**Chapter 3**

* **Pedagogical Infusion of the Contemplative:**
* **SFU’s Contemplative Inquiry Master’s of Education Program in Canada**
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* **PREAMBLE**
* This chapter narrates a design story behind creating a graduate program that thematizes contemplative inquiry and practice as a pedagogic modality. It also offers a critical examination by the founding faculty of the program on what is understood as contemplative education. Finally, it details some of the key findings of student experience pertaining to the program. As a whole, this chapter is offered as an illuminating, and hopefully instructive, tale of one Canadian contemplative education graduate program in the context of a Master’s program.
* **The Call of Contemplative Education**
* One of the fastest growing movements in higher education today is the infusion of contemplative perspectives, approaches, and practices into programs and courses across the disciplines and degree levels in higher education (Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Bai & Scott, 2014). Post-secondary institutions across North America, from Ivy League universities to regional colleges, are implementing programs and courses that incorporate various forms of contemplative inquiry and practice (Stock, 2006). Yale, Harvard, Lesley, Brown, Swarthmore, Princeton, Naropa, Columbia, Penn State, and University of California are among the many institutions of higher education that have established programs or courses with a contemplative focus.[[1]](#footnote-1) Outside of higher education, from law to literature, from business to biology, from mathematics to medicine, and from physics to philosophy, it is difficult to find a discipline yet to explore the implications, synergies, and consequences of infusing contemplative perspectives and practices into courses of study (Bush, 2006; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).
* The field of education is no exception. According to a Canadian researcher and educator, Dr. Claudia Eppert of the University of Alberta conducted interviews and classroom observations with Canadian professors of education who were applying contemplative perspectives and practices to their classroom teachings in various ways. For example, Dr. Eppert at University of Alberta undertook a research is entitled “Bridging theory and practice: Contemplative peace and social/environmental justice pedagogies in higher education.” Another Canadian colleague, Dr. Susan Walsh, and her colleagues at Mount Saint Vincent University, created and taught contemplative education undergraduate and graduate courses. Dr. Deborah Orr of York University coordinates a website, “Mindfulness and Contemplative Education,”[[2]](#footnote-2) for Canadian educators, responding to growing interest in this area.
* The application of contemplative theories and practices are increasingly well established in K-12 education (Schonert-Reichel & Lawlor, 2010; Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010), in business (Gardiner, 2012; Petchsawang & Duchong, 2012), in leadership (Dollman & Bond, 2011; Ho, 2011; Murphy, 2011), social work (Hick & Bien, 2008), and healthcare (Chiesa & Serretti, 2010). Mindfulness and the Mind-UP™ program have been incorporated into a number of British Columbia school programs as part of the focus on self-regulated learning. An increasing number of teachers around the province of British Columbia, where the authors of this chapter reside and work, are incorporating these approaches into their teaching.
* Before proceeding further, it makes sense to define what is meant by the term “contemplative education.” Besides meditating, what else do we do if we are offering contemplative education? Is contemplation the same as meditation? A useful place to start is with Naropa University’s definition of contemplative education:

Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others and the web of life through the erudite academic practices of meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways (Contemplative Education, 2013).

Several inferences are made with the above definition. The first is that there is inherent value in combining the critical *third-person* mode of learning that characterizes most of higher education – that is, analysis of phenomena from a distance (i.e., scientific investigation that prizes objectivity) – with various modes of *first-person* learning (i.e., intuitive knowing that prizes subjectivity and can be expressed in first-person narratives, autoethnographies, and phenomenological accounts). Integrating objective and subjective ways of knowing in this way, as well as creating *second-person* learning or “intersubjectivity” (~~Bai, 2001;~~ Gunnlaugson, Scott, Bai, & Sarath 2017; Gunnlaugson, Scott, Bai, & Sarath (2018), can be a means of overcoming the alienating, disconnected limitations of the former and adding the integrative, holistic benefit of the latter (Bai, Scott, & Donald, 2009; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Roth, 2006; Zajonc, 2006). Contemplative education then is a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, one that acknowledges the epistemic validity of *first* and *second* person ways of knowing, in their dynamic relationship with *third* person ways of knowing. It also acknowledges and works with what is unconscious or transcendent, having a spiritual focus (Ergas, 2016a; Wilber 1999).

* This fusion of critical-rational-logical-computational ways of knowing (for the sake of convenience, call it the ‘left modality’ of knowing) with intuitive-perceptive-contemplative ways of knowing (call it the ‘right modality’), adds valuable “cognitive tools” to the intellectual repertoire (Miller, 2013). Relying, as we currently do in the academy, predominantly on the ‘left’ modality while marginalizing the ‘right’ to make sense of our world and its phenomena is to posit an incomplete picture of our intellectual landscape (McGilchrist, 2009).
* Contemplative education is also considered a powerful pathway to better understanding ourselves and others, arguably an increasingly critical quality to possess today. Empathy and compassion are, as validated by contemporary neurosciences (Kabat-Zinn & Davidson, 2012), among the fruits of contemplative practices. Zajonc (2006) points out that the cultivation of compassion for self as well as for others and the environment is an integral part of most contemplative traditions. The development of compassion in this way is not considered merely a useful by-product of contemplation to still the mind, but rather a critically important means of transcending the self-interest that limits our understanding of others. To quote Weisskopf (as cited in Harrington, 2002), “Knowledge without compassion is inhuman; compassion without knowledge is ineffective” (p. 18).An education that integrates the development of the mind with development of the heart in somatically grounded ways offers hope and peace to a world beset with conflicts and fundamentalism in various forms (Bai, Cohen & Scott, 2013).
* The practices and processes of contemplative education have also been noted as making vital contributions to intellectual development. Contemplative approaches to education enhance critical thinking skills, textual analysis and problem solving. Stock (2006) makes the point that philosophers, from Seneca to Montaigne, incorporated contemplative practices into their studies; both Hadot (1995; 2002) and Foucault (2001) make clear that contemplative practices were central to many of the ancient Greek academies. Zajonc (2006) and Hart (2004) go further to suggest that by bringing contemplative perspectives and approaches into the academy, we are in fact going full circle, to a time before logic and the natural sciences dominated and contemplative elements of intellectual inquiry were deemed the relatively exclusive domain of the monastics. This is not a sentimental yearning for the past, but rather, a call to temper the limitations of modernity, as Bush (as cited in Hill, 2006) commented,

The practical legacy of the modernist tradition has also been a compartmentalized, fragmented way of teaching and learning, dualistic alienation of body from mind, emotion from intellect, humans from nature, and art from science, whereas the basis of contemplative understanding is wholeness, unity and integration*.* (p. 1723)

* **Challenging Considerations**
* With all the compelling reasons described above for establishing a graduate program in the key of contemplative modality of education, we (Anderson, Bai, and Scott) at Simon Fraser University, however, still hesitated in simply launching into setting up a program, as we were concerned about unwittingly joining the growing social movement that popularized mindfulness but for instrumentalist ends. We took time in thinking through the aims and means of contemplative education, and we continue to critically examine the pedagogy involved, especially mindfulness practice for educational purposes. This section of the chapter shares with the reader our review of the literature in contemplative education and how the pedagogic and curricular design of our program reflects our critical response to the literature findings.
* The incorporation of contemplative practices in modern, mainstream, Western education has demonstrated numerous benefits across a variety of measures and outcomes involving human development, many of which have consequences for education (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008; Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013; Waters, Barsky, Ridd, & Allen, 2015). The popularity of mindfulness demonstrated by the recent mindfulness movement in Western societies such as Canada and the United States reveals an interest in new “technologies” (new to the West) in addressing everything from health and wellness to existential malaise. While mindfulness and other contemplative practices offer potential in transforming traditional education and curricula toward more holistic development of the heart-mind-body-spirit connection, caution and care must be exercised when considering the ethical and long-term consequences of these initiatives. That is to say, contemplative practices should not be haphazardly applied into programs merely to capitalize on their current popularity and perceived benefits, but rather, the implementation of such practices should be grounded in a philosophical and ethical foundation that justifies and articulates the reasons for their inclusion, while also informing the methods and principles that guide their application and practice.
* Taking a closer look at the rise in popularity of mindfulness offers a cultural commentary of sorts, elucidating a contextual analysis of modern society. Perhaps the recent interest in mindfulness represents a rejection of modernity—modernity being characterized by a preoccupation with novelty and progress. From this perspective, mindfulness is applied as a means to counter the accelerated speed and pitch at which life is experienced in modern, technologically-dependent societies. On the other hand, perhaps the reason why mindfulness is gaining popularity is precisely because there exists now a plethora of apps, devices, and other technologies that provide a gateway to contemplative practices such as meditation, previously thought to be esoteric, ritualistic, and antiquated. Facilitated by technology and vetted by modern science, this new interpretation of meditation has the effect of incentivizing and promoting meditation as an “activity” to pursue for instrumental means (e.g., reducing stress)—a development which (intentionally or unintentionally) solidifies dominant norms of neoliberal consumer capitalism. Or, perhaps the current popularity of mindfulness is the result of both of the above, along with other factors yet to be determined.
* An inquiry into the implications associated with mainstreaming contemplative practices such as mindfulness presents several concerns. One major question involves the veracity and source of the philosophical and ethical frameworks of the various contemplative practices being applied. For example, in the case of mindfulness, its historical form is rooted in Buddhism, which is markedly different from its contemporary form that is popular today (i.e., secular mindfulness). Not only do these differences manifest aesthetically, but philosophically and ethically, as well. This disparity between the historical and contemporary conceptualizations of mindfulness forms the crux of the growing critical responses to the proliferation of contemporary mindfulness in the mainstream. Referring to instrumental forms of mindfulness as “McMindfulness” (Forbes, 2016; Hyland, 2015a; Purser & Loy, 2013), many of these critiques of contemporary mindfulness suggest that its application is largely devoid of the ethical principles that originally grounded mindfulness within the Buddhist framework of the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths (DeMoss, 2011; Feuerstein, 2013). This obscuration or glossing over of foundational Buddhist principles has major implications, especially as mindfulness is applied in increasingly diverse fields, which include the military and business (Hyland, 2015b). Further critiques suggest that contemporary mindfulness supplants its Buddhist philosophical and ethical principles with neoliberal capitalist principles by shifting the locus of the practice from spiritual awakening to individualistic achievement (Dawson & Turnbull, 2006; Hyland, 2015b; Purser & Loy, 2013; Žižek, 2001).
* Conversely, some take a slightly more accommodating perspective toward the rise in popularity of contemporary mindfulness. O’Donnell (2016), suggests that strict adherence to Buddhist principles in the context of modern mindfulness may not be necessary, particularly in its application in education. This view posits that the aim of mindfulness in education is to cultivate creative pedagogies and responses to modern curricular challenges, rather than observing fidelity to tradition. Somewhat related is the claim by Wilson (2017), that mindfulness is influenced by and is a hybrid of all the cultures and traditions it encounters as it flows cross-culturally, demonstrated by his historical analysis of the development of mindfulness. Wilson (2017) illustrated the movement of mindfulness from East to West, then back East again, resulting in various mutations and metamorphoses that has shaped mindfulness at each step over the course of its development. The flexibility and ability of mindfulness to shape-shift and find itself in seemingly contradictory contexts such as the military and in business is not a phenomenon exclusive to modern times, demonstrated by various instances that illustrate historical precedence in the co-opting and modifications to mindfulness throughout its history. In this regard, Wilson commented:

There are no “traditional” Buddhisms if we take that label to mean “the way things have *always* been,” since all forms of religion and all components of each religion were at some point innovations and have continued to be modified (p. 61, emphasis in original).

* These opposing opinions between the critical and more moderate views of contemporary mindfulness demonstrate the precarious path that educators, administrators, and practitioners must traverse in navigating the terrain of applying contemplative practices in education. It is certainly important to be cognizant of potential pitfalls, such as cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, tokenization, and perpetuating oppression. At the same time, while the aforementioned concerns require serious consideration, they should not debilitate or deter authentic engagement in developing more holistic forms of education and curricula. In fact, it may be suggested that the need for contemplative practices is certainly warranted in modern contexts, characterized by distraction, disconnection, and fragmentation, which seems to be pervasive today.
* The increasing application of contemplative practices in mainstream institutions such as schools must be carefully considered, particularly as the growing popularity of these practices may lead to the denaturing of the very principles that root such practices to spiritual and holistic growth. The faculty members teaching in the Simon Fraser University Master of Education Contemplative Inquiry program are conscious of these challenges and are committed in applying the principles of reflexivity and praxis in all aspects of the program. This is an emergent, ongoing, iterative process, which involves communication, community, flexibility, creativity, and responsibility. This program represents a unique opportunity within the context of traditional public research universities, which are categorically under increasing pressure to conform to neoliberal economic and management policies, demonstrated by a fixation on performance, assessment, standardization, and accountability (Ergas, 2016b). With that in mind, this program is exceptional in that it serves as a container for contemplative pedagogies to be practiced and cultivated; practice, experience, and embodiment being paramount in order for the integration of contemplative practices to become a part of the students’ lived experience—the foundation of praxis. The courses and materials function as a “living laboratory” for the development of the whole self and the realization of the interconnectedness that we all share. The analogy of a container is apt, not only to illustrate the idea of a program providing a space which holds the collective spiritual and holistic growth of the students that are nurtured through contemplative practices, but also in the interpretation of a container as a vehicle which facilitates the transport of the contents inside to another place—the container being the program, and the transportation of the contents inside representing the journey of the students through the program.
* **Contemplative Inquiry Graduate Program at Simon Fraser University**
* As indicated, we took time in *contemplating* a program, which included research, consultation with other colleagues, program administrative team building, and reaching out to interested colleagues and potential applicants outside the academy. The following are the summary program goal statements of what our contemplative education program would be about:
* The MEd program in Contemplative Education (CE) will:
  + Help students grow in various ways: as leaders, educators, scholars, as students within an institution, as citizens, parents and caregivers, to be intellectually curious, broad-minded, emotionally balanced, somatically grounded, present, compassionate, and discerning human beings;
  + Represent multiple perspectives on CE, but within an enabling and robust theoretical framework that each instructor provides for her/his course;
  + Acknowledge that CE is on a continuum from supplementary to the prevailing paradigm, structure, and norms of the academy to transforming the academy (e.g., Wilber’s (2006) and Sarath’s (2014) notions of the “integral CE” model);
  + Expose students to the idea of a “contemplative construction of reality” (Adelman, 2014);
  + Allude to the current, universally established realities of university life and how CE can provide some “relief” from increased anxiety among students, the frantic, frenzied pace, questions regarding both the instrumental and philosophical value of current programs; impact of technology – the “age of distraction” issues; multiple, potentially competing epistemologies, etc.;
  + Be dedicated to *praxis*: a focus of theory into practice, reflection on practice, and practice into theory as an overarching ethical manifestation of *phronesis*;
  + Provide a holistic approach to CE, where somatic, aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual development would be promoted through a variety of curricular and pedagogical approaches, including relational pedagogy, arts-based practices, and field trips to a variety of relevant sites, including nature;
  + Be “big tent” style, in that all instructors and students can see themselves being part of the program (yet still have a coherent conceptual framework).
* Additionally, we offered the following as *Teaching and Learning Objectives*:
* The MEd in Contemplative Education (CE) will:
  + Holistically enhance students’ overall experience in university;
  + Provide students with opportunities to further develop their “contemplative capacity” in an age of distraction;
  + Help students develop their “sustainable selves” (Adelman, 2014);
  + Enable students to deepen, extend and refine their leadership perspective and skills;
  + Enable students to develop a CE “disposition” that contributes to their educational philosophy and practice;
  + Be founded on a robust, broad, deep, and coherent conceptual framework that builds on the knowledge, wisdom, and understandings developed so far in the CE field.
* A graduate degree in contemplative education can help ground the practice of professionals in a broader historic, epistemic, cultural and social context. With a solid theoretical scaffolding, teachers, administrators and professionals in other fields can develop curricular and pedagogical tools that go far beyond packaged, heavily promoted programs to a defensible scholarly and holistically grounded conceptual framework. As well, a graduate program in education provides unprecedented opportunities for educators to infuse their leadership with increased compassion, heightened discernment, advanced skills in critical analyses, and a more holistic, integrative approach to the complex environment of education today.
* In sum, we made a case that our proposed program would provide an innovative approach to transforming the educational experience for students of all ages and professional backgrounds. Our program proposal was well received internally and in the broader community. The combination of a substantial volume of relevant research and a cadre of well-established faculty, each with their own sustained contemplative practices, assured the proposal was given an encouraging endorsement from the Graduate Program committee.
* Three years later, in September 2017, the third cohort of Contemplative Inquiry MEd students started their program. At this point of writing this chapter, we have several research materials generated from working with the first two cohorts comprising forty-some students. A few words of acknowledgement and appreciation for the research supports we received are due here. At Simon Fraser University, we have a research unit whose mandate is specifically to foster teaching in higher education, in particular, at our own university: Institute for the Study of Teaching and Learning in the Disciplines (ISTLD). This institute provides generous grants every year to SFU professors who wish to study their own teaching practice, for the purpose of curricular and pedagogic improvement and innovation. So far, we have received two grants from ISTLD, and we have been documenting and analyzing our findings.[[3]](#footnote-3) Before reviewing some of those findings, we offer a brief overview of the structure of the two-year program.
* **The Infusion Model of Programming**
* From the outset in designing our program, we were clear that we wanted a program that “looks like” a regular Master of Education program belonging to a cluster of programs called “Curriculum and Instruction” that has been part of SFU Faculty of Education for a few decades. The educational intent and learning objectives for Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) is basically to help and support educational practitioners, whether in K-12 system or in other organizations that provide professional development, upgrading, and personal growth. As such, graduate courses that are used in C&I programs, of which there are many, all have specific educational content: for instance, educational philosophy, curriculum theory and planning, curriculum implementation, assessment, pedagogy, and so on. We, the planning team, wanted the courses[[4]](#footnote-4) taught in our program to have these topics and themes covered. In other words, the content or subject matter of the coursework in our program is not in and of itself contemplative. Rather, we wanted these courses to be “infused” with the modality of contemplative education. In other words, what we wanted is a marriage of educational content (what) and contemplative process (how). Or, put another way, we wanted to promote contemplative ways (approaches, manners) of studying and learning everything.
* This idea of infusing the curriculum with contemplative ways is very important to us in our program in terms of creating a culture shift. As educators, we see our work of teaching to be a form of social activism and ethical leadership, and bringing about necessary social change in any substantial or enduring ways is essentially a matter of supporting people to engage in transforming their heart-mind-body-spirit. This is where contemplative pedagogy comes in. The contemplative pedagogy helps to set up suitable conditions of transformation for students and supports their capacity building.
* **Contemplative Pedagogy**
* What does contemplative pedagogy that we practice in our program look like? Since, essentially, we are talking about people’s experience in two cohorts over a period of four years, there is nearly an infinite number of narratives about the experience. Of course, we can capture here only a tiniest fraction. There are, however, some notable pedagogical structures, moves, and gestures, which we attempt to capture and depict below.
* **Creation of Discourse Community and Learning through Dialogue**
* Relationality is the bedrock of our program. Contemplative education is a form of holistic education that recognizes the principle of holism and interconnectivity governing at all levels and spheres of human lives. The explicit contribution that the contemplative infusion makes to holistic education is the method; that is, it is through contemplative ways that we integrate what has been traditionally fragmented and compartmentalized into four dimensions: *mind* (the intellectual), *body* (the somatic or carnal), *heart* (the affective), *spirit* (the energetics and aesthetics). As we noted previously, of these dimensions that make the whole person, the intellectual was prioritized in schooling, while the other three were neglected, if not denigrated. Contemplative pedagogy deconstructs such prioritization and seeks to integrate all four (and other) dimensions.
* The way that our program starts off this integration pedagogy is through the practice of “check-in” in a circle of participants (students and instructors). When our students are introduced to this practice, not just as a one-time ceremony, but as a regular structure for creating a discourse community and for basing learning on dialogue, they are at first rather surprised and even find it uncomfortable. Yet with time, this discomfort shifts to curiosity and engagement, which invites creating a deeper opportunity to inspire a grounding of all four dimensions (mind, body, heart, spirit). This further infuses into the way in which students dialogue with their reflective processing and academic output (papers, projects, presentations).
* One of the authors of this chapter, Meena Mangat, who graduated from our program and is a schoolteacher, speaks about the traditional pedagogy and its reproduction through teacher education in third person to capture the sense of distance and objectification that her educational experiences produced:

She had been a student of the system since before she could remember any other story. Each walk into school filled her with a learned sense to appease, to separate, and to dualize. She would sit quietly in the back as the teacher taught HIStory. Four rows, desk behind desks, student’s faces lost in the linear space. No dialogue. No electricity. The teacher continued to speak of Imperial wars and Western wins. Of trench warfare and great victories. Of struggles caused by the 1% and wins ingrained by the nostalgic narrative. She would soon learn to align herself with the rigidity, the method, the doing—doing—doing. For years, decades, she and the system would concern themselves with taking notes: bullet points, double-spaced, memorized. Stop, repeat.

* No electricity. No relationship. No being.

With this doing—doing—doing, she continued to do the teacher development program. To mimic how the system had taught—to teach the same things, the same way. To personify the “obsessment” (obsession with assessment) narrative, as Heesoon coined the term in class. To then spill that narrative onto her students. To sew herself to outcome.

* Meena further spoke of her experience in the program when she came into it two years ago. Again, she spoke in third person, and this time, she does so to represent a sense of witnessing, as well as the aforementioned disconnectedness that the “system” engenders:

She had heard about the Mindfulness Movement, yet feared that it too would be swallowed by the compartmentalization that our school systems had deemed as a prerequisite for application. She had searched for the container, the deeper dialogue, the safe space. She would try to bring in mindfulness activities, methods, chimes, protocols, breathwork. And although an opening was activated by her spark of inquiry, a craving for an authentic transformation remained.

She considered returning to the system to search—to find a place, a method, a protocol. A way to fix the complications of being.

With this mindset, she applied to the Contemplative Inquiry Masters of Education Program, expectant of another “doing to ... filling with.”

This space of familiarity was further ruptured through the initial weeks of the program.

A program that was quickly realized as aiming to create spaces that embrace the contemplative as a way of life through check-ins, meditational practices, and responsive care of the whole student—the whole teacher.

A program that, instead of objectifying contemplative practices, infused them organically through the diverse traditions of each unique instructor.

The authenticity of each instructor as a contemplative practitioner also allowed her to infuse herself into the praxis of a contemplative—unlearning and relearning all the ways in which she had cultivated herself as a teacher, as a student, as a human member of the world.

* Another student in the program, Sophia wrote about her intentions and experiences as follows:

When I initially applied to this program, over two years ago, I was interested in meditation and had long explored contemplative approaches, such as yoga and journaling, both in my personal life and Teacher-Librarian life. I work at an all-girls’ independent school, where students are often under intense pressure to succeed, within the narrowest confines of the word, or to present themselves in a certain, at times equally narrow, way. Teachers are not immune to these standards. Some of my students would benefit from strategies to reduce stress and develop a more balanced approach to school and life. I had personal motives as well. My family had been devastated by serious illness over the past 10 years and I felt isolated and numbed by the positive thinking platitudes that dominate much of our discourse on health or lack of it. After discussing the program with Dr. Bai, I applied, hoping to gain a better understanding of some of the personal contemplative practices I use and how I could use them to help my students.

This program has changed me so much that only two years after writing my letter of intent, I would now write something totally different.

For the following subsections, we share with our reader our findings from researching student experience. These findings are narrated in terms of themes.

* ***Turning the Ordinary into the Extraordinary***
* In looking at what our students have to say about the transformative results of their learning in our two-year program, the theme we describe as “turning the ordinary into the extraordinary” emerged strongly, and we attribute this phenomenon to the infusion model of programming that we spoke of earlier. As we may recall, integration of all dimensions of human beingness, specifically, the four dimensions of mind, body, heart, and spirit, is the foundation of our program, and the infusion model is a particularly effective pedagogic method. By infusing the courses with contemplative ways of inquiry and practice, all learning activities we typically undertake in graduate courses, such as reading, writing, researching, and discussion, became contemplative activities. We now continue with Meena’s narrative about her experience with the infusion of the contemplative in her academic courses:

She continued with the program while expanding her holistic vision of progress and success. With guidance from her instructors and colleagues, she began to question her role as teacher, and the academy’s role in the education system.



Instead of enduring traditionally compartmentalized reading, thinking, writing activities, assignments, or papers and exams, the program allowed for reimagining schooling as a way of being—a way of dialoguing with thought, pedagogy and method. A way of sensing one Self in the readings, reflections, projects and presentations. This reimagining created space for questioning the narratives of assessment, academic rigor, and collaboration.

With this support, she shifted from completing and submitting work to experiencing and creating work. She did this with critical storytelling, radical reflections, life writing, dialogue, art, embodied performance, critical analysis, and so forth.

Through guidance, the work began to emerge from places of radical authenticity and critical dialogue. Perhaps what struck her the most was how the program acted as a sort of decolonization—a rewriting of academy, structure, teacher, and student. Another space to authentically—safely—holistically experience and inquire into academia.

It is through the teachings available for mind, body, heart and spirit in the Contemplative Inquiry Program, that she was able to uncover a deeper sense of committed relationality to other, to the world and to Self (Bai, Cohen, & Scott, 2013).

* Sophia wrote about her realizations and understandings gained through curriculum and pedagogy devoted to and infused by contemplative inquiry:
* The challenge is describing my evolution to you. I think that at the heart of this program is interconnectedness. Through readings, writing and discussions, this Master of Education in Contemplative Inquiry has revealed the practices I need to undertake to balance my interior life with my exterior life, or my feelings, thoughts and intuitions, with my work, home and family. I honor the harmony of science and art, poetry and data, written and abstraction.

Christina, a student deeply committed to social justice and pedagogies of liberation, wrote:

The MEd in Contemplative Inquiry was far richer than I could have imagined when I applied. My experience of this program is one deeply rooted in compassion and healing. This program was a soothing balm to the parts of me that have been harmed, shut down and silenced by our educational institutions. With focus on the inner life, on connection with self, others and the earth, on wholeness, and on listening it is subtly subversive to the ways our minds and hearts have been colonized by systems that force us to rush, to life from the shoulders up, and to seek competition rather than collaboration. This program is simultaneously rooted in the reality of our broken world and deeply respectful to what is possible.

* Here, many themes germane to the contemplative pedagogy as envisioned in our program emerged, one of which is the integration of the academic and intellectual with other human dimensions, such as the aesthetic, somatic, imaginative, and spiritual. As Meena, Sophia and Christina’s narratives illustrate, the contemplative is not antithetical to the intellectual. In fact, it is our pedagogic conviction that contemplative practice provides a needed “space” or “safe enough” container within which transformation can take place. Some of us in the program also used an evocative metaphor of ‘alchemical cauldron’ to name this transformative space (Walsh & Bai, 2017).
* Transformation of the kind we are seeking—namely, gentle but radical, subtle but enduring—and integration of the inner with the outer changes, needs a ‘held space,’ a psychotherapeutic term denoting an intersubjective space that is energetically warm, caring, supportive, steadfast, trust-promoting, encouraging, and healing. Most of us enter such space with various psychic wounds from the past: schooling that was meaningless, stressful, even hurtful; home and family environment that was relationally damaging and even scary; personal relationships, including intimate relationships that were difficult and even abusive. Given such wounds, it takes a held space that promotes empathy, compassion, and encouragement and that was addressing and re-dressing fundamental human psychic needs for connection, belonging, attunement, trust, and love (Heller & LaPierre, 2012). Without such qualities, we cannot open up, trust, take risks, and be vulnerable. When such qualities are not fostered and increasingly augmented, participants remain in defensiveness. Why would they not? Having been wounded and suffered, one puts up defense structures around self, and attempts to appear well protected and invincible. Practice of empathy, care, and compassion is not something merely ‘nice’ and ‘wonderful’ to do but is absolutely essential to the contemplative ways.

***Deep Listening***

* In our Contemplative Education program, we practice deep listening as a basic practice. One of the students in the second cohort of our contemplative inquiry program, Sophia said this about deep listening:

Together with my fellow cohort members, we explored what does it mean to listen, to really listen, to the point that I believe it would be possible to spend all of elementary school working on listening and nothing else. I understand the significance of giving someone your undivided attention. This big concept manifests itself in every little interaction in my library. Really listening has opened me up to stories. I have learned more about the lives of people around me, at my work and in my community, than I ever imagined, just because I hold the space to listen and honour. In the library, our main currency is stories, but I now give equal weight to the stories that walk into my library and check out the printed ones.

In our program, we linked listening to ontology. We can listen to beings in ways that are validating and celebrating of their existence. Conversely, through inattentive listening, or listening with disrespect and dismissal, we can invalidate the other’s existence, thereby condemning him/her to the periphery of existence. The act of creating a space in which deep listening can take place is hence an ethics practice, committed to non-harming and promoting good. Therefore, we see our contemplative education program as an ethics project, and our work for this program, social activism.

***Inner and Outer Isomorphism***

* Sophia, who above spoke of deep listening, named our work in this program, “the quietest revolution” for both students and teaching faculty. It is a quiet revolution in the sense that it is taking place in the interiority of our consciousness and our personhood. But because our inner life is reflected in our outer life, the work we do in our interiority has a revolutionary potential. Sophia stated:

The ongoing effort required to create this environment is enough work for a lifetime. It is the quietest revolution possible. But the commitment is large, and practice makes you understand the central lesson: there is no real change beyond changing yourself. Once I really understood what the readings were suggesting and focused on this life project of personal change, there was a corresponding shift around me as new opportunities presented themselves.

To genuinely listen to and see other people, I have to treat myself with the same respect. I am not just less judgmental with others but also with myself. I added Loving Kindness meditation to my meditation practice.

Helen, another student, works in the mental health field. She added:

* For me, the program was a process of distillation—my essence; who I am, has become clearer and more concentrated. I have become more connected to my roots and more aware of those experiences that have informed my worldview, including my blind spots. I feel more connected to those around me and braver in approaching those whose values and opinions I do not share. I have thoroughly enjoyed exploring different ways of learning and knowing. I have rediscovered my love of the Arts and embraced them unabashedly as my contemplative practice. I share a bond with my fellow students and lecturers that is hard to explain. I like to think we created a micro-climate where diversity is appreciated and understood as strength and beauty. My hope is that we will each reach out to those we teach and learn from, so that we may recreate those strong attachments in an effort to share what we experienced and to spread peacefulness, compassion and joy.

The integration of inner and outer is, as we recall, part of the contemplative education’s multidimensional integration project. Sophia illustrated this integration as follows:

Through readings, writing and discussions, this Master of Education in Contemplative Inquiry has revealed the practices I need to undertake to balance my interior life with my exterior life, or my feelings, thoughts and intuitions, with my work, home and family. I honour the harmony of science and art, poetry and data, written and abstraction.

The readings and ‘watchables’ balanced scientific research and the personal experiences of a variety of people. Statistics, metissage, brain scans and poetry were given equal coverage. The assignments were often reflective, where we could explore this recalibration of ourselves. Where we could share the thinking necessary to balance our inner and outer lives.

* Shauna, a school teacher passionately committed to performative arts, wrote of her own integration:
* A theme that has arisen many times throughout my journey is the congruency of the interior and exterior as an expression of authenticity. [One] is propelled to act from a deep calling, an expression of authenticity. I continue to explore internal callings as I develop a relationship with myself—my whole self—body, spirit, mind and heart. The [efforts I make] are expressions of my truth and this truth permeates my gestures, actions, words, and intentions in the form of embodiment. With every [effort] that is shared, I hope there are ripples emanating from each act. I try not to be concerned about the outcomes. Instead, I do my best to focus on my commitment in honoring my interiority and trusting in the process.
* In another instance, she wrote:
* Throughout my journey, I’ve come to understand my authentic self by developing greater capacities for intentional presence, gratitude, empathy and compassion. In this program, what began as an exploration of intrapersonal and interpersonal connection through a research-based lens has evolved into a way of seeing and being reflecting a tapestry of Indigenous wisdom, contemplative embodiment and artistic expression*.*
* ***Walking the Talk***
* When our inner and our outer come into alignment more and more through their integration, which is another way of saying living with integrity, we manifest that by “walking the talk.” Many of our students in the program commented that the professors who taught in our program were walking the talk. Indeed, in creating an instructional team for this program, we were mindful that the professors who teach in our program would need to model through their own life examples the kind of multidimensional integration that we wanted our students to achieve. Not as “perfect” models but as learners who are actively engaged in the cultivation of integration in their lives, and who would be accompanying and supporting our students to do the same. Sophia, noting the power of teacher modeling in students’ learning and transformation, confirmed: “Our professors truly embodied the approach they advocated.” This is the highest validation that we the instructors received from our students.
* Shauna wrote:
* I’ve noticed that the ripples of influence sometimes reveal themselves in profound ways when least expected. This year, as an educator, I’ve felt vulnerable embodying my truth given that I was teaching grade 9 students who were not always the most open-minded bunch. I began to question my way of being in the classroom this year, wondering if I had created any ripples in my students. Then one of my students who had struggled emotionally and academically in many of her classes left a note on my desk before leaving for the summer.
* In a letter, she wrote:

This English class has changed me so much. I was lost and confused and didn’t know who I was, but now, thanks to you and your huge heart, I got the chance to find my voice for the first time. Now I know what I’m passionate about and know that English is not just about grammar, spelling and formal stuff. I learned how much my voice matters and I got to truly be myself in a class without caring what other people think of me. I realize my worth.

During the pursuit of my truth, many have planted profound seeds—Heesoon Bai highlighting the nature of the Animate and revealing the beauty of humility, Dave Chang and Heesoon Bai illuminating the magnitude of the Immeasurables, Laurie Anderson embodying the value of embodiment as our greatest gift and contribution, Wanda Cassidy showing the importance of care and self-compassion, Vicki Kelly enlightening us in discovering our divine signatures while revealing the wisdom that exists in nature, Charles Scott’s unrelenting and inspiring trust and contagious joy in our processes of becoming, Celeste Snowber[[5]](#footnote-5) inspiring me to develop an enriched practice integrating writing and dance and my beautiful classmates creating a space optimal for soulful growth through utter vulnerability and authenticity. I have been changed in immeasurable, intangible ways that I cannot fully describe. In hindsight, it is as though foundational philosophies and practices found me along the way. I merely showed up for the ride with an open heart and mind. Because of the richness of this journey, I am now exploring the intersection of the contemplative inquiry and artistic expression through the PhD program in Arts Education. This program has left an indelible print and has fuelled my desire for life long learning and exploration. I am utterly grateful for the depth, breadth and transformative nature of this journey.

* ***Connectivity, Interdependence***
* As we discussed, contemplative education serves and contributes to holistic education. While we can say that contemplation is in and of itself a wonderful way of being and living, as an educational paradigm, it accomplishes many educational goals, such as integrating the multitude of fragmentation, dualities, disconnections, and resulting hurts and wounds in all spheres of humanity. It is illuminating to recall that the etymology of ‘whole’ has to do with healing. When the integrity of any whole is broken, wounding takes place, and it demands healing. Or, to look at this process from the end of results, namely healing: when we are healed, we see the whole, which includes the self being an integral part of the whole. This is, by the way, the Zen enlightenment experience celebrated by Zen poets and philosophers: being part of, not apart from, the whole cosmos, the whole of reality. It is hence with a deep gratitude and awed appreciation that we read Sophia’s statement here:

When I applied to the program, I thought of myself as one person, on my own. Now, I recognize all the interconnectedness that holds my life up. I am part of a tribe, part of a beautiful city, part of a school library, part of a cohort, part of the wind that blows and part of the falling sakura petals on my way to work.

* While “enlightenment” may sound too grand and transcendental, and hence we tend to think enlightenment is what happens to “those holy others,” we recognize that our students who have gone through the program came many steps closer to “enlightenment” and in fact, were having many moments of enlightenment. Listening to Sophia’s reflection above, we consider it a testimonial statement about her in-the-moment experience of enlightenment.
* ***“Life as It Is, Not as I Want It to Be”***
* The existential philosopher and therapist/healer, the Buddha, taught that the origin of suffering is the gap between life as is and life as one wants it to be. Painful disappointment, frustration, anger, and even associated emotions, such as shame and grief, all surface up in this gap. When such gap disappears, and “life as is” and “life as I want it to be” become better integrated, and we are freed from the agonizing grip of personal suffering. Ungripped, we breathe more easily, can look around and see, with eyes of awe, wonder, and curiosity, the vast world around us, and, most of all, we see ourselves as part of, rather than apart from, this complexly interconnected world. We offer the following statements from Sophia as an illustration of the narrowing gap:

I understand what makes my story unique and where it overlaps with the stories of everyone else. I understand my life as it is, not as I want it to be. I don’t push away experiences that are painful. I walk right into them, knowing that praxis, embodiment and connection will hold me up if and when I falter. More importantly, I can support my students the same way. I encourage them to listen more and think more. My main focus in life and work is modelling this approach to being. Depth and reflection become central to every activity as contemplative approaches permeate everything*.*

* **Postamble**
* At the time of writing this chapter (Fall 2017) the third cohort in the Contemplative Inquiry Master’s degree is underway. The response from the 40 or so graduates of the program so far has been uniformly positive, with adjectives like “transformative,” “life-changing,” “remarkable” used to describe their experiences. The faculty in the program provided their own uniform response: not only had the students in the program matched and invariably exceeded the quality of academic work demonstrated by graduate students in other programs, but that the experience of teaching in the Contemplative Inquiry program represented one of their most rewarding and enriching professional and personal experiences for them. These unanimous and common responses from faculty and staff alike suggest that this program is tapping into a largely unmet need in educational institutions, namely, programs that acknowledge and validate the profoundly powerful fusion of our inner and outer lives. Contemplative inquiry and practices offer a path to a deeper engagement with learning, closer connection to self and others, and a compassionate disposition conducive to positive social change. Further research into the holistic efficacy of this program should help determine how sustained these developments are, and how they contribute to enhancing the lives of students and the teachers who serve them.

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1. For a listing of programs, see this page from the ACMHE: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/resources/study> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See <http://www.contemplativeeducation.ca/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Current research involves analyzing data from the students and their work through the lens of transformative learning theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Here are the six courses that are required for students to take in our Contemplative Inquiry program: EDUC 833-Seminar in Social and Moral Philosophy and Education; EDUC 816-Developing Educational Programs and Practices for Diverse Educational Settings; EDUC 820-Current Issues in Curriculum and Pedagogy; EDUC 843-Embodiment and Curriculum Inquiry; EDUC 823- Curriculum and Instruction in an Individual Teaching Specialty. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Chang is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at SFU. He worked as a Site Assistant for the second cohort of the Contemplative Inquiry program, supporting them with their academic needs and also helping the teaching faculty. Laurie Anderson, Charles Scott, Vicki Kelly, Wanda Cassidy, and Celeste Snowber are faculty instructors who teach within the Contemplative Inquiry program. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)