred edges between me and my babies. My practice of attachment parenting has led me to question whether birth need be a separation. The modern Western practice of placing babies in cribs, swings and plastic seats and of artificial feeding may lead to feelings of separation, loss, and despair in both mother and child. The more ancient practice of attachment parenting allows both to experience interconnection, so much so that a nursing toddler refers to her mother's breasts as "mine!"

After my babies were born, they were placed on my chest and nursed right away, and on demand thereafter. During the day, they lived in a baby sling, head to my heart, and at night slept nestled into my body, breast in mouth. My last baby, Grace, was my first to experience child-led weaning, where she gradually moved away from my breast at her own pace. I believe that these counter-cultural practices foster attentive love, joy, compassion and balance as well as a sense of safety and at-homeness in our bodies. Grace is certainly a loving, gentle person who is also confidently able to stand her ground.

Before I had children, though I was a runner, I lived primarily in my mind, and my experiences growing up in an alcoholic family taught me how to disassociate for safety. During the last ten years, with the birth of each baby, I have been born more completely into my body. Motherhood has been a gradually grounding process of embodiment for me, as not only my womb and breasts, but hands, arms, legs, stomach, face, hair and feet are all involved in care. When I sat

down to nurse, baby in arms, feeling the pulling suck on my nipple and the release of milk rushing into my breasts, I was present in my body and also in an altered state of calm, my breathing changed, and I was filled with warmth. The very act of sitting or lying skin to skin as my milk fills my child's stomach is intimate and holy. However, I could not help but look at this particular beautiful face, sucking lips and cheeks, feel the tiny grasping hands and stroke the little warm feet. Especially in caring for my daughter, I have experienced a healing of my own lonely, disconnected infancy. In being present for her, I am also present to the own self crying alone in the crib.

My bodily attending spiritual practice through breastfeeding has led my work in the world. In addition, nursing my babies has led me to see other children and teens as grown up babies who may or may not have benefitted from feeling attached and secure as babies. Those who did not receive it in infancy seems to demand much more presence and attending from other adults as they grow. In schools and in the wider community, I try to provide some as I am able. My approach to teaching through an ethic of care stems in large part from my bodily experience as a breastfeeding mother. Love grows out of intimate knowing and attending.

## Fine Toothed Comb

September in the last long low light  
before the sun skirts behind the cedars,  
we drag a patio chair on the grass,  
and I focus on their lovely heads  
with a fine toothed comb, engrossed. I know  
the number of hairs on each head, almost,  
after weeks of daily scrutinizing.

Sometimes, in the horizontal light, I  
am aware of a tiny egg on a  
suspended blond hair, and like a mother  
monkey, I pull it off and drop it  
on the cold grass, aborted.

I know the double crowns, forehead swirls, the  
shape of each skull which once seared me open.  
When they were babies and toddlers, I would  
sit with them asleep in my lap for hours,  
mindfully tracing the contours of their  
small ears with my baby finger, watching  
their jaws work the milk from my breasts. I smoothed  
silky hair with one hand while the other  
arm went to sleep under a heavy head.

I miss those days. In this first intense  
encounter with lice, in these hours of  
contemplation, I know them almost as  
well as God.

Nursing as contemplation "...is an exercise in ecstasy; it is an insistent gazing that bucks you from yourself into the world which then returns you to yourself healed..." (Lilburn, 1999, p. 33) Besides nurturing my child, bodily attending helps to heal me and enables me to bring a more nurturing presence into my meetings with all beings so that no one need feel like a separate, lost 'I'. When I walk through the classroom door, I bring my years of attentive love experience and offer my receptivity to my students, hoping for encounters. I want my students, like my children, to expect the good. It takes some days, some weeks, some months to trust this expectation of good. As much as I am able, I want to provide through my classroom and school presence what I provide my children as a mother. Noddings explains that "the expectation of good is exactly what a good home preserves. Life that is, at the outset, 'enclosed, protected, all warm' is the way life should be, and such a beginning helps to introduce and maintain the sacred in all human life." (2002b, p. 79) I cannot hold my students in a sling physically, but metaphorically I can bring lamps, plants, candles and pillows to add elements of warmth and

softness, bring occasional food, put up posters and student work on the walls, cluster desks in small groups to encourage relating between students, and establish an atmosphere of trust in classroom interactions. Most students will begin to care for one another in such an environment.

I try to have encounters with students through conversations and conferences, or a touch on the shoulder. How can I further help uncover the caring environment in the school? Noddings writes:

Although teachers constantly tell students that the purpose of teaching is student learning, students find it hard to believe this. More obvious purposes are to secure compliance, rank order students, punish non-compliance, penalize failure....and encourage competition. (2002b, p. 201)

In my classroom, I minimize the importance of marks; I do not post them, and most of my feedback is formative. When summative evaluation is required, we read samples of student writing, praise its good qualities, and use these to form criteria. We then spend a day cooperatively revising and editing.

During class time, I structure time for quiet spaces and study groups. During the first few minutes, I invite students to empty their hands and pay attention to their breathing, but do not force compliance. Similarly, during silent reading, if a few students want to write or knit, I offer latitude. My list could go on; the important element is that I offer them a gift of time and invite participation. I want learning to be unforced and assignments completed with care for the task, not a competitive ranking. I listen for what the class as a whole as well as each individual needs and try to make my teaching and my presence fulfill that need. I bring my feelings, heart and life to my students as well as books and writing tips, moreso than before



children. Most importantly, I do this because I care about them, not because I feel I should. As I go to a crying child in the night naturally without asking why, I respond to the sadness and needs in my students with an open heart. One remedy for the lack of focus on the reproductive processes of society could be metaphorical glasses to see how a mother responds to her baby and valuing this response as essential to understanding how to relate to children. Especially in institutional school settings which have treated children as blank slates, a reclaiming of a mother's engrossment is the starting place for building Martin's 'schoolhome' filled with care, concern and connection.

### Mr. Penaluna: A Note on Fathers

I am writing from the stance of a mother who is a teacher; yet, as a student, I had very few mother-teachers. More often, if a teacher was a parent, he was a father. Caring fathers are different but no less important than caring mothers, in the home or school. When I was sixteen and moved away from home to attend an independent school, I 'boarded out' with my English teacher and his family. He effectively became a father to me as well as a teacher, though the lines were not clearly delineated. At home at night he would tutor me in how to write essays, and at school, though he tried not to show undue favour to me, he would offer me a warm look or smile. He also provided me with a model of a healthy father at a time when my own father did not. It is because of Mr. Penaluna's caring for me and his subject matter that I decided to major in English and become an English teacher.

This situation was fairly unique, as most students do not eat breakfast and supper with the same teacher every day, and become part of the family, yet I have

had other male teachers who bring that particular masculine caring, which could be called fathering, to their teaching. Indeed, in this time when many children live in a home without fathers, they are especially drawn to father figures at school. While mothering has been more absent from schools than fathering, more of both is needed.

## Conclusion

Parker Palmer writes: "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves." (1998, p. 11) One way I have found to acquire this capacity for connectedness is to breastfeed a baby and young child, though there are others available to both genders. Breastfeeding is an embodied experience of connectedness and encounter. It is a living that adjusts thoughts about care and fosters growth. The practice of breastfeeding can open the heart to wonder; once open, all life looks new. Beyond maternal thinking, mothering through breastfeeding is a way of living which is embodied in an ethic of care and which may travel beyond the breastfeeding relationship into the classroom and indeed into all relations.

Jane Roland Martin urges, "never forget the domestic vacuum in children's lives today." (1992, p. 210) Today a minority of students have been at home in their early years, or have been breastfed for more than a few months. Few teachers

have the experience of staying home with their babies for more than six months. School is therefore part of the institutionalization of life which has gone hand in hand with modernity. Some feminist literature has pointed toward this erosion of the domestic, reproductive community. Mothers with at-home experience, whether or not they are qualified teachers, could be invited to share their knowledge with those living in a domestic vacuum so that a more balanced education could be attained. Furthermore, these mothers could be honoured as crucial models of community building, a community of communion, of attentiveness and encounter. These, the ethic of care writers suggest, are more appropriate bases for educating and relating to our next generation. My mother was part of the generation working hard to make gains for women's rights, the same generation of the feminist writers in this chapter. She feared that the gains she had achieved, I would lose in my decision to forgo my teaching career for my young family, as in fact she had done. I join the writers of maternal pedagogy in their argument that my experience as a stay at home mother is an essential one in educating the children of the domestic vacuum.

## Chapter Three: Filling the Gap

### Introduction

What is established in the breastfeeding relationship constitutes the foundation for the development of all human social relationships, and the communications the infant receives through the warmth of the mother's skin constitutes the first of the socializing experiences of life. (Montague in LLL, 2004, p. 8)

My exploration of maternal pedagogy and feminist literature has enabled me to see an imbalance which is at the heart of the erosion of community: the neglect of reproductive processes and embodied practices. This neglectful imbalance reaches all aspects of community, including education, and leads me to talk about the very particular embodied practice of breastfeeding. My years of breastfeeding have shaped who I am as an embodied teacher more than anything else. Surprisingly, the feminist literature, even in its detailed exploration of the practices of motherhood, is silent on this issue. I will address this gap in maternal thinking in the first part of this chapter. When I encountered the ethic of care literature, I expected to find the claim that breastfeeding is an excellent example of the principles; I could demonstrate every one with my own nursing experience. The

feminists' critique of disembodiment, lack of community, discontinuity, and fragmentation, all speak concretely to my breastfeeding experience. I found with dismay that breastfeeding is not addressed in this literature. Later, I will present my discussion with practitioners of breastfeeding: mothers who have come to the ethic of care through breastfeeding. I make use of the example of breastfeeding mothers to show a gap in the maternal literature. Breastfeeding is where I have learned the meaning of embodiment, self-other unity and physical bonding, proper attachment, immediacy of care that only comes from embodied practice and teaching as modeling. Also, through my participation in La Leche League, I learned the importance of community in sustaining any worthwhile practices that an individual undertakes. I offer the practice of mothering through breastfeeding to illustrate a mothering experience which could help fill a gap in the maternal literature.

### *Lactation Blessing*

So great a sweetness flows into the breast  
We must laugh and we must sing,  
We are blest by everything,  
Everything we look upon is blest.

'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', W.B. YEATS

Have you ever tasted that thin blue sweetness  
from your own breast - when your baby  
pops off to smile at you -  
and gets a stream of milk in the eye  
and you catch it in the cup of your hand?  
O it is enough to mourn your own weaning.  
Were you ever so tenderly caressed?  
Marvel at the wonder of your own luxurious body -  
Let your nose fall to the fontanelle and rest:  
So great a sweetness flows into the breast.

A baby makes you forget your remorse,  
reminding you how to laugh  
and that you are connected to a whole.  
We must share our sleep -  
we must share our food -  
we must walk the halls and bring  
lullabies from the back cupboards of our hearts.  
The melting pools of our faces reflect theirs.  
Our breasts flooding like a wellspring;  
We must laugh and we must sing,

for isn't life miraculous, after all?  
asks the collapsable heart, from its hole.  
For here, at the breast, is a blessing -  
sucking contentedly, head  
on the ladder base of your arm;  
and then you pull back the sling  
on the day and we see that blessings are  
dripping from the dew-covered raspberry,  
the sun-warmed peach, the hummingbird's wing;  
We are blest by everything.

Here is heaven in a dreaming face.  
Embodied trust -  
the world is responsive.  
What? - And then we see our respons-  
ibility. And all the thread needed  
to mend a culture so over processed -  
And so we begin to see every face  
as someone's beloved baby; no man's enemy.  
And learn to look with the eye of forgiveness;  
Everything we look upon is blest.

## The Big Gap in Maternal Thinking

In chapter two, I have written as though the maternal pedagogy literature could be full of references to breastfeeding. However, I have found a large gap in the literature on mothering and caring: the experience of the breastfeeding mother, my experience, is missing. This important gap must be addressed because the day to day practice of a breastfeeding mother can be so fundamentally different from that of a bottle feeding parent, especially because a breastfeeding mother is physically connected to her baby through her milk production. (Many studies including Newman and Pitman, 2000, Lawrence and Lawrence, 1999) A breastfeeding mother is more likely watch the needs of her baby than the clock. In this post-industrialized society we live in, the experience of an at-home breastfeeding mother is invisible and discounted. It is not considered an experience applicable to classroom teaching, and certainly does not contribute to union seniority. My mothering through breastfeeding experience has taught me a way of thinking particular to lactating mothers and with much in common with Nel Noddings' ethic of care. Mothering is an embodied experience. I believe that my 'maternal lactating thinking' and feeling has become a practice of increased receptive presence which I can now bring to classroom encounters with my students. Mothering through breastfeeding has transformed my teaching into a practice more steeped in care. The particular engrossment, compassion and embodiment learned through breastfeeding, the internal goods of the practice, are another part of the 'missing conversation' which merits more attention. Breastfeeding could be at the heart of an ethic of care, and it is disheartening to me that it is missing.

For me, and many breastfeeding mothers, conception, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding are part of one continuum. I wanted to provide my children with the optimal nutrition which was tied into one with emotional response in breastfeeding. (LLL, 2004) I wanted to provide this care not just for months, but for the years that met their needs. With this intention, it seemed there was not much choice of who would stay home and who would work for money in the outside world, though I am sure compromises may be reached with juggling in some small families. The mothering I am focussing on is the care from our bodies: in this case, mothering through breastfeeding. According to MacIntyre's definition of a practice, (1984, p. 187) latching on is not a practice, but mothering through breastfeeding is. This is my experience which I find missing from the literature. With the changes in our society during my lifetime, it is more rare to find mothers with extended breastfeeding experience, rarer still to find teachers with this experience in their past. Formerly, women were forced to choose between the classroom and the home; when my mother's pregnancy with me started to show, her teaching job was over. More recently, mothers taught while acting in men's traditional roles and opting for artificial feeding and day care for their babies. Sequencing of care of young children and teaching in the larger society is harder to do in the current economy. Perhaps this is why the leading writers on maternal pedagogy do not mention breastfeeding.

In addition to addressing the gap in the maternal literature, I explore the experiences of some teachers who are, like me, La Leche League (LLL) Canada leaders. (Message posted to [cdnleaders@yahoo.com](mailto:cdnleaders@yahoo.com), January, 2004) LLL is an international breastfeeding support organization. Leaders generally measure the duration of their breastfeeding relationship with each child in years, rather than



weeks or months, and share the belief that in the early years, the mother's presence is as needed as food by the child. These few women with a foot in each world of breastfeeding and school, will help to illuminate the importance of the physical relationship of breastfeeding in understanding a perspective on caring not yet articulated.

Am I powerless in the education system as one who has spent years breastfeeding, and caring for the sick and dying? Or, conversely, is it by reclaiming my decade as a breastfeeding mother that I gain authority as a teacher? Parker Palmer explains the origins of authority:

authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity, remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from the depths of my own truth - and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind. (1998, p. 33)

The body has not been acknowledged in the educational setting, perhaps because of what bell hooks has noted: "the person with the most power has the privilege of denying their body." (1994, p. 137) However, as powerless as I am, I need to teach from my experience so that my students can also feel empowered to listen to their own inner truths. I am not an authoritarian teacher and early in my career I was criticized for not being more so. I hid pregnancies and did not discuss my nursing relationships and how I was making milk, and even feeling the milk ejection reflex, while I taught. After three children, my experience of devotion, of engrossment and attentive love of each particular other, transformed my classroom into a more interactive and living learning space. I have been able to carry the internal goods of mothering through breastfeeding into the classroom and other situations. I will not be breastfeeding my high school students, but my experience helps me conceptualize myself as a responder to needs and a provider of

nourishment. I will include the discussion of breastfeeding experience to validate bell hooks' point about the neglected theme of embodiment in education and to concretize this theme by making it real.

### *Remember*

Remember the smell of the top of your new baby's head,  
the delicate curves of tiny ears.

Remember the rooting mouth,  
the pull of the strong suck  
releasing a rush of milk and love.

Remember the quick uneven breaths,  
taught to be even by yours,  
the smooth new skin on your skin.

Remember the holy feeling in the room,  
how rooted you felt to the earth  
and the generations.

Remember how holding your dreaming baby  
heals your lonely heart,  
how in holding your crying baby,  
you are somehow held.

Remember your delight in the wholeness of this child.

Remember that secret release to the edge of awe.

## Critique of Ruddick, Martin and Noddings

Nel Noddings, Jane Roland Martin and Sara Ruddick are the leading feminist writers on the ethics of care and maternal pedagogy. They are beacons of light in my scholarship. Nevertheless, in their depiction of the model of home and mothers' practices as the basis of an ethic of care, my experience, and that of many other breastfeeding mothers, of embodied mothering practices are left out. I suspect this omission is due to a hesitation to offend bottle-feeding mothers, or perhaps also due to a lack of experience in this field, or to an oversight of it as an embodied transformative practice.

Sara Ruddick considers mothering as work that can be done by either gender and not connected to giving birth. She has a sense of the importance of presence, but not of the non logical bodily attending of the experience of breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding mothers often feel their milk let down when their child wakens, no matter how far away, and wake at the same time, before the baby cries, even in another room. Ruddick begins by grounding her theory in the philosophy of practice (1989, p. 13) and virtue, concepts discussed by Alasdair McIntyre, though she does not mention his name. I certainly see changing, washing and folding diapers, shopping, cooking, feeding and washing up as practices but I see mothering as much more. She defines the practice of mothering in the three areas oft quoted by Noddings:

These three demands - for preservation, growth, and social acceptability - constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservation, nurturance and training. (p. 17)

I see breastfeeding optimally meeting all these “demands” (particularly the first two) for the first few years, at least, and setting the stage for their continual fulfillment. Of course, only a woman can breastfeed and so during the early years I disagree with Ruddick that mothering is not gender specific. To provide the best nutrition and disease prevention, breastmilk is the only choice, and the skin to skin physical closeness of breastfeeding is the most nurturing. Furthermore, it is the best precursor for learning compassion for others:

With the bottle instead of the breast, and with toys rather than its mother’s caressing hands, the infant is encouraged to manipulate things rather than to ‘handle’ people...such training is useful for the mastering and relating to machines, rather than than for interrelating with others. (Montague, 1978, p. 69)

My main criticism of Ruddick is her ambivalence about the physical imperative aspect of mothering. She writes much about the female body, and first focuses on the unity of mother and child:

The growing fetus, increasingly visible in the woman’s swelling body, an infant emerging from the vagina, a suckling infant feeding off a breast, the mother feeding with and of her body express in dramatic form a fusion of self and other. (1989, p. 191)

Contradicting herself two pages later, however, she reiterates, “I have distinguished birth from mothering and then have described maternal work as potentially genderless.” (p. 193) I thought that way until I became a mother and felt my babies’ need for my breast and my physical presence. To say suddenly, ‘OK, Daddy is going to be mommy now’ would elicit tears from a baby and laughter from a toddler: “Daddy doesn’t have milk! You are my nursy mama!” Only after weaning age, or in my case with three children, a decade or more, could I decide to be a wage earner outside the home. Of course, my husband has done the work of attentive love all along as well, shopping and cooking for, bathing and reading to

the children. Several pages later Ruddick continues: "A birthing woman's labour comes to nothing without someone to adopt, protect, and nourish her infant. Even when the birthgiver and adoptive mother are the same, mothering represents a new commitment." (p. 211) Peta Bowden calls this view of Ruddick 'individualism', which is "at odds from many mothers' experiences." (Bowden, 1997, p. 31) She writes, "mothers commonly describe the bewildering experience of their relationships to their children in terms that confound classic individualism...of not knowing whether one is mother or child." (p. 22) When two are one, there is no question of whether I will care for my child. Bowden links this problem in Ruddick's thinking to her oversight of mothers' bodies:

One strand of Ruddick's 'individualism' is evident as she distances herself from the notion that the unique biological base of many mothering relations may give rise to ethical possibilities that belie more conventional claims associated with ontologies of individual identity and autonomy. (Bowden, p. 40)

For Ruddick, according to Bowden, mothers are individual logical decision makers not connected to a biological imperative.

Jane Roland Martin seems to have even more ambivalence toward breastfeeding. In *Reclaiming a Conversation* she writes that:

Nursing cannot be counted on to produce enduring maternal affection in those who do not want a child in the first place, those who do want them but do not want to be bothered with them, or in those who are experiencing great economic, social or psychological stress. (1985, p. 95)

Of course, nursing will not create maternal affection in all mothers, and we know that nursing rates are lower at the lower end of the economic scale. However, sometimes learning to recognize and respond to baby's cues for nursing can

increase a mother's attentiveness, which is the basis of love. Martin continues, "That it can be counted on in the case of women who are educated to be Emiles is also doubtful." (p. 95) Did not I receive a liberal and individualist education like Emile? Breastfeeding transformed the individualist world view I had learned at university into one of engrossment in another, and taught me a new depth of love. Many educated mothers I have spoken with attest that the love they feel for their babies and children is stronger than any they have felt before.

Martin counters Wollstonecraft's suggestion that "the nurturant and caring aspects of mothering, although not instinctual, emerge automatically in females who nurse their young..." with Chodorow's argument "not that women learn to mother by mothering,... but that they learn to mother by being mothered by women." (1985, p. 95) Not only I, but many other breastfeeding mothers believe that breastfeeding is a learned cultural response, not a reflex, and that is why support groups such as La Leche League are important. 'Mothering the mother' is crucial in establishing a successful breastfeeding relationship, as are early parental role models. During the twentieth century in North America, in many families there was one generation of women who were breastfed but inducted into a new culture of non-breastfeeding. This change occurred alongside industrialization in the modern period. In my family, two generations of mothers were not breastfed: the second and third generation immigrants.

Not a lactating body by itself, but repeated intimate encounters made necessary by milk production, leads to a maternal-lactating thinking very different from a mothering practice with little physical contact. The physical touching of skin to skin in breastfeeding, of part of my body in hers, may be the basis of this maternal-lactating thinking I am trying to articulate. Here is how one long time La

Leche League Leader, Sue Lucy, who was also a teacher before becoming a mother, explains it:

This is pretty obvious -- but breastfeeding means you have to be with your child. Of course there are mothers who express and leave milk for someone else to give, but for a woman who is mothering through breastfeeding she is with her child, touching her child, bonding with her child, getting to know him/her better than if she could leave him with someone else. A bottle feeding mother could make the effort to do the same thing, but breastfeeding makes it easier to maintain this parenting style.

All of the closeness, touching, etc. makes me realize the importance of this -- that touching, hugging my teenagers is still important. That my mom needs hugging, other adults need this...

(S. Lucy, personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Lactation makes physical presence, or at least proximity, imperative.

Another experienced breastfeeding mother, Myla Kabat-Zinn, describes the feeling after a nursing: "There is a kind of immersion, a soaking in bliss, that happens in those moments after a baby has been fed. At times, a mutual gaze arises, a wonderfully peaceful feeling and sense of palpable connectedness and devotion..." (Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn, 1997, p. 169) She also notes that this sinking into the present moment can be deeply meditative. (p. 174) It is interesting that Kabat-Zinn uses the word devotion to describe her mothering through breastfeeding, for Milton Mayeroff writes that "devotion is essential to caring, just as it is an integral part of friendship." (1971, p. 10) The Webster's' Dictionary defines devotion as "love given with the whole heart and will." This is the love of lovers, and of a mother's love for her baby. In devotion, there is often no thinking necessary. You call and I am there.

Even Noddings does not mention breastfeeding at all, though her accounts of attentive love come close. Here is her early description of tending to a baby in

the night:

When my infant cries in the night, I not only feel that I must do something but I want to do something. Because I love this child, because I am bonded to him, I want to remove his pain as I would want to remove my own. (1984, p. 82)

This response is preferable to the 'let them cry it out' response or other sleep training methods. However, my experience of responding to my babies in the night was different: sharing my bed with my baby asleep on my arm with my nipple in his or her mouth. Our sleep cycles were synchronized so that I would usually be in a lighter sleep cycle when they roused to nurse hungrily, and could roll them over to the other side for more without fully waking. They rarely cried. I never experienced 'want' or 'must' because I was not awake enough. My body attended.

In her more recent work, Noddings writes "that the constant response, 'I am here', is the foundation of a relation of care and trust." (2002b, p. 129) This belief is the basis of my parenting practice and the reason I stayed home with my children in their early years. I am concerned about how my babies are feeling, not about how I look to others: "One who attends to the bodily needs of another concentrates on the response that is elicited by feeding, cleaning and comforting, not on her own goodness." (2002b, p. 131) This is as close as Noddings gets to the physical imperative of feeding. When I asked her if she thought a different kind of care develops from physical contact, as in a breastfeeding relationship, she answered, "I'm sure the practice sometimes makes a difference, but close holding while bottle feeding may also help to establish the mother (or father)-child relation." (N. Noddings, personal communication, January 21, 2004) So the physical closeness of breastfeeding is the paradigm of the best and most intimate caring relationship



between mother and baby, though one Noddings believes may be replicated through bottle feeding and close holding.

## Oneness

Virginia Held has written about the difference in ethics between general others and particular “flesh and blood other human beings for whom we have actual feelings and with whom we have real ties,” (1993, p.58) which are more typical of women’s experience. As a mother, I learned to love this particular baby, then this one, then this one. My particular love for each one grew out of our physical attachment and the hazy boundaries between us. A baby cue would cause my milk to flow, even across the room. I was no longer in my own separate body. When my baby cried, I did too. Bowden writes “...the extension of the mother’s boundaries to accommodate the baby’s dependency overlaps and conjoins with the mother’s engrossment in the baby and her pain at the separation.” (1997, p. 51) Madeleine Grumet has also written that “conception, pregnancy and lactation constitute an initial relation of women to their children that is symbiotic...” (1988, p. 10) Symbiosis and extension of boundaries is at the heart of the ‘mothering through breastfeeding’ practice of responsive parenting that may develop out of the breastfeeding relationship. Because I was one with my nursing babies, I did not want to leave them. To do so would have caused me physical and emotional pain. Bowden continues: “Somewhere in the experiences of pregnancy, birth, lactation, and the continuous, intimate responsibility of listening, adjusting and attending, the possibility for the fusion of attachment and responsibility is produced.” (p. 51) I know this is where I learned to listen and attend, though it is not the only path to empathy. Sue Lucy says:

Because I breastfed my children, I got to know them very well and I treat them with a lot of respect. I don't see this in all breastfeeding mothers or even in all LLL mothers, but more so amongst them. I guess it is partly a parenting choice but I do think in my case the respect increased because of breastfeeding and my LLL-style parenting. Because I treat my own children with a lot of respect, I treat other children that way too. I empathize with my own children and with others more now too. If I were to teach again, I'm sure I would respect and empathize more with my students than I did before I breastfed and parented LLL-style.

(S. Lucy, personal communication, January 17, 2004)

The feminist writers describe engrossment and particularity as feelings experienced by mothers; however, for me, the more particular practice of mothering through breastfeeding is an ideal case study for examining all these writers talk about. Breastfeeding is an opportunity to learn all the maternal thinking and embodiment that feminists articulate.

## Practitioners of Breastfeeding

I know that if I went back to teaching, I wouldn't yell. I'd try to respect each child, look each one in the eyes and try to empathize.

(S. Lucy, personal communication, January 17, 2004)

There may not be very many teachers in North America with extended breastfeeding experience, and that may explain why there is nothing written on it in the field. As a breastfeeding mother, I have felt extraordinarily powerful in watching my healthy children thrive and grow happily. Whether their achievements are on the field or in the classroom, I know that part of their success is due to their extended breastfeeding. As a teacher with breastfeeding experience, I have seen important developments in my students as a result of the way I have

been able to relate to them. Shelagh Peterson is a high school teacher with twenty-seven years experience and three children, the last two of whom she breastfed. She has been a La Leche League leader for eighteen years. She writes:

I can unequivocally say that being a breastfeeding mother has influenced the way I relate to other people. I know that breastfeeding makes one so "in tune" with one's own children. My youngest two (who both nursed past 3) say that I can often sense when things are not going well with them. I tend to be fairly "motherly" with the students, often understanding their teenage behaviour when some of my colleagues do not. People may say this is because I have a 19 year old, but I put it down to breastfeeding. I know that I did not bond with my first in the same way that I did with my second and third. I became more nurturing and not as self centred. People were more important than things and I learned to relax. "This too will pass" became my mantra through the twos and threes, and later through their teenage years. Because I learned to listen to their cues, I learned that every child is unique. I have brought that with me to the classroom - each child is unique and is someone's son or daughter. While I intellectually knew that before I had children, I emotionally could relate to that after I had them.

(S. Peterson, personal communication, January 20, 2004)

In responding to a baby's cues, in being so tuned into them as a mother must when her baby is intimately connected to her body in a breastfeeding relationship, a mother learns to watch for the subtly expressed needs of the cherished other, and this is a practice she carries with her beyond her breastfeeding years. Noddings writes that "an ethic of care also seeks, more broadly, to identify and respond to needs." (2002a, p. 53) Before I had children, I answered yes on a professional development form to the question 'Should teachers love students as a parent loves a child?' but did not know what that felt like until after I had children. Would I have learned this love if I had not breastfed for so many years? What unique perspective about caring can we learn through breastfeeding? Breastfeeding is a physical aspect of mothering with all the sucking and physical connection, while teaching is conceptualized as a more intellectual practice, with an emphasis on academic

knowledge, especially in high school. However, there is an embodied aspect to teaching as well and breastfeeding is the strongest case I can think of for this relationship. Shelagh explains:

Breastfeeding is a relationship, a literal sharing between mother and child. Teaching is also a relationship, an intellectual sharing between teacher and student. Especially at the senior high school level, there is less "teacher" and more "mentor". Breastfeeding strengthened my beliefs in the teaching relationship.  
(S. Peterson, personal communication, January 20, 2004)

Teaching in the paradigm of caring is an embodied practice. I am a body in the room of bodies, shaking hands, touching shoulders. I am a teacher and mentor sharing ideas, but I can also conceptualize myself as a lactating mother, even in the high school classroom, entering into caring and nurturing teaching and mentoring relationships with students.

### *The Weaning Dance*

A precious time is gone, you want to wean;  
I remember the fire hot day we brought you home.  
The sweet milk years embrace us like a dream.

One holy night in bed as through a screen,  
I heard your laughing taunt from chromosomes.  
A precious time is gone, you want to wean.

I bloomed with you, increasing like a queen,  
then shaman-like, squeezed you through a ring of bone.  
The sweet milk years embrace us like a dream.

You were a glowing peach those newborn days between  
the sheets, my tiny breasts milk-hard like glory domes;  
a precious time is gone, you want to wean.

Through dripping seasons you sucked; I did not intervene.  
Now you push me on my way to wizened crone;  
the sweet milk years embrace us like a dream.

Is there a way to preserve the sacred time that's been?  
Can I keep you in my arms through a tight poem?  
That precious time is gone, you want to wean.  
The sweet milk years embrace us like a dream.

### A Breastfeeding Community

For the past three years, I have been a community leader advocating for breastfeeding. Is our society an "iron cage"? (Taylor, 1999) Some students experience school as inflexible and limiting. I have often wondered if the only way to bring my whole self to the classroom is to walk away and start again, as the school system can often feel as untransformable as an 'iron cage'. La Leche League showed me another way to work for change by opening the door to my seemingly isolated mothering philosophy and inviting me into a universal community of

mothers. LLL says no to the iron cage. It says that one mother to one mother at a time, we can learn a more loving way of life. This collective community of mothers is open and accepting, yet is not morally relative. It articulates a particular philosophy of mothering through breastfeeding which attempts to fill a gap left in modern society around the human need for attachment.

La Leche League listens to the moral voice within a new mother's heart and always holds the needs of the baby, the most vulnerable member of society, first. The family and community needs are reordered around the needs of the baby. In this sense, it is the opposite of anthropocentric. For instance, at LLL conferences, audience members are asked to wave their hands instead of clapping in case one of the babies in the room is asleep and would be startled. Its authenticity is based on thousands of years of mothers' experiences and is linked to the greater good of society, as LLL is the largest women's health organization in the world. (LLLL, 2004) It values the unique and sacred story of each individual mother yet sees the story as part of the overall picture of universal motherhood.

In generations past, girls grew up seeing many mothers breastfeed and care for their babies. In modern society, this is no longer necessarily the case. A new mother may find herself with little experience, but surrounded by books by medical experts. La Leche League returns the 'horizons of significance' to motherhood by offering public meetings where mothers can see other mothers nursing their babies and discussing breastfeeding and mothering issues. The leader, herself an experienced breastfeeding mother, with her LLL published resources, is there to answer questions and stimulate discussion. Meetings work on the recognition that people are naturally dialogical. It counters atomism by fostering a sense of belonging. Here a mother can see babies in slings and learn about proper

positioning for breastfeeding, as well as the benefits of breastfeeding for herself, her baby, and the whole of society, as she would have learned in her home in times when these horizons were more publicly visible. Taylor writes, "If authenticity is being true to ourselves, is recovering our own 'sentiment de l'existence,' then perhaps we can only achieve it integrally if we recognize that this sentiment connects us to a wider whole." (1999, p.91) Since the birth of my first baby, I have fought to be true to my mothering instincts and the call within my heart against the tide of individualism and instrumental reason. Yet, it was not until finding the sisterhood of many other women who hold the same principles and becoming a leader that I have felt I achieved an integral recognition. I am part of a vibrant community. When I was a new mother, I felt dominated by the medical system and logical experts; now I am a community leader. The challenge is to find a way to connect my 'sentiment de l'existence' as a breastfeeding mother into the still very patriarchal and instrumental school system, by which I refer to a system with an emphasis on the qualities of efficiency, domination and productivity.

## Web Relations

Though the structure of the school system in which I work may be limiting, I hope it need not impede my vision of caring, which is based on a more responsive model. Carol Gilligan sees the hierarchical structure (present in the school system) as inherently male, and the web structure, which may be another way of referring to the interconnections or caring relationships, as inherently female, and the two threatening to each other:

The images of hierarchy and web, drawn from the texts of men's and women's fantasies and thoughts, convey different ways of structuring relationships and are associated with different views of morality and self...As the top of the hierarchy becomes the edge of the web and as the centre of a network of connection becomes the middle of a hierarchical progression, each image marks as dangerous the place which the other defines as safe. (1982, p. 62)

When La Leche League began with the meeting of seven busy young mothers, talents were pooled and responsibilities split. All decisions were made by consensus. As the organization grew and attracted attention, men moved in to offer advice on how to run it more effectively and professionally. It should be set up as a hierarchy, one person should make all executive decisions without having to consult with other founders, they said. As a result, relationships were injured and finances suffered, as no one person knew all the answers. LLL is currently undergoing a 'Chaordic Process' in which members are examining the internal structure of the organization. How much does the structure reflect LLL's web like origins of seven mothers working together, and how much has it taken on the typical hierarchy of a management structure, based on the input of advisors over the years? With the encouragement of the founders, LLL is endeavouring to return to its web like roots by empowering leaders to make more decisions for themselves.

Though it is a truism that the best teachers are autonomous in their own classrooms, schools are set up in a hierarchical manner, and the test-driven un-autonomous content from the top is increasing. Would members of the hierarchical establishment in schools view as dangerous teachers and students who see life as a web of interconnections? Also, more democratic classrooms where students make decisions, even about evaluation criteria, take time for everyone to become acclimatized. However, students thrive in this sort of environment and line up to be in my classes, when the structure allows me to have



them. Reconceptualizing school as responsive has grown out of my bodily experiences as a mother. Yet, I think it is important to realize that the web is not necessarily a female only perception. Sue Lucy says:

You asked:

Have you met other people who have learned a similar approach through a different path?

The first answer I have is 'fathers'. My husband was talking with me about this last night. I commented that it is probably because of breastfeeding that our children spent so long in our bed and because of the co-sleeping we're closer to them. Then Bob said, "Whose idea was it to bring Shannon into bed with us." Okay, I admit, the day I brought our firstborn (Shannon) home 16 years ago (!) it was Bob who suggested she sleep in our bed, and I said I was nervous with her there and insisted after that first night that she sleep in a little box right beside our bed. Sadness -- guilt -- wish I'd kept her in bed with us all the time those first weeks. Oh well. She did end up in our bed and stayed for years and has turned out great.

I digressed a little -- so, Bob was a new parent, not someone breastfeeding and yet it was he who suggested the co-sleeping. He has always been a thoughtful, considerate person -- it must just be more in some people's minds than others to be this way.

I do think that because I was breastfeeding, he 'caught' from me and our healthy nursing children more self-confidence in the way we were raising our children. The things that were happening to me -- the way I was treating our children because I nursed them -- not wanting to leave them with other people, respect for them, wanting them to stay in our bed until they were ready to leave must have rubbed off on him too. He already leaned in that direction, but surely he moved further that way because of the nursing. Like me, he ... felt a pride in our healthy, nursing children. And then all of this affects the way he views the way others parent and the way he treats other parents and children.

(S. Lucy, personal communication, January 17, 2004)

Perhaps this perception comes more easily to anyone who is in direct contact with the natural processes of life. This is true of many women living through the natural cycles of birth and breastfeeding, and their partners, and it is true of many people who live on and in direct communion with the land. I believe

that living with awareness through the natural cycle of puberty presents another opportunity to see life as a web. When I meet a teenage environmentalist, s/he is more passionate than many older counterparts. For suddenly to see the web clearly, at any age, is to see the crying need for justice and care in the world; and to see this need is to become a moral agent. Now I am exploring the kind of high school where web relations and true authority flourish: it may have to be one without the traditional power structures of those who may deny their bodies, one with a more holistic view of the human being and community. I will look one alternative model in the final chapter.

### *Beach Forts*

Low, between two beach logs, is the best place to make a home: out of the wind, small round stones, a floor; sunlight slanting on my face through the driftwood with its kelp beards; I found sweet peas, yarrow and bark to cook on my charcoal-marked two-by-six stove, and a row of teacups hanging on nails (hammered by me) with a rock into walls. Do I know how to find that sense of sanctuary still? When my lap was the ground, and my full heavy breasts, the solid walls, and empty cups of hunger slept, waiting for the pull and suck of sweet milk's fulfillment - that came close. What now? All day the empty house frame.

## Conclusion

When I attended my first La Leche League conference, I felt that I had found my community: a group of like minded people who shared my daily bodily practice and breastfeeding and conviction about its importance. Significantly, many of these mothers home school because they have found the education system so out of synch with their experience of meeting the needs of the child first and being attentive to each one. Shortly afterward, I met my thesis supervisor to be, Heesoon Bai, who shared my experiences of extended breastfeeding and homeschooling. She introduced me to the feminist writers of the ethic of care where, again, I felt I had found community. Here were women writing about home, and transforming school with home as the model. Their ideas about attentive love, engrossment, and connection spoke to me of my experience of breastfeeding. I was surprised to find that they did not have breastfeeding in mind when they were writing, and did not even think breastfeeding was central to the experience of attentive mothering. Though they inspire and hearten me, I need to point out that their oversight of breastfeeding is a major gap in their work. When they leave out breastfeeding, they leave out my experience of engrossed embodied care. Beyond pointing out the gaps in maternal pedagogy, I have spoken with teachers who have extended breastfeeding experience in order to begin to fill this hole. The experience of breastfeeding, particularly over years, that intimate bodily relationship of fused 'others', may produce a changed perspective on caring relations. This outlook may transfer into a more caring and responsive teacher - student relationship. What I am calling 'maternal lactating thinking' is a particular relational thinking which is important to include in the field of maternal pedagogy and caring literature. In fact,

this embodied 'mothering through breastfeeding' knowing could be at the informative heart of the ethics of care. Perhaps the leading feminist writers in this field are from the generation which was breastfed but did not breastfeed, or not for long. Their work is foundational, but incomplete. Now it is time for a generation which has experienced a restored breastfeeding relation to add to the body of work, filling out the ethics of care oeuvre with a more complete, embodied experience of mothering. An authored embodiment is missing from education and will be rebalanced when mothers, and fathers, are able to stand ground with their whole experience of care transferred to their student. This chapter, grown from my graduate work while I was a breastfeeding mother, is a first step in this work of reclamation. Authorities in the education system, those with the power to deny their bodies, and lacking the experience to judge the internal goods of mothering through breastfeeding, still consider my contributions as a breastfeeding mother negligible. Breastfeeding, rather than being seen as a waste of time in a professional career, could rather be seen as a fundamental learning experience in an ethic of care which could help the healing of schools and society.

## Chapter Four: Sensory, Embodied Teaching

### Introduction

Progressive, holistic education, “engaged pedagogy,” is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. (hooks, 1994, p. 15)

I have been writing from my point of view as a mother, pointing out a gap in feminist maternal literature. Breastfeeding as bodily experience is one way to experience the interconnection of community, but there are others. Caring is multifaceted; there is no one way to care. As Parker Palmer explains that we ‘teach who we are’, we also care who we are. Becoming a caring practitioner is more than following codified guidelines; rather, it emerges from our lived experiences. What we do as a caring educator depends on who we are. During my decade of breastfeeding, I was aware of myself as a mammal sharing infant feeding practices with other mammals. I worried that my puppy’s mother had weaned him too soon and thought a lot about what fish and birds were not experiencing. Although I was engrossed in my own infant, I was actually more aware of the non-human world

than I had been before; I was less anthropocentric. I thought about how my breastfeeding impacted the earth and how the health of the earth impacted my milk. I was not living only in my own skin, as the well-being of at least one other being was totally dependent on me and what I ate. Charles Taylor (1999) has linked instrumentalism to atomism and anthropocentrism as related malaises of our modern society.

Joanna Macy writes about moving beyond anthropocentrism: “We cannot genuinely experience our interrelatedness with all life if we are blind to our own human-centeredness, and how deeply embedded it is in our culture and consciousness.” (1998, p. 46) Seeing beyond our limited personal needs and wants to how we can live well with and for one another is part of the healing of the world, of retrieving a more communal means of perception. Being anchored in our bodies is still the starting place:

Ultimately, to acknowledge the life of the body, and to affirm our solidarity with this physical form, is to acknowledge our existence as one of the earth’s animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence. (Abram, 1996, p. 47)

An embodied, engaged pedagogy notices breath, the details of the landscape, and fosters a poetic consciousness toward the world. In this final chapter I will explore what an embodied, engaged pedagogy may look like in holistic education which sees the interconnection of all life. An education based on the senses is the starting point for students to experience their interconnection, and see through the false perception that we are closed, separate systems. Through a sensory education we would learn to be permeable at our ‘skin’. Further, I will write about teachers’ work of ‘self-actualization’ necessary for inner community and ultimately for an outer community where an embodied inner community can be at home.

## Interdependence

A baby emerges from a mother's sea-filled womb where s/he was at one with the mother's body. In an ideal setting, the baby will be at the mother's breast immediately, experiencing a continuation of connection with her. In breastfeeding, mother and baby are interdependent. Nel Noddings writes, "new babies have first to locate themselves in space," (2002b, p. 143) When they are skin to skin to with mother, hearing her heart beat, smelling her, filling with her milk, new babies locate themselves in a good place. "Learning where one's body ends and the external world begins is another task," she continues. (Noddings, 2002b, p. 144) Babies seem to 'find' their own hands and feet, not realizing they are part of their own bodies. They handle parents' faces as though they were their own. Do we ever stop wondering where our bodies end and the outer world starts? James Hillman believes that "there is only one core issue for all psychology. Where is the 'me'? Where does the 'me' begin? Where does the 'me' stop? Where does the 'other' begin?" (1995, p. xvii) Mothers are often surprised that their supposed boundary of self is gone when they have a baby:

Mothers commonly describe the bewildering experience of their relationships to their children in terms that confound classic individualism: an extension of self, a sense of being in two places, or being two persons, at the same time, or of not knowing whether one is mother or child. In addition, these blendings and dispersions of self are marked by continuous change through time as the relationship moves through different expressions of dependency and attachment. (Bowden, 1997, p. 22)

In earlier chapters I have related my sense of connectedness to my children, especially during the years of breastfeeding. Hillman suggests that it is not only the

boundary between mother and baby that is artificial, but the boundary between the self and the world as well:

Since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like - to the deep oceans and distant stars. But the cut is far less important than the recognition of uncertainty about making the cut at all.  
(1995, p. xix)

As a teacher, is it important that I barricade myself off from my students, or is there no less a boundary between me and them as between me and my own nursed children? As a student teacher, I had trouble sleeping and was advised to put all my thoughts into an imaginary box; it did not help. Anne Klein writes:

As long as we understand ourselves as a closed system, we feel we must hold all our "stuff" in our own small bodies, we have denied ourselves access to any other place to put it...If we understand our physical boundaries as selectively porous in ways that allow us to receive what is helpful and release what is not, the space through which we understand ourselves to move is expanded. (1997, p. 146)

I am a healthier teacher if I am not a closed system, but a permeable one. This boundary is perceptual, held in place by the hierarchical structure of society. An alternate view based on encounter could help form a community in my own classroom, in the whole school, and beyond to the town and ecology of the region. How to become and remain open is a question which I will explore throughout this chapter.

In July 2003, I participated in a meditation with a piece of yarn. As I held my piece, I listened to a story of emigrants leaving their homeland, never to see the family they were leaving behind again. As the ship sailed away, a family on shore would hold onto one end of the wool while one on the ship would hold onto the



other. Finally, when the ship was far enough out to see, the wool would be at its limit and the one onshore would let go. The one onboard would gather it in and knit a hat or tea cozy with the wool. At this time, I experienced a feeling of interconnection not only with my ancestors, who had participated in this ritual leaving Scotland, but with everyone who has ever left home. Something in my heart shifted. Afterwards, walking on an empty railbed, I again sensed the generations who had traveled far by train to a new home. The dust seemed to hold their stories.

### *Kettle Valley Railbed*

The railbed is dry and bare. How many  
generations will carry the cargo  
of exile? My heart is still tied up in

tangled yarn of a homesickness unnamed.  
The laughing creek knows how to smooth sharp edged  
stones under temporary trestles. And

a heart can knit away grief. Each neat knot  
in line, (on the rocking boat, the rocking  
train car) an ordering of messy loss.

Like here, this butterfly flashing over  
kindling grass; like this pine tree growing out  
of rock in the morning sun. Some days, what

I want to do is - Stay in one place for  
a while. Make a canyon deep enough for  
my heart. Wear the raw sweater of sorrow.

How can I help my students to see that there is no barrier, at least not the water-tight kind, between them and the natural world? I recently repeated this yarn reflection with a Social Studies class. Perhaps in looking at their 'own deep selves', students will be better able to see their connections to the whole natural world; indeed, perhaps this inner journey goes hand in hand with "a harmonizing with the natural environment." (Hillman, 1995,p. xix) At school, weather permitting, I have taken my students outside - just to the courtyard or down to the wharf to notice and feel gratitude before writing. In Dawson Creek, I took them out into the windy fields. I also select the range of literature with respect for its portrayal of place. Noddings notes:

An education for place involves not only direct encounter with a natural setting and its inhabitants, but also regional literature, poetry, music, art, history, religion, and crafts. (2002b, p.170)

Teenagers are often anxious to move out of their small town. The literature of place and presence in the outdoors may open them up to gratitude through the indirect approach.

However, schools are often working against establishing a sense of place for the students. A high school, like a desert, can be an arid, desolate place where a wanderer stumbles from mirage to mirage in desperate hope of finding quenching nourishment in the form of connection and wholeness. In this sense, the high school joins the modern freeway and mall on the landscape of the new interior desert which Thomas Merton writes replaces the parched sand dunes: "The desert is the home of despair. And despair, now, is everywhere." (Merton, 1956, p. 8) The desert visions of biblical tradition become obscured by the ever-burning pop machine lights. With the disconnection of knowledge into subjects and days into fragmented blocks, with an emphasis on performance standards and rubrics,

students not only feel uncared for, they lose a sense of the interconnection of all beings which is the source of a spiritual awareness. Maybe they were not breastfed or held much as babies and have never experienced interconnection in their lives. Maybe the fragmentation of modern life and school or family breakdown has caused many of them to forget. Perhaps adolescents would be better off in a real desert, where this awareness of the life and breath of spirit around them is possible. With time, they may see, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist working for years on the Mongolian desert, sifting through layers of sand, did:

By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us, and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. (quoted in Dillard, 1999, p. 171)

Such an awareness may help withstand the scorching experience of adolescence. Any time spent alone outdoors eventually leads to this kind of insight, yet the desert in which teens spend most of their waking hours is indoors, sterile and fluorescently lit. I may be responsive to and caring for my students; however, the place they are situated also affects their well being. Noddings reminds us: "The infant body that will become a self through encounter after encounter is always situated, located in a place." (2002b, p. 149) Teaching interdependence will require being in the presence of life forms other than human.

We teachers are trained as experts in far away universities to come to small communities and teach the universal truths. I can move to any small town in the province and be qualified to teach the same English and Social Studies curriculum. Noddings writes, "education in 'advanced' societies has long been characterized by the aim of transcending place, but there is a paradox in this aim." The paradox

includes the assumptions that there is such a thing as universal truths and that “some group necessarily ‘implaced’, had possession of this knowledge or the path to it.” (2002b, p.157) Of course, I am part of this assumption, as are other teachers. We represent the implacement of knowledge in our culture. We can arrive in small, remote communities with our suitcases packed with inert ideas (Whitehead) to impart to the students. Or we can come unblinkered, ready to encounter with acceptance whoever and whatever we find there, present in our bodies, not just our heads, and join, or begin to form, community.

Home begins in mother’s arms at her breast, but soon expands to include, land, sky, water and trees. Just as the heart learns to love one particular other at a time, it learns to love the earth because of the particulars of place. David Orr writes of recovering our sense of place:

I do not know whether it is possible to love the planet or not, but I do know that it is possible to love the places we can see, touch, smell, and experience. And I believe... that rootedness to place is ‘ the most important that least recognized need of the human soul.’ (1994, p.147)

As mother and a teacher, I want my children and students to have opportunities to care long before they become parents. Caring for a particular place offers such an opportunity. Though I start from my home, from my nursing chair by the fire, I look outward at my town and region. However, our children lead mostly indoor lives, at home and at school. David Orr laments, “We are increasingly indoor people whose sense of place in indoor space and whose minds are increasingly shaped by electronic stimuli. “ (p.163) It is important to get our children out doors as much as possible, for “the need to experience living things in natural settings is in this respect, comparable to the need to care.” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 170) We learn that

we are cared for through repeated encounters. Similarly, we begin to see our interconnection with other life forms through repeated encounters with the natural world. Walking on a railbed, we may intuit our ancestors; walking by a lake, we may feel the pain of others. We care not as talking heads, but as embodied beings living in the sense-filled animate world, a part of that world. Our interdependence is the basis of our morality and caring; seeing that the 'me' actually extends farther than our skin helps us to care beyond ourselves. Time spent outdoors may facilitate our seeing our interdependence with non-human life. Therefore, teaching in the paradigm of caring is an embodied practice.

## Ecological Encounter

One June, on the day of the full moon closest to the summer solstice, I signed my children out of school for the afternoon and took them to the beach. This was the day of the lowest tide of the year and their teachers conceded that the important lessons they had planned could not compare with the rare chance to touch twelve legged sunfish, dungeness crabs, and sea anemones, and to run on the cold expanse of sand, breathing the new summer ocean at low tide smells. Like Rachel Carson, I too have "the salt of half a life-time of sea love in me," (2000, p.151) and consider it my duty to turn over the big rocks so a toddler can discover crabs, and hand in hand, to hop over the waves. I agree that no program of environmental education will be effective until we attain a child's natural love for a worm or ladybug and sense of awe in regarding a tide pool. Here we may glimpse the interconnection of all life, the apprehension of which is the precursor to action. As a child, I spent hours and days sitting beside tide pools, watching barnacles stick out their tendrils for plankton, trying to catch bullheads, gently touching the soft tops of sea anemones and watching them contract, testing if limpets and clams

were empty or had life in them. These encounters with tidal life helped me to see that a bullhead was like my dog, which was like me. My action in the tide pool had profound consequences for the ecosystem there; it was easy to see that we were interconnected. Furthermore, in the presence of the tidal creatures, my inner life was safe.

How might we help preserve the sense of wonder of the children for the natural world around us and eliminate the ugliness of so much of modern life? I wish my home were constructed of more natural materials than it is, and I want to shield my town's gravel pit from the eyes of its youth. Yet, I believe there are small yet profound choices we can make from birth to help keep a child's connection to the natural world alive. For the new person whose umbilical cord is recently cut, we may ask, shall we feed this child naturally or artificially? Shall his or her bottom be wrapped in paper, gel and plastic, or cotton and wool? Shall s/he be held in a hard molded plastic chair or in a soft cotton wrap next to a parent's heartbeat and feeling the movement of the larger body? These questions need not be asked in the objective sense of which choice is more environmentally friendly, but from the perspective of what is the baby sensing, something natural or ugly? Perhaps these early impressions lay a groundwork for how a child perceives the world.

As a child grows and learns, we may ask where we want to place the budding intellect of a child: in front of TV or Nintendo or in a car to the mall? Instead we may decide to dig in a back yard garden, in contact with not only ladybugs and worms, but also snails, spiders, crickets, snakes, bees and growing seeds. Perhaps we prefer a walk on the beach or through the forest or field. Recognizing that these nature experiences are becoming harder to find and rarer, we may make it a priority to seek them out, or to create a garden, care for a pet, fly a kite or even light a candle where we may. My garden inspires awe as walking on a

wild forest trail does, and provides daily sustenance in peace and beauty for me and my family. Walking to the mailbox, it is the child who points out to the adult the wonder in the mud puddle.

And now, what about school? If only all schools could have the opportunity, as the new Waldorf kindergarten on the Sunshine Coast recently did, to choose a site for a school because of its proximity to beach and forest, where the children play for the first hour of each school day. Waldorf early childhood education philosophy agrees with Carson that education of the elements “includes nature in storm as well as calm, by night as well as day, and is based on having fun together rather than teaching.” (p. 152) This idea is also cherished and followed by many of the home schooling families I know. What if all schools could be small, close enough to neighbourhoods so that most children could ride their bikes to school? What if they had a garden with vegetables growing and were in walking distance of a beach, forest, farm, creek, hill, park or fountain? What if time spent in outdoor schools became a priority for every class every year? Would students return with zeal to become a Green Star School and to raise money for the poor? Would every child stop littering and pester parents to composte and recycle? I would hope that the accumulated efforts of many adults, parents and teachers, to have awareness of our ecoterrorist ways, would enable the next generation to do so more easily.

Young children learn so quickly because they care about everything. They see themselves in a grain of sand. Flavin quotes Stephen Jay Gould: “We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature.” (2000, p.241) I think that we are born with a sense of this bond, that it is inherent in our being, and that it only needs to be forged if it has been broken by exposure to ugliness in whatever form. The salt of

sea love is difficult to remove, as is the love of prairie skies. Noddings writes that “when people have oriented themselves from childhood to certain geographical features, the shock of moving to another locality may be difficult to overcome.” (2002b, p. 144) This has been my experience trying to live away from the ocean. This love for the earth, the sea, the sky, is the foundation for receptivity to information of how to help. It must be not just one teacher, but many, and preferably a constant adult, like a parent, who provides scenes of beauty for impressionable minds and hearts. Perhaps, most importantly, those adults should not distract the child from the beauty around by putting a speeding car, television, or box walls between them. For if that connection is allowed to remain, and is reinforced, the child may grow up to see his or her way through materialism to a better way of living on this earth. We carry a yearning which we fill most often by buying things, but what is it really that we yearn for? I believe it is the sense of belonging to a larger whole.

## Embodied Teaching: Breath and Voice

(The air’s) obvious ties to speech - the sense that spoken words are structured breath...and indeed that spoken phrases take their communicative power from this invisible medium that moves between us - lends the air a deep association with linguistic meaning and with thought. (Abram, 1996, p. 227)

I begin every class with five minutes of silent breathing, with the intent of having students become present in their bodies and their senses open to perceive. Students love the few minutes of silence which draws their energy level into one another’s presence. However, breathing extends into my English classroom more deeply through the spoken word. Breathing is linked to spiritual awareness and



bodily awareness. It is also linked to linguistic meaning. I read all poems and short stories and even novels aloud in my English classes. The sound of a voice brings them to life; spoken presentations by students are frequent. bell hooks recognizes that hearing our voices is central to our building community:

As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence. (hooks, 1994, p. 8)

Traditionally, classrooms have been silent places and any talk is done by the teacher. I have even seen classes where students do not know one another's names at the end of the year. Yet, hearing my students speak makes me want to get to know them. At home, it is the child's laughing or crying voice which focusses the attention of the mother. A house full of children's voices is full of their excited presence. For women especially, who have been denied a voice throughout the history of patriarchy, hearing one's own voice is central to healing, for it releases a knowing, a meaning to the air: "In dissociation, we literally don't know what we know; and the process of recovery...centers on the recovery of voice and, with it, the ability to tell one's own story." (Gilligan 2002, p. 169) Consider the meaning behind the following sayings associated with voice: 'sticking my neck out', 'my heart is beating in my throat,' 'I have a lump in my throat,' 'I swallowed my feelings.'

## Bird Call

Two Red-breasted Sapsuckers cheer and drum from the top of a telephone pole on the first day of school. Steller's Jays wake us before dawn with very loud "shook-shook-shook"s, hanging upside down like lunatics from the giant sunflowers in the back yard. And late at night, as we are drifting to sleep, the gregarious Blackbirds congregate and creak "Chack!" as though playing a wild chess game in the dark orchard.

There's a voice in the wilderness crying. My mother and grandmothers learned to swallow their feelings: a lump in the throat. I haven't seen the winged creatures of light at night since I was nine, after jumping naked on the trampoline, singing "I am woman, hear me roar," almost thinking I might cry or fly away. Sometimes I now wish for a tongue of fire, to shout my joy and my ire, like a fool at any hour, in resonance. Sometimes I am brave enough to want to associate with wild birds, with my winged heart, to start to free my voice from the black knot tied there. Sometimes I feel I'm about to hatch and run into the dark yard to join my loud cousins in a choir of praise. There's a voice in the wilderness crying. It is Blackbird, calling my name.

When I teach high school English I include a large memoir writing unit. We begin by writing memories of particular people, places, objects and smells in our writer's notebooks after talking about them in a circle, where the most heart stopping stories come out. We return to our notebooks to look for especially breathtaking passages and used these as the seeds of our memoirs. The first time I taught this unit with a grade nine class, I asked them at the end to write something

they learned or remembered about the experience. One student wrote, "I will remember how a memoir will construct one's life through special moments and memories..."<sup>76</sup> I think his perspective that the act of writing memoir is an act of constructing a life is important. In the controlled school milieu, filled with an 'objective' curriculum, that a student feels autonomous enough to construct his own life is a sign that the teacher within has been born and is thriving.

However, Tim Lilburn points out the dark side of narrative. Hearing a story too many times can block our seeing what is really there. Language can often get in the way of seeing the world contemplatively, clearly. Lilburn asserts that a contemplative way of knowing the world lies beyond language, but poetry is one way of trying to see the world this way:

The physical world cannot be known in the way poetry aspires to know it, intimately, ecstatically, in a way that heals the ache of one's separation from the world, it seems to me, outside of the sundering of knowledge which contemplation is. (1999, p. 13)

What lies as the veil between our senses and the awe filled world? Perhaps it is our objective way of thinking and describing what we see. Abram points out:

Any particular language or way of speaking thus holds us within a particular community of human speakers only by invoking an ephemeral border, or boundary, between our sensing bodies and the sensuous earth. Nevertheless, the perceptual boundary constituted by any language may be exceedingly porous and permeable. (1996, p. 256)

Language itself may perpetuate our false perception that we are closed systems, in a separate skin from the community of life around us. To reach through the skin of narrative with poetry is to approach the world with an open heart. To realize

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<sup>76</sup>Now adult student's permission granted: see document

through contemplation that everything is sacred, is to allow my heart to open. It is to take a deep cleansing breath and let our pores breathe. Contemplation before writing helps us to see our interconnection; poetry often focusses on the this-ness of a thing, cutting through the narrative line to the present moment, and borrows its line lengths and rhythms from breathing. Reading and writing poetry can thus be like being present to our breathing bodies.

Another aspect of contemplation could be for teachers to follow the practice of their Waldorf colleagues, who meditate for ten minutes each morning on their students. When I was a first year teacher, I swam a few days a week after school. As I went up and down the lanes, my bouncy grade ten students went with me, floating gently in my mind. I would also join the argument for reducing the total number of students high school teachers work with each year. When enough time is given to focus on a student, a teacher begins to see and hear the 'suchness' of each one; the person becomes more important than the academic performance. Parker Palmer calls this attentiveness to students relational: "This relational way of knowing - in which love takes away fear and co-creation replaces control - is a way of knowing that can help us reclaim the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends." (1998, p. 59) Contemplating our students is being attentive to them, forging bonds of connection. Relational knowing is the opposite of objective knowing, which depends upon what Alfred North Whitehead called inert ideas. Heesoon Bai writes that inert ideas are disembodied ideas: "Ideas that are not worked into one's whole being with senses and feelings. Consequently, they are incapable of compelling us to action." (Bai, 2001, p. 87) Curricula are in just as much danger of becoming inert as teachers are if they are disembodied from the current students.

Luce Irigary suggests that teaching breathing is like mothering:

Teaching takes place then through compassion...it is a matter...of giving - sharing one's breath with one who does not yet know the way of natural or spiritual life. (2002, p. 79)

I shared my blood and milk with my children, but also my breath. When my daughter Grace was born, she was blue, reluctant to take her first breath. The doctor and nurses rubbed her with towels and I called "come on honey" before she cried and turned pink. During the early months with her nestled into me in bed, sometimes her breathing would become almost imperceptible. I would take a deep breath for both of us, letting her feel the rise and fall of my lungs in my chest and my exhale on her head, then she would remember and start breathing regularly again. In teaching my daughter to breathe, I was passing on not only physical survival skills, but also metaphysical awareness. I reminded her that the world, too, is a safe place to be, and that to be consciously alive, is to breathe.

Before feeding, before giving herself as nourishment, woman gives or, more exactly, shares her breath, her natural and spiritual life. We have not yet understood such a mystery. At the level of existence and of being, we have forgotten the importance of breathing in human and divine life. (Irigary, 2002, p. 80)

In initiating a moment of breathing in the class, I am being like a mother to them. All teachers can 'mother' their students through this 'breath feeding.' Irigary continues:

If I have spoken of breath at the level of maternity, it is because maternity is often spiritually valorized as maternal gift, of blood, of body, of milk, and not as sharing of breath, sharing of life, sharing of soul. (2002, p. 81)

In sharing my milk with my children, I have experienced embodiment; through breath, those without milk can share life with others like a mother.

Carol Gilligan reminds us that “deep knowing depends on staying connected to our bodies.” (Gilligan 2002, p. 160) When I was a new teacher, I often had stiff shoulders after a stressful day in the classroom. I would hold my breath and tense my shoulders. Now, when I am feeling frustrated, I consciously take a deep breath in and out. The students notice. Similarly, when I needed to calm a particular student down, I would often stand beside him, place a hand on his shoulder and breathe beside him. Breathing lets us experience being part of the web of life. Instead of holding our breath in the face of trouble, we can breath through it and strengthen our sense of belonging. If we breath through our tears, we do not lose our voices. Awareness of our breath is one way to be conscious of our bodies while teaching, like the tingle of let down is a reminder of our bodily connection to our child when nursing. When we are connected to our bodies, we know what we know in the sense of authoring about which Parker Palmer writes. Our voices carry our breath and our knowing outward to community. When we are connected, we are also models for our students.

Anne Klein writes, “to consider our relationship with our bodies is also to investigate how we imagine the boundaries of our own actions, intentions, and physical impact. These boundaries fix our position in physical and mental space.” (Klein, 1997, p. 140) Noticing our breath is one way to be present in our bodies and know where we are. Moreover, “we cannot gain sufficient groundedness by anchoring in our small physique alone; we must connect through our bodies to a greater source of stability.” (Klein, 1997, p. 143) Though we may think we will be safer inside our own skin, we will actually feel more stable breathing with others, including other life forms. To be fully grounded in our own bodies, speaking in our own voice, is to be connected to all life.

## Eros

When eros is present in the classroom setting, then love is bound to flourish. Well-learned distinctions between public and private make us believe that love has no place in the classroom. (hooks, 1994, p. 198)

What on earth is bell hooks talking about? She most certainly is not referring to revealing high school fashions or illegal and student-teacher liaisons featured on *Oprah!* Most students don't even hear the word eros in school unless they study *1984* in the senior grades and then wonder why it is even more dangerous than love. If eros is pleasure of the senses, there certainly is very little of it in a traditional high school curriculum. Most secondary classes have little in the way of pleasing light, colours, sounds, smells, tastes or textures, or sadly, even poetry. Tim Lilburn suggests "poetry is where we go when we want to know the world as lover." (1999, p. 17) Bringing poetry, especially read aloud, into the classroom, is one way to bring eros in. Carol Gilligan's exploration of pleasure residing in our bodies is insightful:

Pleasure is a sensation. It is written into our bodies; it is our experience of delight, of joy. The English word "pleasure" is a sensual word, the z of the "s" and the sound of the "u" coming from deep within our bodies, tapping the wellspring of desire and curiosity, a knowing that resides within ourselves. (Gilligan, 2002, p. 159)

When a baby pops off the breast with a milky smile for mother, s/he is full of the sensation of pleasure, of bliss. In contrast, the often sterile high school classroom is devoid of pleasure, where even the teacher does not often experience delight. Why are high schools, despite the efforts of students, so sensually barren? Gilligan provides an answer: "patriarchy drains pleasure because hierarchy leads us to

cover vulnerability.” (2002, p. 161) The public school system especially at the secondary level, is steeped in patriarchy and the hierarchy inherent in it. Teachers and students do not feel safe revealing vulnerability in the classroom. All crying is done by girls with other girls in the hallway, and teachers must show professional competence, which is understood as objective removal, at all times. Yet, if teachers are not allowed vulnerability, if our facade must remain rigid, how are we to grow?

Perhaps this enigma is at the root of the observations of outsiders to the education system that the longer one teaches, the worse one teaches. Is there a way through this iron cage of patriarchy, short of homeschooling? Gilligan answers: “But we also see the power of love to unglue hierarchy, as association opens the way to undoing dissociation.” (2002, p. 161) If we fall into the old belief ‘that love has no place in the classroom,’ we are stuck. However, if we can hold onto even a scrap of transformative eros, love will follow and break down the barriers of dissociation and hierarchy. Allowing love in is integral to finding our voice. It also opens us up to looking like a fool.

Another answer to the question, ‘what lies as the veil between our senses and the awe filled world?’, may be our objective way of thinking and describing what we see: “Individuality, specificity, haecceity - the thisness of a thing that makes it unlike all others, its final perfection, its beauty, godlikeness - lies beneath order, law, name.” (Lilburn, 1999, p. 16) Helene Cixous reminds us that “Our dreams are are greatest poets.” (1993, p. 81) In the natural breath of sleep we compose a path through logical, objective thought. Perhaps sense-filled eros is only the starting place for love in the classroom. David Orr suggests that agape, love for the whole world, is where we are going:



...for love to grow from eros to agape, something like *metanoia*, or the “transformation of one’s own being” is necessary. *Metanoia* is more than a “paradigm change.” It is a change, first, in our loyalties, affections, and basic character, which subsequently changes our intellectual priorities and paradigms. (1994, pp. 144-145)

Such a fundamental change is possible through caring for the other, in being grounded in our own bodies, in speaking in our own voice. Ideally, *metanoia* leading to agape would be the catalyst inviting one into teaching as truly educating, or as Hannah Arendt writes:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hand their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (1954, p. 196)

If we are to be able to model for our students undertaking something new for the task of renewing the world, we will have to be able to speak in our own voices, yet this stance is not easy as Parker Palmer points out:

The undivided life is foolish because if you let others know what is going on inside, they may reject and injure you, so it is better to keep your feelings tucked away. It is irresponsible because if you reveal your inner truth, you can no longer perform your duties dispassionately - duties like teaching from a detached, “objective” stance - so it is better to play your role and keep personal truth hidden away. (1998, p. 172)

Many teachers, I included, have found it easier and safer to remain in the dissociated hierarchy. The decision to speak out is a dangerous one. However, I believe that not to allow what is inside to be born is to court illness. Parker Palmer points out that:

people who use such a language, the language of the heart, need a place to practice it, to grow accustomed to it, to have it affirmed by like-minded people before they speak it to a larger audience that may range from skeptical to hostile. (1998, pp. 172-173)

One of the places I have found to practice the language of my heart is La Leche League meetings. Here I may speak as a mother who believes that especially through breastfeeding, “mothering is a central constitutive of women’s identities.” (Bowden, 1997, p. 22) Here is an outer community where my inner community is safe. At LLL meetings, women are grounded in their bodies, breastfeeding their babies together, feeling connected to one another and speaking their feelings. Again, being physically present goes hand in hand with feeling interconnected.

Through my graduate work, I have practiced finding my voice and saying what I believe to be important about education and caring for students. I have found a community of writers who come close to accepting my experience. Bringing all that I am to my teaching seems to be the only way to find my voice. Still I wonder, where is the school where I may speak in my own voice, where I may love, and where the eros of beauty, softness, music and warmth is not suspect? Jane Roland Martin asks:

Is it possible in that safe and sealed off (classroom) domain to bring new voices and perspectives into the course of study so that everyone will feel at home; to place at the center of the curriculum activities that integrate minds and bodies, heads and hearts, thought and action, reason and emotion; to make domesticity everyone’s business? (Martin, 1992, p. 209)

I continue to look at Waldorf education, as Martin looked to Montessori in *The Schoolhome*, for answers to this question. One observer wrote: “On my visits to Waldorf schools I felt as if I were watching sensory foundations being built in each

class, almost in layers.” (Oppenheimer, 1999, p. 73) Remember that senses take in pleasure and that eros leads to love? Besides focussing on sensory beauty and the uniqueness of each student, Waldorf schools hold the inner development of the teacher to be centrally important, “to enliven their own sensibility and deepen their understanding of evolution. Only then, according to Waldorf theory, can they inspire students with the wonder and curiosity that make for profound learning.” (Oppenheimer, p. 82) Shunning hierarchy, envisioning the teacher as a second mother to the students, Waldorf education has much to teach the mainstream about wholeness, about love.

We need not build Waldorf schools to learn their ‘lessons.’ All schools may include more of a focus on the sensory beauty, on the development of voice, and on nurturing through encouraging breath. In such schools, there would be pleasure, and not only inner development, but also ‘metanoia’, such a transformational change, that love may grow from specifics to include all life. Here is a poem to dream.

## Conclusion

...education dedicated to the goal of reversing the social and ecological degradation has to start with learning to value the world intrinsically. What this means to me is bringing back the senses to the center stage of consciousness so that we may take up residence in it rather than in the abstract linguistic-conceptual mode. (Bai, 2001, p. 90)

The senses must be at the center of the curriculum and the classroom if education is to help students see the interrelatedness of all life; furthermore, the walls of the classroom must come down more often, as when my daughter, at Waldorf kindergarten, spent over an hour playing on the beach or in the woods every morning before being immersed indoors in song and colour and being filled with warm food. High school English classrooms, where I teach, are of necessity focussed on the linguistic mode. I can add artistic activities, sound, pillows and even food, but by the very act of studying narrative, am I not helping to build the blinders around the students' eyes to the living world around them? An emphasis on poetry, and not on the objective decoding of poetry, but on a cultivation of a poetic stance toward life, will help address this imbalance, as will having students explore their inner selves through reflective memoir writing. Again, a focussing on even the sense of sound can bring some joy of the senses to the classroom. Breathing together even for a few minutes brings us into our own and one another's presence.

The most engaged act I can do as a teacher is to be present in my own body at school, and to speak in my own voice. As a woman, particularly as a mother, I have found this simple sounding task to be a challenge. Though my name, Susan, has the same z and long “u” sounds Gilligan points out in the word “pleasure,” wearing the mask of the dissociated teacher has had little pleasure for me. To teach with true authority, I need to be in association within myself, to acknowledge that motherhood is constitutive of my identity, and to continue my inner development. Moreover, I need to find an outer community which will accept me and my progressive belief that love and care for my students’ growth, as well as my own, should be at the center of a whole education. Then I can speak with confidence and bring love to break the walls of hierarchy without being seen as a fool.

Holistic education focusses on care of the teacher by him or herself, as well as care of the students, on the task of inner development, which as bell hooks points out, may be more challenging even than the feminist task of asking for attention to my work as a mother. However, I believe that being a committed mother is some of the greatest inner work there is, for it is a putting aside of ego and the nourishing engrossment in another. Noddings notes:

Women, looking at their own universe, might point to motherhood (also in line with aboriginal experience) as a school universally accessible and one that teaches very different lessons - lessons of tenderness, empowerment, and constancy. (2002a, p. 108)

Motherhood has been my greatest holistic education. Breastfeeding has been my main lesson in embodiment.

## Epilogue

### *Sparrow*

In the low morning light  
I hold a sparrow in my cupped palms.  
It lay stunned on the cold patio  
after flying into our window.  
I stroke its brown head  
with my thumbs, look into its round eyes.  
In a while I sense it stir  
and flatten my hands.  
It stands, then flies to the "New Dawn"  
climbing rose on the arbour.

This hot September of bird song  
my last child is weaned.  
After a decade of bodily attachment  
My milk is gone; I am alone  
in my body.  
My breasts rest from their good work.  
My empty hands are free to feel  
the heartbeat of a sparrow  
and release it, too, into flight.

I started writing this thesis a few months after my youngest child weaned. It has been a year of learning how to be in my body again without being symbiotically attached to another for the first time in over eleven years. While writing this thesis, I also wrote dozens of poems, healed an illness, and explored where I want to call home. The thesis pushed me in all these directions as I untangled and consolidated my thoughts, my original goal upon starting the graduate program. Writing it has been an exploration of the question 'How shall I live?' and an affirmation that my experience in attentive love and engrossed encounters while breastfeeding and caring for my children transformed my way of relating to others. Further, I have grown confident that embodied experiences like mine are needed by teachers in today's instrumentally based school system.

While being a mother to my three children, I have learned in my body the importance of loving attachment. From my perspective as a mother, school seemed to me at first to break attachments rather than nurture them, not only separating children from parents, but from the surrogate parent, the teacher, from year to year. In my quest for an alternative, I homeschooled for a few years and was the catalyst starting a Waldorf school. Ethic of care literature opened a door for me to step back into the realm of public education. In the first book I read by Nel Noddings, I found:

An ethic of caring puts great emphasis on the loving attachment between parent and child. It rejects the common notion put forward by Freud and others that morality begins in fear. Morality is affected by fear, but it is inspired by love, and is demonstrated in loving relations." (1992, p. 110)

School seemed to me, and sometimes still does, to base its moral teachings in fear. While I left the classroom in 1995 on a practical level because of my second baby, I also left on a theoretical level because I did not feel I could belong in such a bureaucratic, rule-based system. Seven years later, I taught in high school again, using Noddings' ideas to carry my mothering philosophy of care into the school. No longer will I be intimidated by teachers suggesting that I should be authoritarian in the classroom; I have found a bridge between my embodied mothering and my classroom presence. While I was reading Nel Noddings' later work and teaching, my principal remarked that I had found a unique way to relate to students and maintain a sense of calm in the classroom that was not confrontational or coercive. I simply responded to them with the same warmth I do to my own children.

Then I started writing this thesis, and piecing together the ideas I had collected. While writing about community, I almost moved my family to a new community but chose to stay here in the house where my second son was born. In reflection, I have seen that I have helped build community through my La Leche League and school work but that the most important community building I can do is inside, continuing my own healing and growth. I have found sufficient evidence to support my intuition that my at-home experience contained lessons valuable in the classroom. Moreover, I believe that in order to empower my students to listen to their inner truths, I must model for them by teaching from my whole life experience, not just my university knowledge. Deep knowing comes from our connections to our sensual bodies, a connection aided beyond breastfeeding by attention to breath, the senses and poetry. When our ideas are embodied, we are more likely to become agents of change and to lovingly relate to others.



## Rainy Season

Lulled to sleep under sheets of rain  
you can forget  
your name.

As the drops splatter the window,  
your name is waiting,  
gestating,  
down by the base of your spine. It is pressuring  
your effacing cervix.

Your name is in a cheesecloth bag,  
like blackberries,  
suspended from the rafters  
dripping  
slowly  
into a  
waiting bowl  
on the counter,  
gelling.

In the middle of the night  
you wake up from thundering rain  
on the roof - or is it from a dream  
of labour,  
or from old fury churning  
in the pit of your stomach,  
or a child coughing,  
or a voice calling  
your name?

Stand up on the top bunk and look  
over the walls. Check the bowl  
on the kitchen counter.

You have dreamed of a little girl  
in pigtails  
at the top of the stairs.  
"Don't forget about me!" she is calling  
like a lost duckling. Call to her.  
Take her by the hand.

Tell her her name,  
which is yours.  
Hold your name  
in your arms again  
through these days  
and days and days  
of cold rain.

I now face the professional community more grounded in my own life, more willing to make school like home, and with greater hope about working within the system. I can say that my breastfeeding experience nurtures my approach to teaching through an ethic of care. With my personal community, including my family, my neighbourhood, La Leche League group and church, my life feels no longer divided between my role as a school teacher and my role as an at home mother. Now, they are all part of the same cloth my of my caring.

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