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## LIFE LESSONS

*I am convinced that one cannot be a great educator without being a great learner ...*



## LIFE AS CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

### PREAMBLE

We learn all kinds of things, from the moment we pop into this plane of existence (or even before) till we pop out of it. Learning is a pervasive and expansive phenomenon for humans. But not all learning is the same. Some learning is delightful, joyful, beautiful, and animating; some insightful and mind-expanding; some downright "wrong"; some useless; some boring; some hopeless and depressing; some hurtful and harming. For sure, not all learning is helpful. Helpful learning is an ethical practice. Ethics aims at bringing about a flourishing of the world, in which individual beings singly *and* collectively find relief, reconciliation, healing, rejoicing, hope, compassion, and wisdom. It is my hope that we can increasingly bring about such learning in our learning institutions, our homes and workplaces. We need to see this happen, urgently, as we face deepening trouble on all planes of existence: environmental, social, academic, professional, and personal.

In the meantime, I turn to my life, spanning many decades and two continents, to reflect on and see if there has been ethics learning that I can share in these pages. Ethics learning? My readers may ask: "What are you talking about?" I like how the primatologist Frans De Waal (2005) defines ethics as the question of helping or harming. Are we helping or are we harming? Am I helping or am I harming? Seemingly clear and simple questions, but there aren't always equally clear and simple answers. Therein lies the need for us to live and learn, make mistakes and relearn, and pass on what we know. Most often, it takes individuals a lifetime to figure out what's harming and what's helping. Thus, sharing the learning stories of our lives is very helpful to each other. This is what communities are for, isn't that so?

### "WHAT DID I LEARN IN SCHOOL TODAY?"

Here is a story of how my formal learning began. This story is reconstructed from my own somewhat vague memories and stories told to me by my mother.

Many children play the game of "school" amongst themselves years before they actually show up at school as a Grade 1 student. Nowadays, young children even go to preschool and kindergarten. Thus when they show up at their elementary school, they already know something about the game of schooling. Not I. I never went to a nursery school, preschool, or a kindergarten. I don't know if they had such things in Korea when I was growing up in the fifties and sixties. And I didn't have anyone in my family to explain to me what going to school was about, or to prepare me for it. Neither my parents nor my grandparents went to school, which was usual for Koreans in those days. My parents grew up without electricity or car or telephone. They were of the generation that was just beginning to participate in the modernization and westernization seeping into the country. This was in the

early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Korea. My parents and my four older siblings went through the period in which Korea was under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) and subsequently, the Korean War (1950–1953). As the youngest, I was the only child who did not experience Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War.

I was clueless. Hence, when my mother and whoever else marched me to school on the first day, and tried to have me line up with other children in straight rows in a gigantic schoolyard, while all the parents stood behind the assembled children, I thought something terrible was happening to me. I had never in my young life been separate from my family members in a public space. I wouldn't let go of my mother, and after some struggle, they (I don't remember who) managed to separate me from my mother, and placed me in the assembly. Terrified, I sobbed the whole time, while the principal was giving an edifying and moralizing speech to the assembly of children and parents. That was my first day of school.

In recalling this story, what strikes me most is how the modern institution of schooling shapes the subjectivity of children. Though my own case may be extreme, and most children may fare better than I did in coping with their first-time immersion in school, I would make the argument that the institution of modern schooling represents a critical event of bonding rupture and dislocation in a child's life. (Does it always have to be that way? I don't think so. But we have to know what we are doing.) A child now has to leave the family, the comforting and familiar nest of nurture and care, and enters an impersonal institution that demands that children individualistically compete, fear failure, and work for and earn their keep and others' approval. They now have to justify their existence by demonstrating their extrinsic worth in the eyes of others. They are now open to the critical gaze of society through their meeting or not meeting its expectations as carried out within schools. The survival game has begun in earnest.

It took me about three years before I clued in to the schooling game. Maybe this is how long it took me to become resigned to the existential sign: NO EXIT. The only way out was by staying in and finishing. I must have also finally figured out that going to school was the only survival game in town and that I must learn to play it well, if I was to survive. I survived the first three years, thanks to my mother's singular effort to support me and also to my homeroom teachers' kindness.<sup>5</sup> For my mother, it would have been her survival game, too. A Korean mother's job description includes being a cook, coach, counsellor, nurse, cabdriver, and maybe even a security guard for her children while they go through the gruelling K-12 system.

Why did it take me so long to make sense of school? Probably the best way to understand the situation is that I was in some kind of culture shock. As the youngest of the five (my sibling closest in age was my sister who was nine years

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<sup>5</sup> It was typical of elementary schools in Korea in the sixties that a homeroom teacher would teach all subjects to her or his pupils. Pupils stayed in the same classroom all day with their homeroom teacher. This arrangement changed when we went to junior and high school. Students stayed in the same homeroom throughout the day but different subject matter teachers visited each class according to the timetable.

older), I grew up like an only child in a family that was in many ways still in a state of pre-modernity. I spent the days playing with my ancient grandmother and pottering around the sprawling household, watching others, mostly adults, going about their business or visiting with each other. I was fed, clothed, and talked to by whoever was around—and there were lots of people, all adults, around, not everyone my own immediate family member: I was free to run about, come and go as I pleased, and to poke around within the confines of our large household. Hence the idea of being made to sit at a desk and perform learning tasks, with a roomful of little strangers, and being told what to do, and most of all, that I had to compete with other children in my learning, was more than my freely wandering little mind could fathom. It was, I am sure, decisively unnatural to me.

Since I was clueless about what I had to do, let alone able to comply with all the instructions, my mother came with me to school every day. She got permission from my kind teacher to sit at the back of the classroom, screened by some large object so as not to distract other students, and attended to the teacher's instructions. In particular, it was my mother's task to remember (she herself was illiterate, although, I swear, she was one of the smartest people I ever met) what the homework was, and upon coming home she tried to have me work on my homework. There, too, she was not too successful as I did not want to do it or perhaps, again, I was clueless. I remember a typical scene at home. I would be eating my apple, enjoying my snack, while watching my mother and my sister busily colouring pictures of apples and cutting them out. They were doing my homework! This whole thing of my mother coming to school with me and doing my homework seems to have lasted for the first six months of schooling.

Eventually, by Grade 4, I clued in, and became a competitive student who stayed up regularly till past 10 pm, studying and preparing for the first major hurdle: the entrance examination for junior high school, which would largely decide one's fate as to which university one would eventually enter. All Korean universities were, and still are, clearly ranked: number one, number two, number three ...all the way down to the bottom. For a girl, entering a top-ranked university would determine how well she would fare as a woman, since her choice of husband, his job security and his social standing had everything to do with which top-ranked university she could successfully enter and there meet her future husband. At least, such was the rationale traditional Korean society laid out plainly to its citizens.

"Little girl, what did you learn in school today?" Little Heesoon would answer (if she could): "I learned that for me to succeed in life, I have to compete, becoming a winner over my fellow students. I must get to the right university so that I can find a husband with social standing and wealth. I learned today that all knowledge comes with a price tag. Knowledge from the West has the highest price tag."

Fortunately, along the way, Heesoon also learned many other valuable things, too, even though they were not really part of the official or the prioritized part of the curriculum: making friends, the pleasure of reading, of making art, expanding the mind through reading widely, and the habit of disciplined study.

## UNLEARNING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO UNLEARN

Each time we open our eyes, look at the world, and make sense of the world in certain ways, we have invoked a learning event that took place in the past. The present would be unrecognizable if we cannot see the past in it. Thus, to see the world anew, and make sense of the world differently, past learning has to largely die and recede, and new learning has to be born. But the past does not die easily. It too has its own survival instincts. It insists on persisting. And most often, no insistence is necessary. It has no rivalry, no competition, from the present. As long as no one or nothing disagrees or conflicts with how one has made sense of the world in the past, the past continues to live into the present. Why not? That's efficiency. No need to change when change is not called for. However, now and then, here and there, we may run into someone or some situation that questions and confronts our past learning. These are moments of opportunity for new learning to take place. That is, if we are willing to unlearn what is already there.

Take heed. Every conflict, disagreement, surprise, discomfort, and pain is an invitation for new learning to take place. A new world is born to us. Such moments are unforgettable. Here I share with you one significant story of unlearning from my life.

I had my cultural conditioning: what I imbibed from the culture, small and large, around me, implicitly or explicitly. As an Asian mom at heart, I was rather insistent on our two little girls learning to play a musical instrument—in our case, a piano. My husband and I had little money in those days, but I was committed to giving them piano lessons. We found a qualified piano teacher, and she would come every week to give the girls lessons. My older one, Lumina, was a little more obliging. Perhaps she did not want to engage in conflict with me so as to protect my taut nerves, or hers, or both of ours. Even if dispassionately, she seemed to do her practice every day, at least for a while.

But my younger one, Serenne, who was a feisty 5-year-old then, was not going to be pressured by me about practicing every day. I was not happy about my daily campaign of pressuring my child, but I was not going to—was not ready to—give up the cherished idea of my children learning to play the piano. After all, pressuring one's child to study more or harder was what all normal Korean (and other Asian) mothers were programmed to do by their culture.

One day, after being yet again nagged and badgered by me about practicing the piano, my younger one decided to confront me. She said: "Mom, I think you are more interested in playing the piano than I am. Why don't you take the lessons yourself?" These words, and the bold and decisive manner in which they were spoken by a 5-year-old child, had a direct and penetrating effect on me. That moment of encounter stopped me dead in my tracks, and forced me to look at myself. She was basically declaring that she was not me, and I was not her. I saw, with startling clarity, that my own child whom I loved dearly, who—as the expression goes—was my flesh and blood, was truly a person of her own with independent thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. At that moment, I woke up, at

least a little, from my own cultural conditioning. I didn't have to do what I was socially programmed to do.

I said to Serenne: "Okay, no more practice pressure from me. But having a piano teacher means having to practice regularly. That's how that system of learning music is set up. So, no practice means no piano lessons. I cannot afford to have a teacher come every week when you don't practice." Serenne was just fine with the idea. What was intriguing and wonderful was that she did not stop playing. She played her piano when she wanted to, which was erratic but frequent enough for years to come.

Many years went by. One year before I finished my doctorate, I secured a teaching position at Simon Fraser University and started to teach. I purchased my first home near the university, and my family of four, including my mother who was rapidly declining in her physical and mental health, moved in. And my girls, who were homeschooled for most of their younger years, were trying out public high school. One day, my now teenage Serenne said to me that she wanted to take up piano lessons again. She said that she was inspired by a Korean girl in her class who was doing Grade 10 Royal Conservatory piano. Okay, I said, and we found a piano teacher for her in our new neighbourhood. The new piano teacher assessed Serenne's level and told her that she could now go into Grade 8 Royal Conservatory piano. The last time she was taking lessons, she was in Grade 4! Interesting. So she managed to "self-teach" for four grades through just hanging out and playing her piano? I was astonished. Serenne excelled and graduated from the Grade 8 level with two silver medals. Was she then going to continue on? I got excited. I was more than willing to support her going on. No, she said. She had had enough for now. "Okay," I said, "As you wish." To this day, she still plays her piano, when she wants. More recently, she added guitar playing, and composing songs and singing, to her music making.

Are there morals to this story? I can think of a few: Never compel anyone to learn. Invite, suggest, and propose, but never demand that they learn; never "make" them learn. Even so, be careful. Any time we have this desire for others to learn something, we need to ask ourselves: whose needs am I trying to address and meet?

#### WHO TEACHES? WHO LEARNS?

Many teachers like to think that their teaching is directly related to their students' learning. I don't need to deny that sometimes, or perhaps often, this happens. That's a good thing.

However, there are many things in life that are not learned by such linear causality. In fact, there is a sense that profound things in life are not learned that way at all. I relate two stories here: one that I heard from a Zen teacher, and another from my own home life.

Zen Roshi Reb Anderson from San Francisco Zen Center told this story during a weekend retreat I did with him over two decades ago. He spoke of one of his revered teachers in Japan whom he would visit whenever he was there. One year,

he went to see his teacher. The usual formal meeting was arranged, and he was received into a room where his teacher was seated. This time, though, something was terribly different. His teacher was in his usual formal robe, and was immaculately dressed. All was the same except that his eyes were vacant and drool trickled out of the corner of his mouth. As he looked at his teacher's expressionless face, Roshi Anderson was struck by a profound question: *What is Zen?* And as soon as this question arose, he was also struck by an insight: "I realized that even in this state he was still teaching me!"

What sense do we make of Roshi Anderson's statement? Surely his demented teacher was not engaged in teaching, was he? But, says Roshi Anderson, he was having a profound learning experience in the presence of his teacher at this particular time and place. Roshi Anderson could say that he learned something important in the presence of his teacher, and *therefore*, his teacher was teaching.

The Zen worldview does not isolate individual objects (including people) from the context and environment within which these objects show up. In fact, it would be fair to say that in the Zen worldview, there are no objects in the sense of separate, discrete, atomistic entities. Existential objects are part of the field phenomena that emerge all together moment by moment. Who I am at this moment and in this place is not separate from this moment and this place, which coexist interdependently with everything else in the universe that shows up at this precise moment and in this particular place. No more, no less.

So, there was Roshi Anderson who was looking at his teacher, and experiencing a moment of profound learning, and there was his demented teacher whose presence was critically linked to Roshi Anderson's profound learning. Teaching and learning are two terms of a relational equation. Whoever sits on the side of learning is a student; whoever sits on the other side is a teacher. The student, ever grateful for teaching that guides his or her life, honours whoever sits on the other side and calls him or her a teacher.

One time I too was in an inexplicable and inexhaustible place of learning. My demented octogenarian mother, whom I was taking care of at home, said something so startling that I did a double take, and at that moment, I had a profound learning experience. Both severe osteoporosis and Alzheimer's disease took hold of my mother in her 80s, which rendered her immobile, incoherent and mostly speechless. On my side, I was completely exhausted from sleep deprivation while carrying on the triple duties of working full-time, raising my girls, and taking care of my mom at home. One day, I was changing my mother's diaper, and out of nowhere, my mother said that she could not die just yet because she needed to take care of me! It was one of those moments when I did not know whether to laugh, or cry, or what. My mother had to depend on me so totally for absolutely everything, except still breathing on her own, and here she was talking about taking care of me. Surely, I thought, she was joking. But then, the possible truth of that statement began to gradually sink into me. My mother dedicated her life to taking care of her children, and raising me, her youngest child, was her last project. Probably even her dementia couldn't stop her indomitable spirit and absolute devotion. Besides, the opportunity for me to take care of her, however challenging and difficult it was,

promoted my own growth as a compassionate human being. I was not particularly talented in that department of learning. Caring for my mother gave me the opportunity to practice my compassion and gratitude. In the way Roshi Anderson said that his demented teacher was still teaching him, I would say that my mother was still teaching me, in her profoundly demented state, the lesson I needed most in life: how to be compassionate.

#### A TASTE OF BLISS IN LEARNING

It is still somewhat a surprise to me that I am a writer. The surprise part is: How did I become a writer and come to like writing when writing experience or practice was lacking during my 12 years of going to school in Korea? In addition, once I came to Canada, I learned to write again in English as my second language, a challenging and laborious process. What was there in my formative years that possibly encouraged me to be a writer, or at least gave me a taste of writing that perhaps stayed with me?

One learning experience comes to my mind, not readily, as it was a rather strange and obscure experience. But the more I think about it, the more it holds the possibility of being a deeply influential event.

Amongst the multitude of fifteen to twenty subjects (the exact number escapes my memory) we were required to take in high school, there was a subject called "Composition." I do not know why this subject was separate from "Korean Language Arts." It was just there, and the teacher taught it, and students studied it. Now, the most interesting part is that in our case, neither the teacher taught nor the students studied in the usual way. The usual way meant studying a textbook under the teacher's instruction, memorizing it, and being tested. None of this took place in our composition class. Instead, what we were told to do was to just write and fill up our notebooks! Every week, we would bring our notebooks to the class, pile them on the teacher's desk, and all he did was flip through each notebook—not really reading it—go to the last page of our writing, and put his stamp on it. For all I know, the teacher wasn't really interested in teaching us composition, or maybe he had other things to do, and decided to use the hour just to keep us quietly occupied. Chances are that he didn't have any curriculum or some brilliant and intriguing pedagogical reason behind the way he conducted the class. Or perhaps he did!

What happened to me is that I wrote and wrote. I filled pages and volumes of notebooks, unhindered by the need for and worries about studying, doing well, and earning a good grade. This was the only subject in which I was totally free to explore whatever I wanted in the way of writing. I wrote little stories, diary entries, letters, and essays. Since I was not being tested and graded, I didn't really care how I wrote. I didn't worry about writing well or writing badly. I just wrote. It engaged my tender, growing teenage girl's soul.

Many decades later, this summer, when I was teaching an undergraduate course, my students and I read an article by an English professor who was advocating writing for no reason other than just for the experience of writing (Yagelski, 2009).

He had some compelling theorizing to go with this practice, using heavy-duty words like “ontological.” Writing for Being! As I was reading that article, many light bulbs went on brightly in my consciousness. That’s it: my composition class experience was just that. It was a rare taste of intrinsically motivated learning. I was not compelled to study something, was not studying in fear lest my grades drop and I lose my place in the competition. To a captive soul like me, freedom in learning was intoxicating. Bliss. Perhaps it’s that taste of bliss that’s still lingering around when I write, even when I was writing under the pressure to publish to get tenure.

### EMBODIMENT

We are said to be living in a disembodied culture. In the academy, the theme of embodiment is taking off like wildfire. Everyone wants to be embodied. We shudder at the state of disembodiment said to be profound in the academy. I heard a colleague of mine quipping, dramatically, to make her point: “A human being is really a big brain on a pair of legs that move the brain around from point A to B.”

Nowadays, we spend a lot more time sitting than moving around, which is linked to increasing cardiovascular disease, if not the likelihood of early death. Even more than the concern about shortening lifespan and precipitating disease, my primary concern with disembodiment is the diminishment of the self and personhood. What do I mean by this? Simply put, to be disembodied is to not know my self because I am not totally present in my being, for my self and to my self, in the most sensate and feeling ways. Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” (cogito ergo sum) is a brilliant statement of disembodiment. An existential statement of embodiment would be: I feel, therefore I am (sentio ergo sum). It is primarily through feeling that I know my being. And feelings are extremely complex and dynamic, and to know them requires that we pay attention to them. Subtle energetic, sensate, emotional, and somatic currents and undercurrents constantly, moment by moment, circulate around in the subjective field of self. To know myself is to be in touch with these currents and understand their sensate signals. Disembodiment means that I am not in touch with these currents and therefore, I am not in a position to know myself.

Embodiment is not about just “having” a body. If that were the case, then there would be no concerns about disembodiment, as we all have bodies. But the language here betrays the truth: “having a body” is a disembodiment relationship with oneself, as “having” is an external relationship between a subject and an object. It is not an internal relationship of intimately experiencing oneself from within *this* fleshy fluid being. To be embodied means to *feel intimately from within* the vast sensate ocean of fleshy beingness with all its currents and undercurrents.

There are many obstacles to embodiment. Whenever we are overwhelmed by shock, trauma, and/or emotional wounding, our nervous system is unable to handle the stimuli, and shuts down. This is the instinctual way that our nervous system handles what it cannot handle: by not feeling. I have heard about people going suddenly blind on the spot when having to witness terrible atrocities committed

towards their loved ones. Or losing their memory of things that were traumatizing. We experience this in everyday life, too, to a smaller degree, like losing one's voice when too scared or enraged to speak. Or when rushing madly about doing tasks under great time pressure, afterwards we hardly remember many of the details of what we did. Imagine living one's whole life more or less that way: not being present to one's life.

Even distractions, or especially distractions, that take one's attention out of one's fleshy self contribute to disembodiment. Distraction can be a coping or defense mechanism to not feel what's too painful and fearful. Disembodiment is basically the condition of one's not "being fully present in one's body." This happens rather frequently for most of us, even though we may not recognize it. Where are your feet at this moment? Do you find yourself looking down, looking for them as if to look for a nearby object? Do you attend to and really notice things in your environment when you go through your day, rushing from one place to another, from one task to another?

Typically, our attention is constantly called out of our selves, and kept away from our selves. Contemporary childhood seems to be particularly prone to this disembodiment and dissociative condition as children are more and more subjected to the constant attention-grabbing practiced by the external world of parenting, schooling, media, lateral socialization, consumerism, and so on. There is literally an attention war being waged on the battlefield of each child's consciousness. I am not aware of a disembodiment scale test (that is based on my understanding of disembodiment here), but I would be very interested to know the extent of disembodiment amongst today's youth.

When I look back at those twelve years of intensely competitive schooling, with the constant and unremitting pressure to perform academically and succeed, I would say that I could not have attended to my feeling matrix in any generous or deep way. My attention must have been tied up a lot with meeting externally imposed high-stakes demands, such as endless tests and exams. I was not deeply in touch with myself. The first Socratic injunction is "Know Thyself." This to me is the central and foundational-aim of education. Hence, all the practices we impose on students in the name of education, but that are conducive to their disembodiment, negate education. It is mis-education. From this understanding, I wonder how much of what goes on in schooling is really mis-education. I invite readers to reflect on and examine their own schooling experience without feeling put on the defensive.

Return the attention to where it belongs: to the fleshy organism of the self! That, to me, is an urgent educational goal. Learning to be embodied means rehabilitating one's attention to the organism and its matrix of the felt sense. In practical terms, this rehabilitation requires that the organism be supported in certain aspects. I would characterize this support in terms of protection, repair, restoration, and resourcing. (I learned these terms in my study of body-based psychotherapy.) Basically, any time an organism is overwhelmed by stimulation overload from shock, trauma, wounding, and/or undue demands, it tends to go into disembodiment. It loses touch with its own force field of subtle and dynamic

energy, sensations and feelings. This is part of the legacy of our physical survival mechanism: under stress, the bubble of subtle feelings and sensations bursts, releasing us to instantaneously flee, fight, or freeze in paralysis, mental or physical.

One of the greatest learning activities that I have been engaging in for the past two decades is meditation. Meditation is an activity (even though it may take the form of sitting still) of getting in touch with sensate and mostly non-discursive interiority. Hence meditation is an embodiment practice. While different people may meditate for different reasons other than embodiment, I meditate to return my attention to its origin: to the organic sensate life-force field that surrounds *this* being, right *here*. I am following the Socratic program of education: Know Thyself. To know myself, I must be present to the sensate, energetic life-force field that is my being.

### LEARNING TO CONNECT

This little chapter won't be complete without my sharing one of the most challenging types of learning that's going on in my life right now: learning to connect. In recent years, I have been reading a lot in neuroscience, especially about neurobiology as explained by Daniel Siegel (2010). Also watching Jill Bolte Taylor's *My Stroke of Insight* (Taylor, 2006) TED Talk left a huge impact on me. As well, I have been reading Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and his Emissary* (McGilchrist, 2009). What all these scientists are pointing out is that the human being is basically a two-brained animal. Two brains—left and right hemispheres—joined by a wide, flat bundle of neural fibres called the corpus callosum, are packed into one skull. Each brain experiences reality differently and specializes in different functions.

Among many differences, what interests me the most in my present learning is that the right brain specializes in perceiving the embodied world of body language, emotional expression, context, implicit meaning, holism, and connection, whereas the left brain specializes in abstraction, analysis, denotative language, the mental power of manipulation, and categorization. With the left, we see the world in the conceptual clarity of sharp distinctions and categorizations, which is abstract and emotionless; with the right, we see the world in a warm and hazy glow of everything somehow connected to everything else and meaningful. Obviously we need both brains working hard for us to be successful in living, but the difficulty that we have created for ourselves in the modern world is that it prioritizes and prizes left-brain function over right-brain function. What does it all mean for me or for you? Let me talk about myself, and I will leave it to you to reflect on yourself.

I can plainly see, when I look back at my own education, that my left-brain development far exceeded my right-brain development, in keeping with the orientation of modern civilization. My 12-year schooling in Korea and 10-year schooling in Canada both strongly supported me to become a highly developed analytic, conceptual, discursive, problem-solving thinker, communicator, and academic writer. Lest I be misunderstood, I clarify: I am not condemning and complaining about my left-brain development. I am grateful that I had a first-rate

opportunity for that, and glad that I am doing the kind of work that I do. The concern is over what was lacking or underdeveloped (see Cohen's chapter in this volume). Of course, in the way of learning, it is never too late to learn something valuable. Remedial learning is due.

Ironically, I have been in the position of teaching what I wish I had learned earlier. (Perhaps the meaning of "ironically" here is that this is how this wonderful universe of ours mysteriously works.) Eighteen years of professorship has been my absolute best opportunity to learn, with and from my students (and, of course, my two children and my husband—my toughest personal "Zen masters"), what I didn't get to learn or learned only superficially during my own two decades of schooling. I had an "Aha!" moment realizing that the research topics that interested me and continue to interest me have to do with right-brain matters! To wit: how to see the world as alive, intrinsically worthy, sacred, and beautiful; how to act with kindness and compassion; how to be more empathic and intersubjective; how to *just be* with another human being, not falling constantly for the impulse to control, direct, shape, and solve problems; how to rest in beingness, without cogitation and agitation; how to realize the interdependence of all things and honour relationality; and so on. And most of all, I am learning the toughest lesson of loving boundlessly and immeasurably. Failures and mistakes abound in my learning.

These matters of the right brain that I am trying to learn cannot be approached simply or predominantly through the left-brain ways that I excel in. Has anyone succeeded in connecting with and loving another human being through arguing and debating? I grew up seeing my brilliant mother (who never went to school) outwitting everyone through her skills of verbal argument; I went for my Honours BA degree in Philosophy that was all about analysis and argumentation; I did my doctorate in Philosophy of Education. Again, I am not debating or criticizing the merit, power, and usefulness of my training. I have been handsomely rewarded for my training. But it is what is underdeveloped that I'm concerned about. My education was one-sided, literally. It privileged and prioritized the left side: the left brain that specialized in the brilliance of discursivity.

How many times, even in the last few days, have I caught myself arguing my way into trying to connect with people, especially my loved ones? A totally self-defeating approach! Unless we are talking about purely instrumental connection with people, connection here requires emotional attunement and resonance. Discursivity has little to do with such connection. Allow me to illustrate this: Suppose that your child comes to you in distress. She is upset and crying. The distress has discursive content, for sure: for example, being socially ostracized in school. What's your first response? If your first response is to suggest how she/we can solve that particular problem, then you are not connecting with your child. You have not emotionally attuned to and established a resonance with your child. You may have suggested the most brilliant plan for solving her problem, but it is not likely that your child will smile and say, "Oh, thank you! I now feel much better." If this were one of my girls (brilliantly perceptive and articulate), she might have said, "Look, Mom, are you a machine or what? I am emotionally hurt, and your

response is about solving my problem? It's not helpful! I want to know that you are *with me!*"

A couple of years ago, I was taking some counselling psychology courses. In my Counselling Skills course, I was role-playing a counsellor with my peer who played a client. She presented to me her troubling issue. The issue had to do with her job satisfaction and feeling caught between worries about financial security and unhappiness in doing what she does not enjoy. There were some other life issues that were part of her anguish.

My professor was emphatic: our job as a counsellor was not to solve clients' problems but to first and foremost listen to them deeply and emotionally connect with them. And yet, there I was, unconsciously falling right into the habit of problem solving and starting to tell my client what she could do to address her issues. In our counselling courses, we were reminded again and again that the cornerstone of counselling and psychotherapy is establishing an emotionally safe, supportive, and trusting counsellor-client relationship. Only then is the concrete work of helping our clients possible. I think educators need to be educated for the same understanding. Establishing a human relationship must happen before we can work with our students over whatever knowledge, information, and skills they are to learn.

It is not that there are no problems to solve and issues to address. The world and our personal lives are full of them. We have to wonder, though, how many of our problems and issues have sprung up precisely because of our inability to emotionally connect, and because we approach the world predominantly through the left brain. If many of our problems in the world fundamentally have to do with our lack of empathic understanding, kindness and compassion, acceptance of and respect for the other, then we must teach, alongside critical thinking and problem solving, how to foster and increase our capacity and ability to connect, attune, and resonate. And let me emphasize: such teaching must not be didactic and discursive, if it is not to be self-defeating and useless. But this also brings up the issue of how to undo the unconscious habits that keep us doing the same things again and again producing the same results we don't like or want. This brings me back to meditation or contemplative practices, and to pedagogy that is psychologically astute and attuned, all of which, in my view, need to be an integral part of education in all educational settings.

In the previous narrative, I said that I meditated for embodiment. In the present narrative, I will say that I meditate to develop witness consciousness. Both embodiment and witness consciousness are inseparable aspects of human beings' holistic, integrated consciousness. The witness consciousness has the ability to "see," be aware, and reflect on what's happening in the moment in the consciousness. For example, suppose I am livid with anger, and am about to explode, verbally or even physically. If my witness consciousness is sufficiently developed, and kicks in at the moment that I am about to explode, I may have an instant "stop" experience. I see, in my "mind's eye," what I am doing and what I am about to do. This awareness brings me to a pause. It is like someone inside me pushing the "pause" button. This "action" may be sufficient to discharge the

energy—locked up in anger manifest in the moment—and I may be brought down into a calmer state. In this calmer state, I can reflect, assess, evaluate, and maybe even plan a different choice of response and course of action.

If I am quite advanced—I'm working on it—in my cultivation of the witness consciousness, I might not even go all the way to a state of near explosion. I would be in constant touch with the vast ocean of my felt senses, and see what's happening there long before any of the subtle and dynamically shifting feelings could gather a charge and storm up onto the surface in manifest and active emotional forms, such as anger, hatred, frustration, envy, jealousy, greed, and so on. It is a very hopeful thought, to an educator like me, that the human consciousness can be cultivated to this degree, in the service of creating a more harmonious and flourishing life for all.

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