

# TAOIST PEDAGOGY IN EDUCATION

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

At best the current education systems in North America are a rational enterprise. At worst the current educational systems are also a rational enterprise. In contemporary education a profound force is driving an ever increasing level of bureaucracy, regimentation, and order. The banking model, factory model, and technocratic metaphor of education are all being accentuated by the recent fascination with computer technology and cyberspace. A prominent result has been a standardization of education apparent in curriculum and teaching approaches. In the face of this standardization there is now more than ever a need for philosophies and practices that evoke inventive styles of learning. A Taoist pedagogy of education offers a new perspective through its recognition of *yu-wei* (logical action) in relation to *wu-wei* (non-action) and the need for balance between these two kinds of thinking. Several possibilities and alternatives are demonstrated in a case study of Inglenook Community High School, which is examined through a Taoist perspective on knowledge, educational resources, teacher-student relationships, and meditative possibilities.

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# Chapter 1

## Foreword

My greatest fear is that the word school might become monosemantic, which means "a word with only one definition". The definition, I fear, looks like this: students are wired to a central computer answering questions in uniform response at the exact same time with the exact same set of answers. In schools where learning is reduced to empirically verifiable propositions, creative, ethical, emotional and natural knowledge will be abandoned. Instead of concentrating on people, communities and learning, schools have focused more and more on procedures and predictable routines. From my own teaching experience, and twenty years working with alternative and "at-risk" youth, I know the intelligence and exceptional talents that many of these students possess. Rigid structural and linear approaches to knowledge attainment do not appeal to these students' desire to learn. What is missed is that, in many ways, these youth have an incredible ability to question the worth and value of routines and procedures. It has been my experience that when placed in a learning environment that values their knowledge and interests, these students can thrive.

For decades, educational theorists and practitioners have pointed to the problems of procedure and mechanical reasoning in educational institutions. Despite these traditions of concern, there has been a recent growth in

standardized testing, a globalization of curriculums, and an expansion of educational bureaucracies. For example, currently in British Columbia, there has been the introduction of grade ten standardized testing as part of new graduation requirements. This increase in educational process is only one of many possible examples of how schooling is moving towards a single modality. In response, a few schools, an occasional teacher, a handful of academics and a great number of students have been demanding innovative forms of schooling. It is in these diverse practices that hope rests for a return to the idea of school as having multiple definitions.

## **Introduction**

The premise of this thesis is to set out and to examine the possibility of initiating a Taoist Pedagogy. The following chapters will explore potential pedagogical principles, methodology and the case study of an alternative high school. However, before entertaining these discussions, it is necessary to answer the question, Why do we need this perspective? In reply, four educational theorists are presented as an attempt to locate Taoist Pedagogy in contemporary educational discourse. The first of these four authors is Ivan Illich whose notion of the factory model of education sets the groundwork for each of the following theorists: Paulo Friere who proposed the banking concept of education, Elliot Eisner who identified hidden curriculums, and Neil Postman who is concerned with the expansion of technocratic reasoning. From these authors, four principles of education are identified as contemporary concerns. In order to bring these

discussions together, each are examined through the theoretical case study of cyber-schools. Discussions surrounding the construction of knowledge, the influence of learning relationships, the value of educational resources, and the mechanization of educational time are current educational concerns which suggests the principles of a Taoist Pedagogy.

Over the last two decades, the dominant metaphors for the critique of educational institutions have been the factory model and the banking concept of education. The first metaphor, the factory model, places students, teachers and knowledge in an assembly line of production, a perspective which arose in the early 1970's. During this period the work of Ivan Illich was paramount as he defined schools as factories which turned learning into a commodity.<sup>1</sup> As a metaphor, students are the raw product and they are molded according to factory standards. The idea that schools are treated as factories has become even more explicit over time. Larger high schools across North America now service several thousand students at a time. In most districts, the trend has continued to be for larger and larger sites of educational production. These sites of information manufacturing have expanded their factory tendencies beyond the scope of Illich's initial analysis. Since he proposed the factory model, a profound change has occurred in the economies of the western world. Factories have left the Americas at a rapid pace and in their place high technology and service sector jobs have emerged. Despite the economic shift to smaller work place sites, schools have continued to follow the practices of factory education. Even though most students will never see a factory, let alone work in one, this dislocation between economic reality and

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<sup>1</sup> Eisner, Elliot. *Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. pg. 77

educational practice appears to be expanding.

In many ways, another metaphor for education, the banking concept, has more relevance to contemporary economics. Paulo Freire initially invoked the bank as a metaphor for defining the relationships between students and their teachers. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire outlines the banking model of education as one where:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his [her] choice, and the students comply
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he set in opposition to the freedom of the students
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.<sup>2</sup>

With time, the processes that Freire envisioned have become more and more entrenched. The current movement towards standardization has enabled the banking model of student/teacher relationships to be widely embraced particularly,

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<sup>2</sup> Freire, Paulo. *The Paulo Freire Reader*. pg. 69

through the increase in large scale testing practices. In addition, educational attainment and lack of academic success are also examined as transactions. With little regard for the students' desires and hopes, routinized processes are prescribed and technical solutions are advocated. In schools, these dictates of economic reason are becoming highly transparent and have been the subject of much study based on Freire's inspirations.

Like Freire, Eliot Eisner also points to a plague of economic and technologically driven thinking in schools in his book *Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. In the chapter entitled "The Three Curricula That All Schools Teach" he outlines educational practices which permeate educational institutions. He adds the idea of "hidden curriculums" to the pervasiveness of mechanical thought in schools. His claim is that the architecture and the internal structures of schools are just as important as the curriculum, buildings, furnishings, color schemes, bell systems, and class arrangement which all work together to create a "hidden curriculum". Eisner's conclusion is that a tragedy is occurring in the modern school. He surmises that a common model of education dominates contemporary schooling and is designed to promote repetitive tasks, efficient thought, and compliant behavior. For Eisner, the impact of the "hidden curriculum" and large scale standardization is to discourage initiative taking and to deny what it means to be fully human.

Neil Postman, in his book, *Technopoly*, has considerations which parallel the concerns of Illich, Freire and Eisner. His perspective is that North America has fallen into a near religious devotion of technology and that this belief system is responsible for drastic changes in social and political institutions. Postman's

*Technopoly* describes a culture transfixed with the rules and dictates of technological innovation and his analysis has a distinct commonality with the banking and factory models of education. In a Technopoly, people place technical calculations and considerations before human interests. Just as Freire, Eisner, and Illich lamented the expansion of instrumental thinking, Postman has similar concerns:

the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital source of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living.<sup>3</sup>

What is unique about Postman's theory is that he applies his analysis to the digital era.

In *Technopoly*, Postman recognizes how central computers are to the reconstruction of our social frameworks. As evidence, he outlines how many current educational practices would not be plausible without the advent of computer technology and that these changes have had a profound impact on how we view education.

It is important to remember what can be done without computers, and it is also important to remind ourselves of what may be lost when we do use them.<sup>4</sup>

The concern for Postman is that rather than creating new ways of understanding, technocratic school systems have had a tremendously narrowing effect on human possibilities and potential. Through regulation and standardization, schools have reduced the possibility for natural human learning desires and creativity. He

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<sup>3</sup> Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. pg. xii

<sup>4</sup> Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. pg. 120

further argues that with the influence of technological thought, school curriculums, grading mechanisms, and learning processes are surrendering our diverse cultural experiences to the demands of technocratic reasoning.

Together Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, Eliot Eisner, and Neil Postman portray a Western educational system transfixed by a mechanical paradigm.<sup>5</sup> Illich recognizes the movement of factory driven processes into educational institutions. Freire identifies the importance of human relationships in a banking model and fears an extension of economically driven thought. Eisner returns to the factory model and explores hidden curriculums that result from the structural resources used in education. Postman's analysis points to the growth of technology and the development of a culture which reveres these innovations. At the center of each of these arguments rests the idea that instrumental tools, both mechanical and social, are having a profound impact on the western world and our education systems.

Currently, a new kind of machine is dominating the technological paradigm and is having a phenomenal impact on the restructuring of social and economic processes. The advent of cyberspace through global networking technologies has begun a new era which extends the influence of computer systems as a worldwide instrument for monitoring information and knowledge networks. While computers can contain a wide range of information, there are certain kinds of knowledge which are particularly easy to manipulate in cybernetic systems. In

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<sup>5</sup> Western in this context does not specifically relate to a particular geographical area. Instead, it refers to the global spread of economic, political, social and educational values which have been claimed to have a "Western" origin.

Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus's book *Mind Over Machine* they describe computer systems as preferring mathematical and sequential knowledge such as:

hypothesis formulation and testing, control of variables, estimation, logical deduction, combinatorics, data collection, data organization, decision making, and pattern identification.<sup>6</sup>

Essentially, information that is technical and calculable is ideal for computer systems and is expanded by cybernetic processes. Cyberspace can contain images of art, passionate e-mails and information that is not necessarily calculable or technical. However, cyberspace could never recreate the feeling of rain on a face, the intensity of human to human eye contact, or the grandness of an art gallery. In *The Child and The Machine*, Alison Armstrong and Charles Casement explain that computer programs are restricted to standardized and predetermined responses.<sup>7</sup> The result is that everything in cyber-space is detached from its natural environment and decontextualized through a restricted number of signs and symbols. While this distinction between the abilities of cyber-space and the realities of the world should be left in the hands of science fiction writers, for this discussion of contemporary schooling it is the phenomenal ability of cyber-space to reinforce and accelerate the practices of standardized reason, the banking concept of education, and the factory model which is of the utmost concern.

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<sup>6</sup> Dreyfus, Herbert L. and Stuart E. Dreyfus. *Mind Over Machine*. pg. 126

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, Alison and Charles Casement. *The Child and The Machine*. pg. 202



## Cyber-Schools

With the dramatic influence of cyberspace in economic, political and social realms, it might be argued that schools are now under tremendous pressure to produce students capable of working with cybernetic information systems. A hidden influence in this process, comes from the way that cyberspace links school systems across the globe. In an educational culture transfixed with instrumental tools, cyberspace expands the comparative possibilities of educational databases and provides a platform for the increased influence of standardization. The spread of computer use and the bias towards standardized practice reminds us that, as Postman and Eisner previously identified, the tools that we use have a profound impact on who we become, how we think, perceive, feel, and how we live. Having embraced the cybernetic revolution, schools are moving toward an increasing digital connection between the classroom and curriculum. While there are schools which claim to be actual cyber-schools, for this theoretical exploration the claim is that most schools are being pressured into cybernetic convergence.<sup>8</sup> From this convergence I am proposing four areas of educational process which have been deeply affected by cyber-space: the valuing of specific forms of knowledge, the commonality of educational resources, the increased standardization of student and teacher relationships, and the hyper-acceleration of instructional time.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark, Karin. "Yennadon tries cyberschool" *Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows News*. pg. 3

## Knowledge

The value of information has been deeply impacted by the networking capabilities of cyberspace. In oral cultures, knowledge or information distribution was limited in scope, and a desirable commodity. With the advent of books, access to information became widespread and initiated changes in the structures of societies. Through the creation of cyberspace, information has become abundant. In Thomas Hylland Erikson's book, *Tyranny of the Moment*, he states that through limitless access to information, information has become noise. The impact of this infinite expansion of information has been the desire to focus on instrumental forms of learning. The recent growth of standardized testing and concise curriculums points toward a desire to contain these expansive knowledge possibilities. The computer and its bias towards information that is standardized and calculable also promotes instrumental processes in information systems. While the promises of cyberspace are exponential global information networks, the actual information in these networks is highly contained. As Dreyfus and Dreyfus illustrate, the backbone of information systems, the computer, serves as an ideal tool for coping with knowledge abundance by creating micro-worlds. The Dreyfuses fear these processes will encourage knowledge that stems from drills and repetitive practices.

Under such pressures mathematics might degenerate into addition and subtraction, English into spelling and punctuation, and history into dates and places.<sup>9</sup>

In cyberspace, the biases of computer structures and concerns over expansive knowledge possibilities leads towards a favoring of knowledge that can be quantified, scored and ranked.

Beyond promoting knowledge that is calculable, instrumental and easily transferable, cyber-space also allows for the monitoring of information systems. In *Technopoly*, Neil Postman emphasizes that the private nature of computer use and the kinds of information computers prefer has a unique effect on educational practices. Through large scale digital testing, the outcomes of learners and educators can be compared with tens of thousands of other classrooms in an instant. This innovation places students, teachers, schools, districts and even countries under a form of surveillance. Mixed with a technological bias towards standardized information, the increasing influence of testing and accountability places pressure on educators to promote learning that enhances knowledge of numerical and ordered processes. Through the globalization of cyberspace and its increasing use in schools, the future of schooling appears to be a movement toward knowledge that is structured, uploadable, and instrumental in assessment.

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<sup>9</sup> Dreyfus, Herbert L. and Stuart E. Dreyfus. *Mind Over Machine*. pg. 133

In the following chapters, this trend will be compared with Taoist principles that highlight the value of knowledge that is unordered, spontaneous and non-active in intent.

## **Resources**

In current educational practices, the dictates of knowledge systems tend to favor particular kinds of resources in classrooms. Cyberspace promises an instantaneous access to an infinite collection of possible resources. Support for this claim rests in the millions of books, videos and articles that are available on the Internet. Cyberspace potentially places all of these resources at our finger tips. The paradox is that cyberspace also acts as a tool for reducing the range of resources. Since computers promote information that can be easily assessed and ranked, certain kinds of resources are positioned as more valuable than others. In education, teachers can identify resources that maximize specific learning outcomes. In turn, the growth of standardized testing and the pressure to "teach to the test" or to "follow the curriculum" proven lesson plans, mass produced work sheets and repetitive activities, increases in stature.

In 1979 Eliot Eisner judged that across America the vast majority of schools were already teaching identical subject matter with similar resources even before the explosion of computer technology. In addition to the "hidden

curriculums”, he recognized a hegemony in math, English, science and social studies.<sup>10</sup> With the global digital revolution, these curriculum guidelines have expanded their influence, since highly instrumental versions of these subject areas are ideal for testing. At the present moment, it is not unimaginable that a class in Texas might be using the exact same curriculum, textbook and lesson plan as a class in Quebec. The problem is that these curriculums suppose that knowledge is fixed and that there is one way of representing knowledge that can be favored above all others. In addition, standardized curriculums divorce students from their local contexts, alienate them from the natural world around them, and create monotypical understandings. The danger with the standardization of educational resources is that it reduces ways of knowing. Standardized information whether distributed through cyber-space or the textbook, encourages knowledge that is routinized and neglects localized, emotional and social forms of knowledge.

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<sup>10</sup> Eisner, Elliot. *Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. pg. 86

## **Relationships**

With the current growth of standardized knowledge and resources through cyber-schools I foresee a future where digital systems could begin to take the place of teachers in many educational structures. Yet, while digital education platforms are clearly expanding, it appears that human teachers are still central to the process. Global curriculums and cybernetic testing continue to need human agents as carriers of information. Although digital systems have not yet replaced teachers, they are beginning to influence the way that teaching occurs. What the digital systems do quite well is control the actions of teachers through testing that promotes instrumental forms of knowledge. Curriculum guidelines, testing, and the over-valuing of technical knowledge requires teachers to evoke educational techniques that follow standardized practices. By networking through cyber-space, specific kinds of teaching that have the greatest impact on test scores and curricular expectations are promoted. In cyber-education, innovative forms of teaching are as risky as students' scores and external measures of success hold teachers accountable for a specific kind of learning. Instead, required resources, predetermined lesson plans and instrumental teaching tools are the only secure option.

Concerns over the management of schooling, the ordering of structured knowledge, and learning relationships have a tradition prior to the digital era.

Before cyberspace came into existence, Paulo Freire invoked the bank as a metaphor for student/teacher relationships. In many ways, the influence that cyberspace has had on education increases the kinds of relationships that Freire outlined. Interactions between teachers and students have varied little with the advent of information technologies. However, there are some differences. Take for example, item (h) previously listed as a characteristic of Freire's banking model: "(h) the teacher chooses the program content." In this area a shift of authority has occurred. While teachers continue to assert their professional authority, it is the designers of cybernetic evaluations who determine program content. With the expansion of standardization and testing, teachers spend much more time "teaching to the test". These tests and the knowledge content contained in them are bound by the limitations of the computer system. In essence, it is the demands of network systems and computer knowledge which dictate much of the classroom activity. It is for this reason that the banking metaphor needs to be adapted. The concept of the bank places students as empty vessels to be filled by their teacher's knowledge. In a cybernetic culture, this process continues but teachers are also viewed as empty vessels who need to be filled with authorized knowledge and techniques. Theoretically, students become hard drives, the teachers are the programmers, but the software has been developed outside of the classroom. Teachers are now viewed not as content programmers but as technicians delivering knowledge systems through highly mechanical teacher-student

relationships. In my own experience, I have noticed that following the announcement of grade 10 standardized testing in British Columbia, immediately teachers began to consider ways to adapt their lessons to fit the forthcoming tests.

Cyberspace is a brilliant tool for arranging and ordering information but it is also highly effective for determining quality control and expanding the surveillance of knowledge distribution. Even before the explosion of cyberspace technology, Postman recognized the ability of computers to regulate learning in educational environments. What he asserts is that as more information is collected from schools, then powerful external bodies are able to examine this data.<sup>11</sup> The concern is not that cybernetic systems survey, but that they survey for a particular kind of educational experience. Schooling practices that are instrumental become a priority for surveillance; as monitoring increases, so does the value of these kinds of knowledge. The cybernetic surveillance of instrumental reason does and will continue to have an effect on teaching practices, resources used, and place both the teacher and the student under the authority of mechanical knowledge. In a Taoist approach, emphasized particularly in chapter three, educational relationships are presented as more adaptable and the roles of teacher, student, and the authority of knowledge more fluid than fixed.

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<sup>11</sup> Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. pg. 10



## Time

The increasing mechanization of education time, over the last one hundred years, has demanded the regulation of educational relationships, the promotion of the authority of knowledge, and standardization of resource types. Neil Postman and Eliot Eisner both examine the effect of time in schools and point to the theories of Lewis Mumford for inspiration. It was Mumford who exclaimed that beyond telling time, clocks also create and mediate social interactions. He posited that through establishing time-based social phenomena, humans came to be controlled by the dictates of time.<sup>12</sup> In schools, mediated by schedules and bell structures, learning has been given shorter confines. Eliot Eisner explains that:

Every fifty minutes, an entire school population of two thousand students and sundry teachers plays musical chairs.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of this procedure is that regardless of subject or curricular area, schools are limited to teaching knowledge in small chunks of time. For Eisner, being confined by time is a tragedy and he argues against contemporary schooling which overemphasizes left brain activities. When time is short, the left brain works best with processes that are sequential, bound by classification, habitual and time-ordered. Unfortunately, this means that schools are moving away from knowledge that is visual, metaphoric, poetic, unfamiliar, and independent of time constraints.

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<sup>12</sup> Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. pg. 11

<sup>13</sup> Eisner, Elliot. *Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. pg. 78

Neil Postman discusses a similar concern and demonstrates how there has been a hyper-acceleration of time due to the technological change from the printing press, to the radio, to the television, and finally with computer technology.<sup>14</sup> The tragedy, as Postman sees it, is that with this hyper acceleration of time the values of wisdom, age and looking backward have been lost.

The demands of time have increased greatly with the advent of cyberspace. Accelerated time by information networks is creating an even larger disdain for anything slow, and in cyberspace the hyperactivity of time accentuates the forces that Eisner has lamented. Processes that are sequential, bound by classification, habitual and time ordered become even more influential over processes that are metaphoric, poetic, and independent of time constraints. The trouble is that a hyper-acceleration of information turns knowledge into a kind of noise. On an advanced computer system, a potential user could be watching a movie, searching rapidly through a host of internet sites while downloading a file larger than an average phone book. With this access, cyberspace changes information from a rare commodity to an informational abundance. In response, larger and larger categories of informational learning are being established and demanded in educational facilities.

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<sup>14</sup> Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. pg. 46

In schools, there is a fear that time will run out, that there is never enough time, and students are often accused of "wasting time". The priority is that students are actively receiving information, a perfect example of Freire's banking concept of education. He defined the process as an "effort to turn women and men into automatons" which are part human and part machine entity.<sup>15</sup> The history of automatons comes directly from the mechanical innovation of keeping time.<sup>16</sup> In the banking metaphor, time is something to be measured and transaction rates are to be monitored. The demands of time and the mechanization of particular kinds of learning were a great concern for Freire because he recognized that liberating forms of education take time. Creativity takes time, innovative thinking takes time, wisdom takes time, and developing greatness takes time.

In his book, *Tyranny of the Moment*, Erikson lists the values of slow time; in particular, he mentions that without slow time metaphysics would be lost.<sup>17</sup> For Erikson, slow time requires consideration. He reminds us that some of the greatest thinkers have often taken up to fifty years to fully develop their thoughts. In addition, he highlights that creativity and innovation depend on the gaps between fast time. The greatest tragedy of the contemporary school system is that students participate for a minimum of ten years, during which their learning is

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<sup>15</sup> Freire, Paulo. (2000) *The Paulo Freire Reader*.pg. 70

<sup>16</sup> Gonzalez, Jennifer. "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies." *The Cyborg Handbook*. pg. 269

<sup>17</sup> Erikson, Thomas Hylland. *Tyranny of the Moment*. pg. 154

dominated by twenty minute lessons. It is almost unheard of to find schools or classes which embrace projects that take an entire year, an entire month, an entire week, or even an entire day. Knowledge and learning processes that rest in slow time are quickly being lost in cyberspace. In response, to the hyper-acceleration of schooling, slow time needs protection.

In the field of education, the cybernetic revolution has been a hyperextension and hyper-acceleration of previous habits. Illich, Freire, Postman and Eisner outline earlier perspectives about education, and cyberspace accentuates their concerns at an alarming rate. As a possible antidote the philosophies of Taoism will be presented in the following chapters, particularly with an emphasis on slow or meditative time. By questioning the very nature of knowledge, scrutinizing standardized resources, forwarding different student-teacher relationships and confronting the hyper-acceleration of time, Taoism offers a new perspective on some old questions and concerns.

## Taoism

For historical reasons, Taoism has little to say directly about the impact of cyberspace, the factory model, the banking concept, and technocratic processes on educational practices. Taoist philosophy was developed long before the creation of these ideas. Yet, what Taoist philosophy does offer today's world is a long-term understanding of the nature of machines and their impact on humans.

*Tzu-kung [a disciple of Confucius] traveled south to the land of Ch'u. On his way back, he passed through Chin and along the south bank of the Han river. There he saw an old man going to plant his field. He had dug a [diagonal] tunnel to reach the water down in a well. He entered this tunnel clutching a large jug and then came out again to bring water for irrigating his field. It was a hard job that required much effort for a meager result. Tzu-kung said to the gardener: "There's a tool for this kind of work; in a day you could irrigate a hundred fields. It demands but little effort for a big result. Wouldn't you like to have one?"*

*The Gardener looked up and squinted at the speaker, saying: "What is it?"*

*"All you need is some wood with holes drilled in it and then assembled like a machine [a lever] that is heavy on one side, light on the other. By moving it up and down, you can draw up water in a constantly flowing stream. It is called a well sweep. At these words,*

*the gardener turned red with anger and said with a laugh;”I have heard my master say that where there are machines, there will be the problems of machines, and these problems will produce people with hearts like machines. With a heart like a machine in your breast, there will be a lack of pure whiteness. The gods of life [of the body] will be disturbed and there will no longer be a place for the Tao to dwell. It is not that I do not know your machine. I should be ashamed to use it!”<sup>18</sup>*

In Taoist philosophy, the relationship between people and their machines has been acknowledged for many generations. From the use of well-sweeps to the use of cyber-space, Taoist wisdom suggests that tools produce people that are like the machines that they use. As an educator with a profound interest in natural learning desires I, too, frequently struggle with the results of educational machines. Due to classical conditioning, when a bell rings or the curriculum is in jeopardy, I often suppress natural or spontaneous learning moments. While my conscience reels, for the student, I too become as cold and heartless as the machines I work for.

In education, a Taoist perspective provides options for reviewing and reassessing unbalanced educational practices and mechanisms. With an understanding of Taoist philosophies, the works of Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire, Eliot Eisner, and Neil Postman compel a revisitation. From a historical distance, Taoists have also pondered the construction of knowledge, kinds of educational resources, parameters of teacher-student relationships and the dictates of

<sup>18</sup> Schipper, v. *Taoist Body*. pg. 197

educational time. While contemporary conditions are much different than the position of Taoist philosophers, the desire to understand the impact of our tools is similar. In the above parable, the old gardener does not reject all technology, instead he views certain kinds of machines as having an undesirable impact on the human condition. As a solution he opts for a less efficient tool and is creative in how he uses it. In the contemporary struggle over interpretations of education the Taoist perspective rests closer to humanist interpretations. However contrary to divisive dualism, the preference is to examine models that support Taoist principles and maintain the vitality of the human spirit. Instead of simply rejecting standardization, a Taoist analysis of contemporary educational practices promotes processes that compliment as well as critique.

## Chapter 2

### **Introduction**

A Taoist Pedagogy is one potential solution to the ever expansive standardization of knowledge which now dominates contemporary practices in schooling. From traditional educational technologies to the recent introduction of cyberspace, school has been primarily defined as a process which contains resources, establishes authoritative teacher student relationships, and relies heavily on the dictates of time. Taoist philosophy questions the use of these tools and their profound impact on human relations, and instead proposes unique educational alternatives. For educational practitioners, a Taoist Pedagogy introduces the idea that structures and instruments of education have a limiting effect on what it means to school. By utilizing restrictive knowledge, limited resources, one directional student/teacher relationships, and highly ordered management models, schools have lost touch with the human desire to learn. In this chapter, a Taoist Pedagogy will be explored in relationship to the critiques of education presented in the first chapter. This chapter will present a philosophical exploration and develop a foundation for a Taoist Pedagogy. Constructive solutions will be explored in the third and fourth chapters.



## A Taoist Pedagogy

A truly Taoist Pedagogy would have to begin with the disclaimer that there can be no Taoist Pedagogy. *Tao* is the root of Taoism and is commonly translated as “the way”- a universal force which interconnects all things. Infinite in scope, *Tao* cannot be defined.

*Tao called Tao is not the Tao.  
Names can name no lasting name.<sup>19</sup>*

If Taoism is all things, then a Taoist Pedagogy must also attempt to bring the ideas of diversity and unlimited possibilities into education.

In contrast to *Tao* the unlimited, stands the idea of *Te* which can be interpreted as the actual. Taoism is not simply about metaphysical universality, it also rests in the moment and the actual. However, central to the understanding of *Te* is that the actual always rests under the influence of the *Tao*. Like our universe, education can also be viewed as both unlimited and actual. It is through this understanding and a historical exploration of Taoist texts that four clear educational implications emerge and will be explored in this chapter. First, the Taoist understanding of the nature of knowledge will be examined in relation to the learning process. Secondly, the worth of students, and their learning interests, will be examined in relation to the contemporary model of teaching critiqued in the earlier chapter. Thirdly, in the spirit of *Tao* itself, the ideas of the universal and unlimited will be examined in relation to learning resources. Finally, the Taoist

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<sup>19</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 1

notion of meditative time will be introduced in order to reexamine the ideas of educational resources, school relationships and the nature of knowledge from a Taoist Pedagogy.

## **Taoist History**

The birth of Taoism is in many ways unclear and has been a source of dispute among historians. What they do agree upon is that Taoism originated from an oral tradition passed down through generations and that, some time during the third century B.C., an unknown author penned a book without a title and gave birth to a written tradition in Taoism. Over the centuries this first text has been assigned the title *Tao Te Ching* and attributed to the author Lao-Tzu (the “Old Master”).<sup>20</sup> From this seminal work has flowered a Taoist philosophy which now constitutes approximately fifteen hundred sacred texts.<sup>21</sup> The *Tao Te Ching* has been a source of inspiration not only to Taoists but has had a profound impact across the globe.

Over the centuries, the culture of Taoism has spread to influence both eastern and western traditions. Eastern understandings of Taoism have a long history of trial and consideration. In the west, the introduction of Taoism has been evident for centuries in the ideas of science, philosophy, psychology, literature and the arts. During the past few decades, these writings have grown in the scope of their consideration. From metaphysical and poetic explorations, Taoist literature now covers everything from self help books to administrative leadership manuals. Yet, despite the diversity of their application, these texts hold

<sup>20</sup> Chung, Tsai Chih. translated by Brian Bruya. *The Tao Speaks*. pg. 11

<sup>21</sup> Schipper, Kristofer. *Taoist Body*. pg. 5

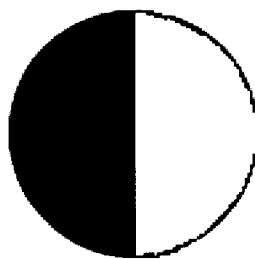
true to one common foundation of Taoist philosophy, all Taoist texts incorporate and consider the nature of binary systems. Through a consideration of the balance and struggles between opposites Taoism has had its greatest impact and offers possible alternatives to current regimens of technocracy.

## **The Yin-Yang**

As an expansive philosophy, Taoist writing has encompassed a phenomenal number of subjects and areas of interest. However, there is one common theme based in the paradoxical relationship between opposites. This concept is symbolized in Taoism in the form of the yin-yang. The origin of this symbol is in dispute as having either Buddhist or Taoist origins.<sup>22</sup> Yet, this symbol has spread beyond both of these traditions and can now be found around the globe in a variety of locations. In Taoism, the yin-yang symbol has a foundation in the words of the *Tao Te Ching* which primarily concerns itself with the interplay between sets of opposites.

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<sup>22</sup> Little, Stephen with Shawn Eichman. *Taoism and the Arts in China*. pg. 131

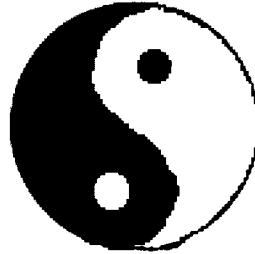


Static Yin-Yang

At a basic level, the yin-yang represents a balance of white and black, a symbolic representation which can include a wide range of opposites such as cold and hot, male and female, and hard and soft. Split in half the yin-yang dichotomizes a universal tendency that favors symmetry. In humans, this balance can be seen in our bodies with our propensity to have two eyes, two arms, two legs, two ears, two nostrils and two lungs. In addition, many parts of the body which appear singular still have a center of reflection. For example, the mouth is symmetrical and the brain is split in two hemispheres. The human body is an example of the universal preference for the binary and can be expanded to animal life, plant life, and even the polarity of earth itself.

However, opposites can be considered to have an antagonistic relationship as well, where two extremes have a potential for conflict. The yin-yang represents a struggle between cold and hot, or men and women, or even left and right brain thinking. This kind of interpretation fits well within a western view of opposites that pits extremes against each other. The above diagram of two polar forces could be understood as a representation of a perspective which pits extremes against each other; a model where dualisms duel. In academia, one example can be found in the assumption that positivists and humanists have separate and antagonistic

relationships. Yet, the Taoist belief in the yin-yang goes beyond these one dimensional understandings of opposites and recognizes that opposites not only conflict but they also exist in an interdependent relationship.

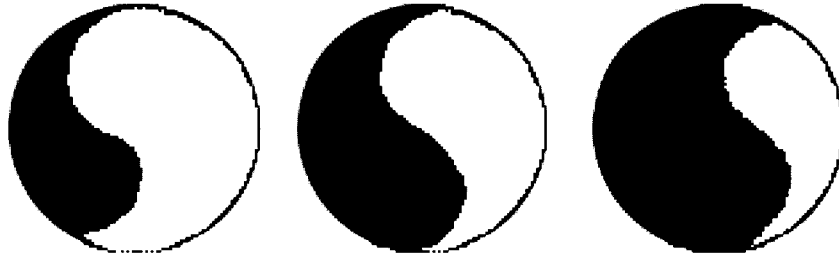


Balanced Yin-Yang

In the above representation of the yin-yang the two binary forces contain pieces of each other. In the black side there is a white circle and in the white side there is black circle. These represent the reliance opposites have on each other. For example, there could be no right brain without the left brain, no understanding of night without day, hot could not exist without the experience of cold, and humanism could not exist without an understanding of positivism. What Taoists recognize and add to Western ideas of binary is the notion that polar opposites require each other and that one could never exist without the other.

In traditional literature the yin-yang is expressed as both the extremes of the universe and the interplay between these polar opposites. Taoist teachings do not end here. There is also the middle ground where binary forces meet. Black meets white to make gray, night meets day to make dawn, and cold and hot merge to make warm. It is this liminal space between opposites that is often ignored. The above representation of the yin-yang identifies a highly balanced relationship

between opposites. However, the interplay between yin and yang generally favors one side over the other.



Fluid Yin-Yang

In this model there is not simply hot, cold and warm but a unlimited range of temperate waters. It is this fluid and dynamic representation of the yin-yang symbol which offers a visual model for the unlimited possibilities of the Tao. Open-ended potentiality and the Taoist desire to achieve balance in extremes informs the four pedagogical principles which I have identified; the Taoist perspective of knowledge, Taoist teacher-student relationships, Taoist resources, and the unifying principle of Taoist meditation. In the contemporary school system, which favors order and standardization, the role of these principles is to forward oppositional perspectives in order to promote an expansion of possibilities.

# Four Pedagogical Principles

## Knowledge

*Your life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain!*<sup>23</sup>

A universe filled with unlimited possibilities has its roots in two distinct kinds of knowing for Taoists. This yin-yang of knowledge is represented through the forces of *wu-wei* and *yu-wei*. Defined as “willful, intentional or unnatural activity,”<sup>24</sup> *yu-wei* is designed to control and manipulate the natural world. In educational theory, *yu-wei* exists as the banking model, works through technopolies and favors the factory paradigm. While educational theorists fear that these modes of thinking move us away from what it means to be human, Taoists warn that an absolute favoring of *yu-wei* philosophies results in a drastic movement away from the order of the universe. While not rejecting *yu-wei* entirely, Taoism offers a desire to pursue *wu-wei* principles in order to achieve balance.

It is difficult to find reference to the idea of *yu-wei* in Taoist writing, instead references to *wu-wei* fill the pages. It appears that during the historical origins of Taoism, there also existed social conditions which favored *yu-wei* paradigms. It is for this reason, that Taoism offers an ideal philosophy for an antidote to increased regimentation, standardization and order. Recognizing the

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<sup>23</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 46

<sup>24</sup> Ames, Roger T. “Putting the Te Back into Taoism.” *Nature In Asian Traditions of Thought. Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. pg. 121

human desire for structure and order, Taoists maintain that being human means also following the ways of the natural world. In order to move beyond standardized responses, Taoists advocate living in the moment and responding spontaneously to external forces. As a solution *wu-wei* is advocated, and often defined as “non-action”. However, this conventional definition ignores the Taoist notion that non-action does not necessitate sitting still.

*We find Confucian standing by the banks of a powerful waterfall. So treacherous are the currents that not even fish can survive in them long. He sees a man jump into the swirling waters and, afraid that he is committing suicide, orders his disciples to pull him out, only to find the swimmer quite unscathed by the incident. “May I ask if you have some special way of staying afloat in the water?” Confucius inquires. “I have no way...,” the swimmer answered. “I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself.” The swimmer merely flows with the water, never thinking about how or why, forgetting about himself. Likewise, the sage flows with the Tao, wandering through life and never knowing how or why he does what he does.<sup>25</sup>*

In this story, the Taoist notion of non-action does not translate as non-movement. Instead, unwillfully or unintentional activity may require movement that follows the order and rhythm of natural forces.

The *yu-wei* paradigm dominates schools. In an era of government exams, specialized curriculums and bureaucracies, there appears to be little room for anything that is not logical and ordered learning practice. The idea that schools have a *yu-wei* tendency is not a new concept for educational theorists. However, despite the dominance of *yu-wei*, *wu-wei* moments continue to find their way into schools. In every classroom, the news of the day, an insect flying into the class, or

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<sup>25</sup> Oshima, Harold H. “A Metaphorical Analysis of the Concept of Mind in the Chuang-tzu.” *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. pg. 68



sudden changes of the weather allow for natural and spontaneous learning moments. Many teachers and schools stuck in *yu-wei* philosophy attempt to resist these intrusions. However, as the yin-yang symbol identifies, opposites exist in a relationship and for this reason natural and spontaneous interruptions will continue. From a Taoist perspective, it is unwise to rest solely upon *yu-wei* philosophies. Instead, it is through pursuing *wu-wei* practices and attempts to encourage spontaneous learning in natural and social contexts that a balance may be achieved.

First it is important to stipulate that advocating *wu-wei* practices does not mean eliminating *yu-wei* principles. In fact, sometimes in order to pursue *wu-wei* activities, it is necessary to follow the highly rule bound and ordered processes of the natural world. Benjamin Hoff, in his book *The Tao of Pooh*, highlights the distinction between *wu-wei* and *yu-wei* knowledge.

When you work with the *Wu Wei*, you put the round peg in the round hole and the square peg in the square hole. No stress, no struggle. Egotistical Desire tries to force the round peg in the square hole. Cleverness tries to devise craftier ways of making pegs fit where they don't belong. Knowledge tries to figure out why round pegs fit round holes, but not square holes. *Wu Wei* doesn't try. It doesn't think about it. It just does it. And when it does, it doesn't appear to do much of anything. But Things Get Done.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hoff, Benjamin *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 75

## Student and the Teacher

*Therefore the good person  
Is the bad person's teacher,  
And the bad person  
Is the good person's resource*

*Not to value the teacher,  
Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent*

*This is called the vital secret.<sup>27</sup>*

From this section, entitled Vital Secret, two points emerge with regard to student and teacher relationships. First and foremost, comes the obligation of Taoist teachers and their position in relation to the authority of knowledge.

*Therefore the good person Is the bad person's teacher,*

In teaching, there is always a desire to reward and focus upon the highly motivated students. However, the Vital Secret introduces the notion that high test scores and high levels of knowledge acquisition might not be the most important feature of teaching. Instead, Taoist educators have a larger responsibility.

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<sup>27</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 27

*The sage has no mind of his own.  
He is aware of the needs of others.*

*I am good to people who are good.  
I am also good to people who are not good.*

*Because Virtue is goodness.  
I have faith in people who are faithful.  
I also have faith in people who are not faithful.  
Because Virtue is faithfulness.<sup>28</sup>*

The Sage, a Taoist practitioner, and Taoist teacher are required to act for the benefit of those not good. A virtuous teacher is required to have faith in both the good and the bad students. The problem for Taoist educators is that the structures of education are designed to resist virtuous acts. It is hard for a teacher to be virtuous and these acts are rarely noticed in the institutional schools. Grading, based on an externalized authority of knowledge, demands high test scores. Professional prestige favors teaching to those who are the best students. Yet, despite these pressures, a Taoist Pedagogy demands that good teachers find a way to work with "bad" or academically unsuccessful students.

*Not to value the teacher,  
...Causes great confusion even for the intelligent*

The standard approach to working with bad students has been a desire to make them into good students. A Taoist Pedagogy, however, questions whether bad students even exist.

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<sup>28</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gai-Fu Feng and Jane English. pg. 49

*If a man follows the mind given to him and makes it his teacher, then who can be without a teacher? Why must you comprehend the process of change and form your mind on that basis before you can have a teacher? Even an idiot has a teacher.<sup>29</sup>*

If every person can be their own teacher then how can bad students occur?

Even "idiots" have an innate desire to learn and pursue knowledge. Bad students occur only when the knowledge and authority of learning is externalized.

The solution that Taoist tradition offers is to devalue the teacher, not to eliminate, but to question the teacher's relationship with the authority of learning. Knowledge that is considered linear, going from teacher to student, entertains only one kind of teacher student relationship. *Yu-wei* conceptuality suggests that linear relationships work best with factual and standardized forms of education. In contrast, there is also the possibility of teacher student relationships which support *wu-wei* forms of knowledge. Non-active teaching is that which facilitates the intrinsic desires of students to learn, and takes no-action or appears to be *wu-wei* in intent. Devaluing the teacher, in Taoist Pedagogy, does not mean eliminating the teacher, instead the hope is that by reducing the authority of the teacher and supporting internalized knowledge, good students will thrive and bad students will cease to exist.

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<sup>29</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 34

## Resources

*Therefore the good person  
Is the bad person's teacher,  
And the bad person  
Is the good person's resource*

*Not to value the teacher,  
Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent*

*This is called the vital secret<sup>30</sup>*

It is the Vital Secret which illuminates much of what it means to follow a Taoist Pedagogy and informs not only student/teacher relationships but explains the nature of teaching resources. The tools educators use and the authoritarian structures of schools, are resources which need examination. A Taoist Pedagogy, not only provides an opportunity for critiquing resources but also proposes solutions. A Taoist solution never discards what is already in existence. Bad student, and even bad educational systems have potential if they are treated as a resource.

*And the bad person  
Is the good person's resource*

It is the bad student or low achieving student that Taoist teachers have a moral obligation to view as a resource. In *wu-wei* or non-active teaching these students act as vital sources of knowledge and have hidden talents. Aside from the good and beautiful, the bad and ugly also have hidden benefits. In one Taoist parable, this value is assigned to an old gnarly tree that has grown for centuries

<sup>30</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 27

near a local temple. In the story, a traveling carpenter is the main character and upon seeing the enormous tree admires the length of its shadow.

*"What tree is this? It must certainly have some extraordinary usefulness!" But, looking up, he saw that the smaller limbs were gnarled and twisted, unfit for beams or rafters, and looking down, he saw the trunk was pitted and rotten and could not be used for coffins. He licked one of the leaves and it blistered his mouth and made it sore. He sniffed the odor and it was enough to make a man drunk for three days. "It turns out to be a completely unusable tree," said Tzu-ch'i, and so it has been able to grow this big. "Aha!-it is this unusableness that the Holy Man makes use of!"<sup>31</sup>*

In this tale the unusable tree is left to grow and over time has become of great benefit to its surroundings. The expansive shade from the old tree symbolizes the potential contained in all things bad and ugly.

A Taoist approach reveres the bad and ugly in relation to the good and beautiful. Yet, this outlook is not just based in a notion of equal value. Instead, Taoists have pity and concern for the fate of the good and beautiful. The above story of the carpenter continues that night when the carpenter goes home and falls asleep. This time the tree is personified in his dream and speaks to him about the tragedy of being good and useful.

*"Are you comparing me to those useful trees? The cherry apple, the pear, the orange, the citron, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs-as soon as their fruit is ripe they are torn apart and subject to abuse. Their big limbs are broken off, their little limbs are yanked around. Their utility makes life miserable for them."<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 61

<sup>32</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 60

This story illustrates the concept in Taoist Pedagogy that not only is the bad a resource, but the good is to be pitied. In education, it is the bad student who resists being twisted and abused, who stands as an asset for Taoist educators. These bad students have been treated as an unrecognized resource. Through resistance, bad students have demanded that teachers improve their lessons, asked for more relevant learning, and have offered tremendous educational resources through their demands for alternative educational approaches.

In education, we have an abundance of unusable or bad students. Schools are saturated with students who resist in degrees the educational structures and the tools that are used. "Trouble makers" and "anti-authoritarian students" are often looked at with disdain and punished for their actions. However, much like the unusable tree these students have a hidden impact on education. To begin with, educators and their teaching methods are continually adapting and responding to the demands of these students. Bad students have been pressuring educators to improve their lessons, to offer more diverse classes, and to make curriculums more relevant. In addition, across North America, thousands of alternative education programs have been created in response to the bad student. While credit is given to teachers and institutions that succeed with bad students, it is in actuality the bad students who have demanded the changes and determine the success or failure of any program. For a Taoist Pedagogy, it is these bad students and the changes that they have made in education that rest as a valuable resource for educators.

*Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent*

The greatest impact of the bad students in education has been a revaluing of the resources and tools we use in education. If it were not for the bad student, schools might never change or adapt to new circumstances. Once again the paradox of the yin-yang symbol appears. After recommending bad students as a resource, the Taoist Vital Secret asks us not to love our resources. We are reminded that it is important not to become too transfixed with one way of doing things; focusing exclusively on the bad student and their demands can also be problematic. Taoists do acknowledge that in addition to the natural desire to learn there is information that people ought to know. It is finding a balance between internalized authorities and the construction of knowledge that is the greatest challenge for a Taoist educator.

The advice to not love our resources reminds us that *wu-wei* and *yu-wei* practices need to occur mutually and asks educators to question the balance of our resources. In education, it is with the *yu-wei* resource that most classes begin, and with the influence of cyberspace this trend is expanding. Before there is a teacher, students, and even a school there is a formalized curriculum, imported from a central computer console. At present, these curriculums are derived and limited by the demands of computer based technology. The danger is that with this bias these curriculums constrict knowledge types. Through a technical approach to education, these documents favor standardized forms of knowledge which prefer testable and accountable forms of education. If, as Taoists claim, knowledge is



unlimited and universal, then the favoring of specified learning resources becomes problematic in a Taoist Pedagogy. The binding and restriction of knowledge into curriculums, textbooks, and lesson plans promotes *yu-wei* structured schooling and focuses resources away from *wu-wei* and non-active forms of learning.

*The great scholar hearing the TAO  
Tries to practice it.  
The middling scholar hearing the TAO  
Sometimes has it, sometimes not.  
The lesser scholar hearing the TAO  
Has a good laugh.  
Without that laughter  
It wouldn't be TAO<sup>33</sup>*

## **The Meditative**

Considerations of knowledge types, resources, and teacher-student relationships culminate in the Taoist notion of the meditative. A common association with meditation is being slow of breath, deep in metaphysical thought, and unmoving. In Taoism, these processes are ideal but not necessarily the only way to be meditative. Instead, Taoist meditation is primarily about the human body and the mind's action over time. Despite proclaiming the benefits of *wu-wei* (non-action), Taoists recognize a fluid range of degrees of non-action. A Taoist perspective on meditation explores non-action in its relationship with action through the yin-yang.

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<sup>33</sup>Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 41

*It is not wise to rush about.  
Controlling the breath causes strain.  
If too much energy is used, exhaustion follows.  
This is not the way of the Tao.  
Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long.<sup>34</sup>*

Tao means a universality of option and possibility. To rush about and to control one's intent is contrary to following the Tao. Since energy use is generally focused and limited, it is far from the notion of unlimited possibility. In Taoism, the physical act of rushing stands in stark contrast to meditative time. The meditative is not only about being non-active but searching for ways to slow down the body and mind over time. Tai-chi, a Taoist form of martial arts, is the embodiment of this principle. In Tai-chi people empty their minds and follow a series of physical movements with the goal of slowing down as much as possible. It is this idea of slowing and not rushing which informs a Taoist meditative perspective.

It is virtually impossible to find examples of slow meditative behavior in contemporary schools. Instead, hundreds and thousands of students fill large factory modeled schools that promote a Taylorist inspired work ethic. If you have ever experienced the break between classes at a large factory high school you will have noticed the frantic pace with which students literally run from classrooms. This desire to rush is not a typical teenage response to schooling. Instead, these students are responding to a model which expects them to keep busy. Reinforced by the authority of administrators and teachers, the culture in most schools is similar to a fast food restaurant where students and teachers pretend to be busy at

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<sup>34</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gai-Fu Feng and Jane English. pg. 55

all times. This culture of getting things done, is reinforced through school management systems which train students and teachers to rush around; the bell system, highly prescriptive curriculums, and authoritative relationships demand the appearance of busy activity. Education that is based in rote memorization, repetitive activities and standardized testing becomes ideal in these environments, as these learning techniques involve the appearance of hard work. The tragedy is that these learning conditions are contradictory to certain kinds of knowing which are also important. These kinds of learning will be exemplified in depth, in chapter three, during the case study of the Outreach program at Inglenook Community High School.

## **Meditative Knowledge**

*You have heard of knowledge that knows, but you have never heard of the knowledge that does not know. Look into that closed room, the empty chamber where brightness is born! Fortune and blessing gather when there is stillness. But if you do not keep still-this is called sitting but racing around. Let your ears and eyes communicate with what is inside, and put mind and knowledge on the outside.<sup>35</sup>*

Meditative knowledge is that which transcends highly active forms of understanding. Action or thought which requires highly conscious activity and involves rushing the mind, contrasts with the Taoist notion of the meditative. Instead, *wu-wei* knowledge is much closer to meditative forms of thinking, through the idea of mindless or non-active participation. It exists when a person is engaged in an activity to such a extent that they appear to become one with the object or

<sup>35</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 54

knowledge they are engaging. Examples might be found in a painter, or crafts person, or even a musician who has become one with their instrument or canvas. In Taoist educational literature, knowledge has been defined as walking in the woods. During these *wu-wei* moments, the learning involves non-active intent as the participant simply appears to be in a trance like state. In Taoist practice, meditative forms of knowledge may still require mindful action but it is the intent of intensity with which this action occurs that defines the meditative.

There is presently a fixation with learning that focuses on active minds and bodies in the field of education. The domination of willful or intentional activities stands in stark contrast to meditative forms of learning in classrooms. In defining meditative knowledge, it is the action, not the specific knowledge type, which is of the most importance. Instead of categories of knowledge, it is the physical and mental state of alertness which defines the meditative. Education that invokes stress and demands intentional activity runs contrary to the demands of meditative knowledge. Meditation demands internalized will, as it is impossible to learn to meditate without internalized desire. The difficulty for educators is that this kind of learning is highly individualistic and diverse in nature. What might induce natural learning desires in one student might induce anxiety and stress in another. It is in the tradition of Tao itself that meditative knowledge becomes unlimited and unbounded. Yet, more important than the kind of knowledge is the way that knowledge is approached. Meditative knowledge is that which is internalized, non-intentional and demands little rushing of the mind.

*On his way back from the K'un-lun Mountains, the yellow Emperor lost the dark pearl of Tao. He sent Knowledge to find it, but Knowledge was unable to understand it. He sent Distant Vision, but Distant Vision was unable to see it. He sent Eloquence, but Eloquence was unable to describe it. Finally, he sent Empty Mind, and Empty Mind came back with the pearl.<sup>36</sup>*

## **Meditative Resources**

The notion of space and time is essential for an understanding of Taoism. Time, particularly the idea of slow time, is the most important feature of a meditative resource. To meditate takes substantial amounts of time. First it takes time to learn to meditate. Then it takes time to practice meditation. And, finally, once learned, meditative talents get better with time. Beyond this obvious skill based notion of time, meditation by its definition is to go beyond time. It is an act where the participant leaves notions of time and space behind in order to transcend the minute to minute demands of life. Evidence of achieving meditative time rests in the experience of returning. This occurs when a person who has experienced meditative time realizes that they have been absent from time constraints. This kind of time experience is not specific to meditation, and can happen in a variety of locations and activities, walking in the woods.

Meditative time and activity relies on the idea of a meditative space. Full is the opposite of this kind of space and occurs when there are distractions, high levels of activity and human contact. In contrast, it is the idea of the empty which informs the concept of a meditative resource.

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<sup>36</sup>Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooch*. pg. 144-145.

*Thirty spokes join in one hub.  
The wheel's use comes from emptiness.*

*Clay is fired to make a pot.  
The pot's use comes from emptiness.*

*Windows and doors are cut to make a room  
The room's use comes from emptiness.<sup>37</sup>*

Being empty evokes the unlimited possibility of Tao. Empty rooms and empty pots contain unlimited potential for fulfillment. For meditative resources, this same emptiness is crucial for the universal potential of meditative processes.

Empty rooms and inactive moments are quickly identified, organized and structured in schools. Here, *yu-wei* driven knowledge demands that resources be categorized and intentional in their outcomes. In contrast, meditative resources are those which evoke *wu-wei* knowledge forms that are unintentional and natural in intent. As discussed above, *wu-wei* knowledge is diverse in its possibilities, as it is not the knowledge but the appearance of non-action or non-intent which defines *wu-wei*. This means engaging in forms of learning or doing in which the student might not even realize they are learning. Just as important, meditative knowledge demands that learners be intrinsically motivated to learn. In contemporary schools almost all rooms have a specific function, each moment of time is designated as a particular learning moment, and learning is demanded and asserted on the learner. These conditions are highly contrary to supporting *wu-wei* forms of knowing.

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<sup>37</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 11

Instead of actively filling schools, time and classroom activity, it is the emptying and promotion of non-action which informs a meditative perspective. This idea of being empty relates to meditative resource in two distinct ways. First, empty can be a resource in itself. In the above quote, the empty spaces between the spokes of the wheel must stay empty in order for the wheel to function. Meditative resources are ideally the kind of space where nothing exists as a function. The second area of relationship between the empty and the meditative resource comes from the analogy of an empty pot or room. In these void spaces there is a wide range of potential uses. An empty pot can be filled with a wide range of substances for a variety of purposes. It is the empty space which makes the pot so useful. In schools, these meditative spaces would occur as rooms that can be filled with a wide range of activities, a room that is not a science lab, or grade two classroom, or a warehouse for books. Instead, a room may host a large variety of activities and may even appear unused for an extensive amount of time. The school gymnasium offers a meditative space as it is regularly used for a variety of activities, meetings and assemblies. However, this is only an introductory example of a meditative space. A true meditative space or resource, following the idea of meditative knowledge, must involve the learners intrinsic motivation to attend or engage the space. It is hard to give a contemporary example of this kind of space or resource in the current school system as they are highly managed and unfavorable to meditative conditions. In chapter 3, the case study, a student lounge is given as an example of a meditative space where learning can occur across a wide spectrum of possibilities, a space which could be filled with a flurry of activities but also could be, and is used, as a room for quiet meditative contemplation and activity.

## Meditative Teaching

*Therefore the sage is devoted to non-action,  
Moves without teaching,  
Creates ten thousand things without instruction,  
Lives but does not own,  
Acts but does not presume,  
Accomplishes without taking credit.*

*When no credit is taken  
Accomplishment endures.<sup>38</sup>*

Meditative teaching begins with empty resources and through non-action promotes the natural learning desires of students. This is a most difficult act for a Taoist teacher, since non-action overrides the authority over knowledge which defines the profession. However, being located outside of the authority of knowledge does not mean being invisible to the learning process. Knowledge obtainment that is based on the intuitive and internalized desires of students might need support. Non-action on the part of teachers does not necessitate non-action. Instead, it is intentional and willful instruction that is to be avoided. Questions and answers which arise naturally and spontaneously are those which Taoist educators should embrace and support with non-action.

Similar to knowledge types, resources that are dictated and intentional in activity are contrary to meditative practices. Instead, meditative teaching needs to promote diverse resources and knowledge possibilities. In the field of educational psychology, academics have argued for decades over the number of human intelligence types. Meditative teaching understands that beyond one, two, three or seven kinds of intelligence, there are ten thousand more, and each one needs an

<sup>38</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 2



unique kind of resource. For this reason, Taoist teachers need to promote endless possibilities of resources. The benefit of this kind of practice comes when unlimited knowledge and resources are combined with the non-action of a teacher. Instead of petty knowledge categories, schools would promote a movement from knowledge towards wisdom and from this, accomplishment would endure.

## **In the Pursuit of Learning**

The ideas of meditative knowledge, resources and teaching methods rests as the foundation of a Taoist Pedagogy. For Taoist educators, these principles contrast the current expansion of mechanized standardization. Schools, curriculums, lesson plans and testing are only half of a Taoist understanding of knowledge. Through the Taoist tradition of the yin-yang, inspired teachers need to promote oppositional forces. Instead of simply denouncing what is wrong, the Taoist teacher should forward the possibility of a balanced approach. Despite the difficulty of this task, there is hope if a few key principles can be incorporated into the school environment. A Taoist Pedagogy demands that educators scrutinize the balance of knowledge types in schools, open classrooms to a world of resources, examine teacher-student relationships and pursue activities that promote meditative forms of learning. At the heart of this search rests the idea of Tao itself-the universe is a diverse and limitless place and even ten thousand kinds of thinking could never encapsulate its magnitude.

*In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.  
In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped..*

*Less and less is done  
Until non-action is achieved.  
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.*

*The world is ruled by letting things take their course.  
It cannot be ruled by interfering.<sup>39</sup>*

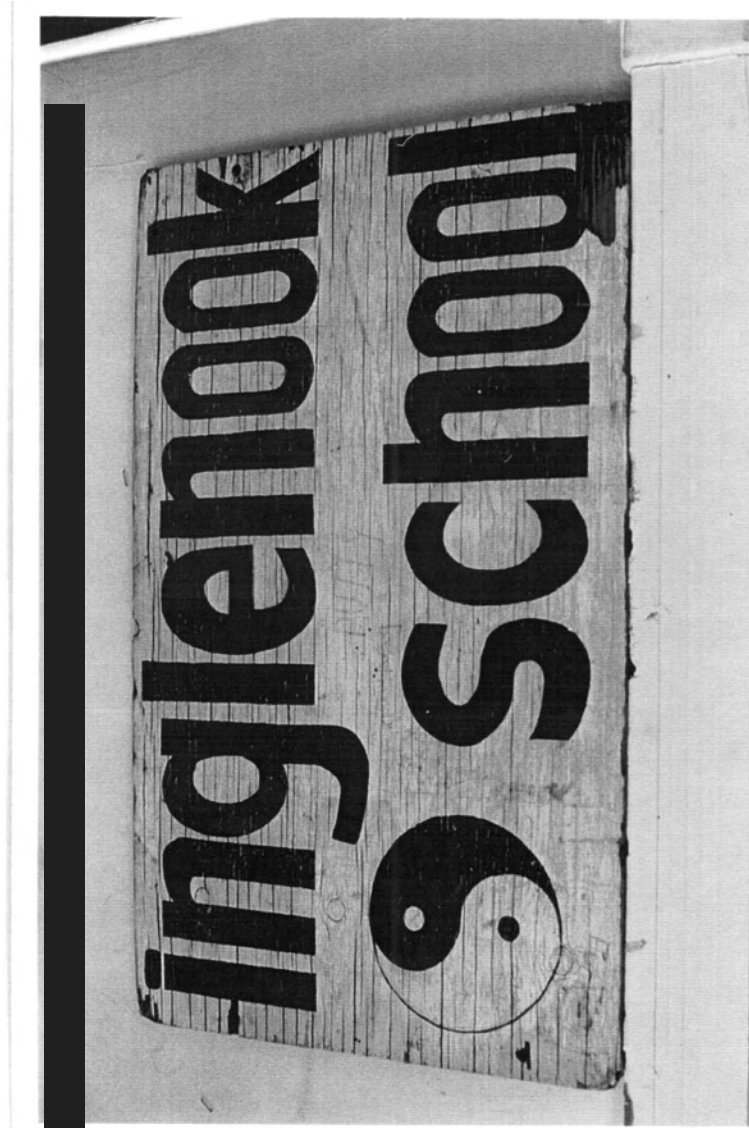
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<sup>39</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gai-Fu Feng and Jane English. pg. 48

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

The case study presented in the following chapters is about a small inner-city school, called Inglenook Community High School. It was introduced in chapter one that Taoist considerations of programs and institutions need to recognize how those machines are used by people. For this reason, the programs at Inglenook school will be compared with the personalities and relationships of two teachers at the school. To begin with, in this chapter, the programs and policies of Inglenook will be associated with educational strategies raised by Taoist philosophers. In particular, a specialized day of study, called Outreach, will be presented as an example of Taoist programming, since it encourages *wu-wei* knowledge, Taoist resources, unique student-teacher relations, and a meditative approach to time and space. In chapter four, two veteran teachers behind the program will be introduced in order to add a human component to the Taoist case study. While not an officially recognized as a Taoist institution, the school structure and educational relationships demonstrate the possibilities of a Taoist Pedagogy, particularly through their support of *wu-wei* knowledge, meditative time, student teacher relationships and Taoist resources.



## **The School Symbol**

Inglenook Community High School, a publicly funded alternative school, has utilized the yin-yang as the school symbol for over three decades. Over the years, this icon has adorned official school documents, signs, school t-shirts, hats, and art which covers the walls of school. At Inglenook the yin-yang symbol is much more than an icon. Instead, it is a living code with which students and teachers engage on a regular basis. In classrooms, school meetings, and in discussions between teachers and students the symbol returns for consideration. Despite this ubiquity of the yin-yang, at the school there is no dominant interpretation. The yin-yang is considered from the perspectives of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, western traditions and a multitude of interpretations. However, it is the centrality of the yin-yang to Taoism, as discussed in chapter two, which makes the case for Inglenook as a representation of Taoist educational principles.

## **Defining Inglenook**

Before entertaining a thorough Taoist examination of Inglenook, it is necessary to impart a historical, political, and educational context. Inglenook Community High School is an inner-city school in the heart of Metropolitan Toronto. The school has been operating as Inglenook since 1974 and has developed a tradition of alternative schooling that has become a source of pride for the school district.

Inglenook is a small, friendly, alternative community high school with a family-like atmosphere. It is housed in a historical building, in the heart of Corktown, in downtown Toronto. It is the oldest continually operating school in the Toronto District School Board. In 1994, Inglenook Community High School was named an exemplary school by the Canadian Education Association. We offer Advanced level programs from Grade 11 to OAC with a few Grade. 10 courses.

Students can select from a wide range of Advanced level courses structured in an interdisciplinary format. Because of our location, teachers use the rich resources of the city, such as galleries, museums, radio and TV stations, movie theaters, and a host of other educational sites. All courses invite active student participation, and both teachers and students find the often passionate debates in courses to be intellectually stimulating.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Found Document #1. *School Profile*.



## Small School

In many North American high schools it is common to see student populations well over a thousand. At Inglenook, the quality of a student's education is directly related to the size of the school. Despite the trend for increased school enrollment, Inglenook has maintained a population of close to 100 enrolling students for the last thirty years. This desire to maintain a small school is a defining feature of Inglenook.

*ingle-nook n. a nook forming a place for sitting beside a deeply recessed fireplace.<sup>41</sup>*

With a name that hints at the intimacy of gathering around a fireplace, Inglenook has stayed true to its definition. Encouraging the intimate relationships that would occur around a fireplace allows for teachers and students to form familial and community relationships. At Inglenook, size does matter, and is an important feature in the creation of relationships and the structuring of an educational environment.

While Inglenook has been aware of size and its impact on relationships for over thirty years, popular academic literature is beginning to reflect similar concerns. Extending from several highly publicized cases of high school violence, such as the Columbine massacre, academics and the mainstream media have begun to question the value of large impersonal educational environments. The old argument was that larger schools are ideal because they support a diversity of programs and increase student achievement. Yet, the value of these proposed attributes has started to come under question. Instead, as a result of the growth in

<sup>41</sup> Found Document #2. *Info Nook*.



school violence many educational agents are now rethinking the placement of achievement over community.<sup>42</sup> With a rediscovered interest in educational relationships school districts across the continent are proposing smaller schools as a solution. The leading advocate is the New York City School District, which has conducted extensive research into the cost effectiveness of small schools. After finding that the costs in small and large schools are comparable, the District supported the creation of 140 new small schools between 1995-2000.<sup>43</sup> The unique quality of the New York example is that the district has not simply added schools, it has also eliminated several large factory modeled schools. For proponents of smaller sized schools, and advocates of community, family and friendly relationships, Inglenook offers an exemplary thirty year history.

## **Community History**

The history of the community and particularly the school site is a great source of pride at Inglenook Community High school, where documents and plaques pronounce the historical importance of the school's location.

### **25 Dollars Reward**

The subscriber will give for the apprehension and return of a colored man, named THORTON, who absconded from our employ on the 3rd or 4th of July, inst. Said Thorton is about 5 feet, 9 or 10 inches high; stout and of good address; had on when he left, a blue cloth coat and pantaloons, boots, and a black hat.

July 7

WURTS & REINHARD<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Raywid, Mary Anne, and Libby Oshiyama. "Musings in the wake of Columbine." pg. 444

<sup>43</sup> Stiefel, Leanna, Robert Berne, Patrice Iatarola, and Nom Fruchter. "High School Size: Effect on Budgets and Performance in New York City." pg. 27

<sup>44</sup> Found Document #4. *A Photocopy From an Old Newspaper.*

This document and a school plaque tell the story of a slave named Thorton who fled through the underground railroad to make his way to Toronto, where he built the cities first Taxi company on the school property. This story is a great example for Inglenook students, who are also often running away from oppressive conditions and in need of hope and inspiration.

Beyond the school site, the community in which Inglenook is located also has a long historical importance. Originally called Corktown, the neighborhood was once a vibrant working class community until an expressway was built through the main corridor. With time this passage changed the dynamics of the neighborhood from a residential environment to a predominantly industrial area.<sup>45</sup> Presently, Corktown is undergoing a revitalization with many artisan studios, cafes and galleries opening in the neighborhood. It is possible that Inglenook has had a large impact on this return to the past. For a school which advocates community connections, and has a long tradition of promoting artistic talent, it is possible that after 30 years Inglenook might have had an impact on this reformation of the local community. For example, a nearby recording studio has recently been established by a former student who now encourages contemporary students to apprentice at the shop.

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<sup>45</sup> Beattie, Mary. with Margaret Robertson and Suzanne Stiegelbauer. *Exemplary Schools Project Technical Report: Corktown Community High School: Toronto, Ontario*. pg. 11

## Alternative Schools

As an alternative school with three decades of experience, Inglenook has a unique position in the history of alternative schooling. Currently alternative schools and programming are recognized as a vital component of public education. Yet, alternative programming has its historical roots in the 1960's. During this early era, a substantial number of academics, teachers, parents and students became highly critical of the public school system. These critics pointed towards high drop out rates and low participation rates in what they identified as factory modeled schools. During the early years of this phenomena dozens of books were written with an emphasis on the need for freedom in education: *Free Schools* by Kenneth Richmond, *Free the Children: Radical Reform and the Free School Movement* by Allen Graubard, *Organization Without Authority* by Ann Swindler, and *Free Schools* by Jonathan Kozol. While diverse in study, each of these readings suggested that large institutional public schools were inherently instrumental in educational oppression. The list of indictments was extensive: that public schools used coercion, regimentation, large classes, rigid time structures, and competition to create competitive factions in society.

In response to the early theoretical work, schools were established to celebrate alternative learning styles. Initially, a small number of private schools emerged in the early 1960's, under the banner of the free school movement. The first were mostly private schools for predominantly middle class youth and these boarding schools were generally extensions of an earlier experimental school in England, called Summerhill. In Summerhill and these early alternative schools, schools were redesigned to encourage student directed learning. The operational

assumption was that students did not need external prompting to learn, and instead that they would be motivated through their natural desires to learn. To pursue these passions the curriculum, classrooms and administrative decision making became the responsibilities of the students. The response from the students was positive and by the mid 1960's these alternative schooling practices began to influence the urban public school systems and a second wave of alternative growth occurred.<sup>46</sup> New urban schools introduced alternative education to inner-city students who also responded to the new models of education. However, these urban schools, by the nature of their location and clientele, had to adapt the Summerhill model to their local context. Despite these adaptations, one central tenet remained with each of these alternate schools, the principle that disenfranchised students are best educated when they are directly involved in their own administrative and curricular decision making.

Inglenook Community High School, originally established in 1973 has maintained some of the early free school traditions. At Inglenook, the programs and the structures of the school encourage students to take control of their own education. With a history of tremendous local success and the recent nomination as an exemplary school, Inglenook demonstrates the possibilities inherent in alternative models.<sup>47</sup> This recognition of the talents inherent in alternative students adds to academic discussions of what it means to be academically successful. In a study conducted by Herve Varenne and Ray McDemott, in a book entitled *Successful Failure*, the research found that alternative students have

<sup>46</sup> Mintz, Jerry. *The Almanac of Educational Choices*. pg. 24

<sup>47</sup> Beattie, Mary. with Margaret Robertson and Suzanne Stiegelbauer. *Exemplary Schools Project Technical Report: Corktown Community High School: Toronto, Ontario*. Canadian Education Association.

different sets of skills and knowledge than "normal" students. When they presented alternative curriculum to both kinds of students, Varenne and McDemott found "failed children succeeding at school tasks and successful children failing at similar tasks."<sup>48</sup> Considering their study, and the historical contribution of free schools, it becomes apparent that the unrecognized talents of alternative students needed a thorough examination. Inglenook is one institution where alternative students have been encouraged to follow their potential. The school has maintained a small, community oriented, familial educational environment in order to enhance the education of alternative students.

## **Inglenook and Taoism**

### **Knowledge**

In chapter two, the Taoist Pedagogical understanding of knowledge was defined as expanding beyond intentional categories and definitions. Instead, both intentional knowledge and non-active knowledge, *yu-wei* and *wu-wei*, are Taoist forms of knowledge. However, with a consideration of the yin-yang symbol Taoism promotes the balance between opposition forces. In chapter one, the contemporary school system was described as overly concerned with standardized and ordered knowledge categories, *yu-wei*. In this chapter, the story of Inglenook is put forward as an example of a *wu-wei* inspired system which offers the

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<sup>48</sup> Varenne, Herve. Ray McDemott. *Successful Failure: The School America Builds*. pg. 3

potential for a balance in schooling approaches.

At Inglenook the mandate is to educate with as much interdisciplinary study as possible.

Students can select from a wide range of Advanced level courses structured in an interdisciplinary format. Because of our location, teachers use the rich resources of the city, such as galleries, museums, radio and TV stations, movie theaters, and a host of other educational sites. All courses invite active student participation, and both teachers and students find the often passionate debates in courses to be intellectually stimulating.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to the highly categorical and systematized approaches to learning adopted at most North American schools, at Inglenook education reflects the interdisciplinary realities of knowledge. In Taoism and in the above profile there is a common understanding that knowledge is not only curricular and categorical, it is also interdisciplinary and learning also exists outside of the school walls within the larger community. The belief that knowledge must go beyond basic categories is a shared vision with a Taoist Pedagogy of learning. In Taoism, the idea of an education fixated with compartmentalized learning is something to be avoided. In *The Tao of Pooh*, Benjamin Hoff discusses this ancient principle in relation to current scholars.

Far from reflecting the Taoist ideal of wholeness and independence, this incomplete and unbalanced creature divides all kinds of abstract things into little categories and compartments, while remaining rather helpless and disorganized in his daily life. Rather than learning from Taoist teachers and direct experience, he learns intellectually and indirectly, from books.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Found Document #1. *School Profile*.

<sup>50</sup> Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 25

It is this common philosophy of interdisciplinary learning and education through direct experience which Inglenook encourages, a Taoist approach to knowledge acquisition.

Interdisciplinary intentions and focus on lived experience exists beyond the mandate and the school profile. It is the class offerings that highlight the application of these visions into educational practice. At Inglenook, class titles demonstrate the school's commitment to education which crosses disciplinary boundaries. The list of course offerings includes a variety of unique titles.

Science *in Society*, Introduction to Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology, The Fashion Industry / *Fashion in Society*, Individuals and Families in a Diverse Society, Issues of Human Growth and Development, Utopian Cities, and Cyberpunk Literature.<sup>51</sup>

Similar to the Taoist understanding of knowledge, at Inglenook standardized and categorical approaches to knowledge are viewed as limiting and instead interdisciplinary and relevant forms of knowledge are pursued. In Taoism learning for the sake of learning is contrary to developing knowledge and eventually wisdom. Instead a Taoist Pedagogy advocates the idea that students, like trees, need to be well rooted. To be rooted means to learn and understand a whole range of knowledge types.

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<sup>51</sup> Found Document #5. *Course Generator: Student Course Survey.*

*Well planted is not uprooted,  
well kept is not lost.  
The offerings of the generations  
to the ancestors will not cease*

*To follow the way yourself is real power.  
To follow it in the family is abundant power.  
To follow it in the community is steady power.  
To follow it in the whole country is lasting power.  
To follow it in the world is universal power.*

*So in myself I see what self is,  
in my household I see what family is,  
in my town I see what community is,  
in my nation I see what a country is,  
in the world I see what is under heaven*

*How do I know the world is so?  
By this.<sup>52</sup>*

## **Learning Relationships**

In chapter two, A Taoist Pedagogy, it was identified that knowledge possibilities are intricately linked with student teacher relationships, that the relationships between teacher and student are as important as the information itself. At Inglenook, students and teachers have a different kind of educational relationship. At most schools, the standard relationship is one based on the authoritative position of the teacher. At Inglenook, the standard notion of what it means to be a student and a teacher is challenged.

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<sup>52</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Ursula K. Le Guin and J.P. Seaton. pg. 69



Approximately 130 students (Grade 10 through to OAC) and seven teachers are housed in a crowded Victorian building of few facilities and enormous vitality. Walls are festooned with news articles, letters from alumni and ads for beat poetry readings; students may take their lessons from sofas and armchairs or with teapot and cup perched on the edge of a desk. Teachers are called by their first names in attempt to break down any ideas of hierarchy; kids tend to describe their course load as “Two Robs, a Bob and a Gretchen.”<sup>53</sup>

This quote from the *Toronto Life Magazine* paints a portrait of the educational relationships at Inglenook, an image where students work in a domestic environment with the comforts of home, identify and refer to their teachers on a first name basis. These three examples of Inglenook's alternate relationship model are only a small portrait of a much larger picture. While very descriptive the above article fails to state that the teachers also sit on the couches and learn from the students. During the research one teacher commented:

“The neat thing about Inglenook is that sometimes I am not sure if I am the student or the teacher.”

It is through the techniques of equalizing student and teacher power relations that Inglenook promotes learning that has a foundation in the the Taoist understanding of the Vital Secret.

In chapter two the Vital Secret poem was presented as showing a Taoist concern for the authority of knowledge and the need for virtuous teachers who have faith in both the good and the bad students.

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<sup>53</sup> Found Document #6. “*Inglenook Community High School.*”

*Therefore the good person  
Is the bad person's teacher,  
And the bad person  
Is the good person's resource*

*Not to value the teacher,  
Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent*

*This is called the vital secret.<sup>54</sup>*

This Vital Secret questions the value of the teacher and promotes the bad person as an educational resource. At Inglenook Community High School the Vital Secret has application in the practices of the schools' programs where students are encouraged to participate in their own education as both student and teacher.

Teachers using their first names and students drinking tea are the result of an intricate system of programs at the school. At Inglenook there are a wide variety of rules, practices and governing bodies which reinforce this desire for students to act as equals in their education. The most active of these programs is a governing body called C.E.A.S.A (Committee on the Evaluation, Academic Standards and Admissions). This committee, responsible for the quality of academic, community life, hiring of staff and monitoring of the community volunteers, consists of two teachers and two students, each with equal voting power.<sup>55</sup> As the day to day disciplinary and administrative body of the school C.E.A.S.A. runs during lunch time when any students or teachers can arrange for a meeting. The mandate of C.E.A.S.A. is as a problem solving body which attempts to mediate disputes and to suggest repercussions for administrative infractions.

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<sup>54</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 27

<sup>55</sup> Durno, Elizabeth. *Public Alternative Schools in Metro Toronto*. pg. 88

C.E.A..S.A., which has a democratic balance between teachers and students, acts in the role of a traditional principal. It is through this political body and other school traditions that Inglenook embraces the Taoist principles that relations between students and teachers should be void of ultimate authority and instead students and teachers should share in decision making.

## **Resources**

The programs at Inglenook, developed over a thirty year history, have not gone unnoticed. In 1995, a study was conducted at Inglenook by The Canadian Educational Association which selected the school for an exemplary schools project. This study was composed of twenty-one select schools across Canada, which were identified for forwarding innovative solutions to the challenges and tensions facing contemporary schooling. In the study, Inglenook was defined as a:

distinctive, alternative high school where the philosophy, pedagogy, and programme focus on the development of creative intelligence, and which emphasizes both academic excellence and equity.<sup>56</sup>

However, there is more than just philosophy, pedagogy, or program that has informed the school's success.

In addition to structural considerations, for the last three decades, the participation of the students has been vital to this success. Students who have already demonstrated their willingness to leave other school institutions, excel at Inglenook, where their participation shows the possibilities behind these kinds of alternate programming. At Inglenook the inclusion of student knowledge and expertise has been an important resource.

<sup>56</sup> Beattie, Mary, with Margaret Robertson and Suzanne Stiegelbauer. *Exemplary Schools Project Technical Report: Corktown Community High School: Toronto, Ontario*. pg. 4

*Therefore the good person  
Is the bad person's teacher,  
And the bad person  
Is the good person's resource  
  
Not to value the teacher,  
Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent  
  
This is called the vital secret.<sup>57</sup>*

By encouraging the abilities of these students, Inglenook Community High School demonstrates the Taoist concept of the resourceful bad student and the need to reconsider what it means to be either a good or bad student. In order to devalue the role of the hierarchical teacher and to emphasize the possibilities of resourceful bad students, Inglenook has initiated a wide range of programming.

In school structure, it is the Outreach program that stands as the best representation of Inglenook's educational practices, and rests as the most likely example of Taoist principles in the school. Four days of the week, classes at Inglenook are structured much like the typical high school. The daily timetable has students moving from class to class where, for the most part, they study standardized curriculums. Designed for students and teachers, the Outreach program encourages educational resources that exist beyond these boundaries of school curriculum and routine. Instead, every Wednesday morning is dedicated to participation in student designed learning activities, and once a week students and staff put aside curriculums, standard school routines, mandated knowledge and structured time.

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<sup>57</sup> Lao-tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 27

The Outreach program, unique to Inglenook, is mandatory. Each semester, students choose an unpaid voluntary activity-covering community, career or personal enrichment-and spending Wednesday mornings pursuing that choice. They rotate through these three areas and marry their program to a particular academic component. An Outreach project is worth 20 per cent of the final course mark. One girl learns Japanese language and culture; a young man writes and produces a short film and submits his screen play to the English class.<sup>58</sup>

As the main subject for the duration of this chapter, the Outreach program exemplifies how Inglenook mirrors the Taoist considerations of resource types, relationships, knowledge categories and meditative possibilities.

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<sup>58</sup> Found Document #6. "*Inglenook Community High School.*"

## The Meditative

The possibility of meditative resources, meditative relationships and meditative knowledge are part of what unites Inglenook High School with a Taoist Pedagogy. Central to a Taoist understanding of the meditative is the idea of an uncarved block. Being devoid of external influence, much like a piece of uncut wood, is the practice of returning to a natural state.

The essence of the principle of the Uncarved Block is that things in their original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is changed. For the written character *P'u*, the typical Chinese dictionary will give a definition of "natural, simple, plain, honest." *P'u* is composed of two separate characters combined: the first, the "radical" or root-meaning one, is that for tree or wood; the second, the "phonetic" or sound-giving one, is the character for dense growth or thicket. So from "tree in thicket" or "wood not cut" comes the meaning of "things in their natural state" - what is generally represented in English versions of Taoist writings as the "uncarved block."

This basic Taoist principle applies not only to *things* in their natural beauty and function, but to people as well.<sup>59</sup>

In Taoism, people are considered natural beings who have their own beauty and inherent desire to grow. The principle that people can also be uncarved opens further opportunities for a Taoist Pedagogical approach. The uncarved potentiality of people can be expanded to the possibilities of uncarved knowledge, uncarved resources and uncarved relationships.

At Inglenook, several programs are designed to encourage the uncarved interests of students. The Outreach program, in particular, is the best example of these practices as it offers a substantial amount of time for students and staff to

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<sup>59</sup> Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 10-11

focus on natural learning desires. While in the program, students must follow the categories of community, career, and personal enrichment. These options are extremely broad and in application are highly transferable. For example, the production of a short screen play, referred to on the previous page, satisfied the career category for one of the participants, and satisfied the personal enrichment category for the other participating students. While there is structure and order in the Outreach program the most important contribution is that this flexible system allows for the uncarved interests of the students, learning which also influences how other classes at the school are taught. On Wednesday, at Inglenook, students' learning is not bound by curriculums, testing, or teacher mandated learning and the results of this program demonstrate the possibilities of the educational approach. A Sample of Outreach Project Titles (from 1996-2001) has been listed in appendix B. The allowance for contemplative learning is what makes the Outreach program the ideal case study for exemplifying the Taoist principles of meditative knowledge, meditative resources, and meditative student-teacher relationships.

## Meditative Knowledge

*Banish learning, discard knowledge:  
People will gain a hundredfold.*

*Banish benevolence, discard righteousness:  
People will return to duty and compassion.*

*Banish skill, discard profit:  
There will be no more thieves.*

*These three statements are not enough.  
One more step is necessary:*

*Look at plain silk; hold uncarved wood.  
The self dwindles; desires fade.<sup>60</sup>*

The mandate of the Outreach program and informational literature does not specifically mention or advocate the idea of meditative knowledge. Yet, what I will argue here, is that this program allows for and encourages a meditative approach to knowledge acquisition. The evidence gathered during the research period, includes a data base of 789 Outreach projects completed from September 1995 to June 2001. It is important to note that not one of these projects had the specific title of Taoism and less than 1% are listed as specifically meditative projects. However, if the Taoist affiliation with Yoga, Nijitsu, Buddhism, Kung-Fu, and Tai Kwon Do is considered, then the number of meditative studies rises to 7%. As discussed in chapter 2, the Taoist perspective on meditation is much more expansive than training oneself to sit and breathe. The act of meditative knowledge acquisition can also be an active process. In the Taoist meditative art of Tai-chi

<sup>60</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao the Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 19



practitioners are mobile and their body is involved in highly physical movement while meditating.

The priority from a Taoist Pedagogy is that being meditative involves resting the mind from endless racing about. More important than the bodies' actions is that a person's thoughts are at peace and contemplative without external demands or requirements. In Taoist research the processes involved in being creative and in artistic endeavors encourage quiet contemplative learning.<sup>61</sup> Anyone who has ever painted or completed a craft project should be able to relate to these meditative moments where the project consumes the mind and all other external distractions and ordered thought processes fade away. In Taoist literature, poetry, painting, dancing, photography, drawing, cooking, drama, and even walking in nature have all been forwarded as examples of meditative learning. To return to the Outreach program, if these categories are included, then 45% of the Outreach projects are linked to notions of the meditative.

When considering the Taoist understanding that any activity which is not forced allows for an untrammled or uncarved mind, the number of meditative Outreach projects grows.<sup>62</sup> More important than the topic of study is the process of learning which should involve natural learning instincts, where students are encouraged to explore activities which they desire to learn about. The pursuit of meditative approaches to knowledge is much more than a categorical consideration. Meditative approaches to knowledge acquisition are as much about the processes of learning as they are about the topic being studied. As an example

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<sup>61</sup> Kuo, You-Yuh. "Taoist Psychology of Creativity." *Journal of Creative Behavior*.

<sup>62</sup> Simpson, Steven. "A Simple Lesson in Experiencing Nature." *The Journal of Experiential Education*. pg. 120

of this distinction, consider the difference between a student who has decided to make a painting, in contrast to a student who is required to make a painting. It is easy imagining a student being forced to paint, or even forced to meditate, and hating every moment of the process. This example is intended to demonstrate that meditative knowledge requires uncarved natural learning desires and cannot be forced. Instead of categories of meditative knowledge it is the processes of learning and the conditions of learning which defines whether an activity is meditative or not.

### **Meditative Resources**

The understanding of meditative resources begins with this segment from the Taoist poem called the Vital Secret.

*Not to love the resource,  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent.*

As with meditative knowledge Taoist resources should be expansive in possibility. In the Outreach program, at Inglenook Community High School, rests a working model of how schools can encourage a diversity of learning resources. As one veteran teacher notes, the origin of the program itself was based on this idea of expansive resources.

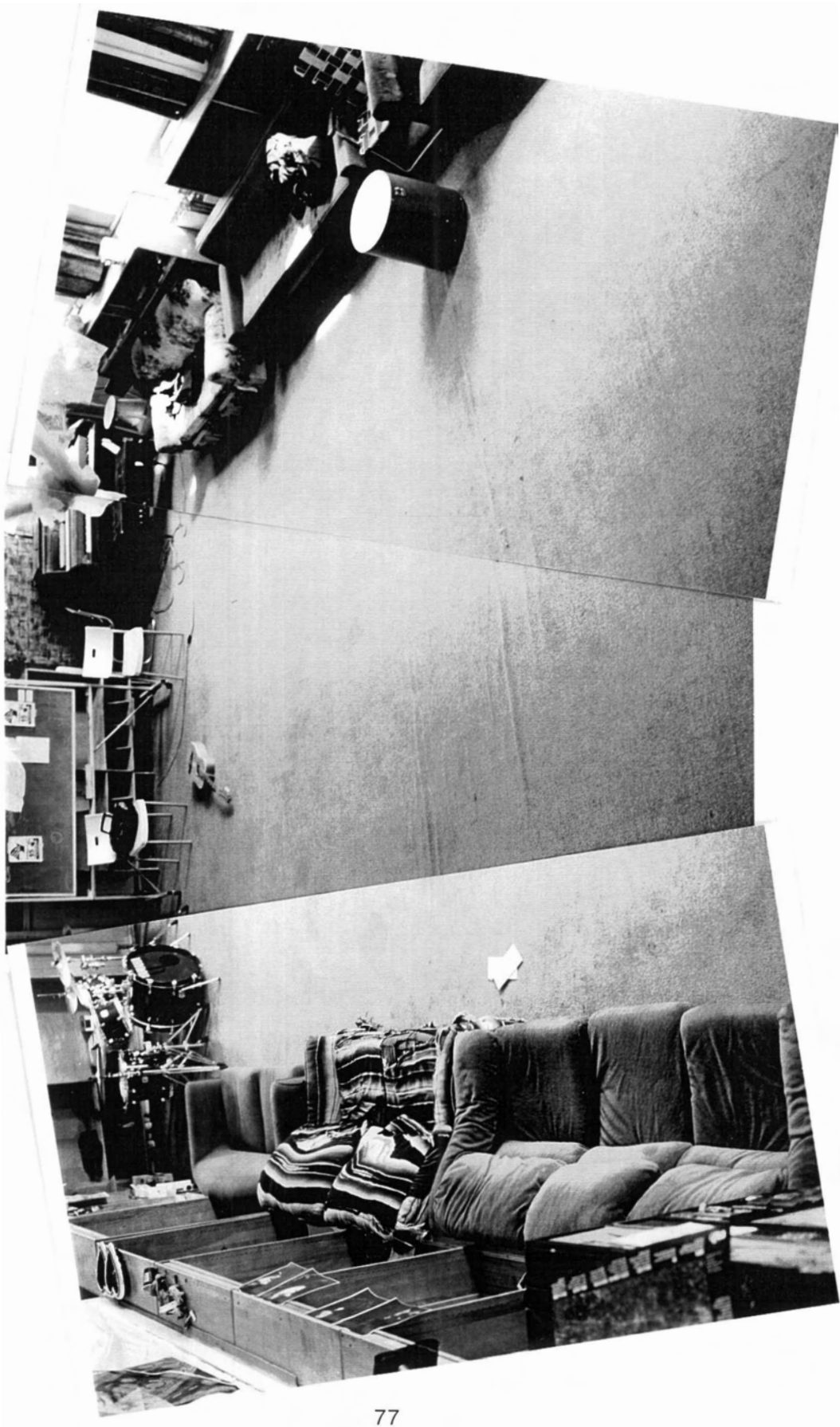
“it started with that kind of notion that there is education in the classroom and there is this whole thing outside and trying to combine the two in some kind of form and that was called Outreach.”

During the history of the school, this original vision has been enhanced by structural and procedural elements that support the desire to explore learning resources outside school boundaries. Through the Outreach timetable, students are inspired to engage a wide range of community resources not normally available in a school environment. In order to support this program Inglenook has reconstructed notions of school time and school space, which together help define the possibilities of meditative resources.

At Inglenook there is a room called the student lounge which was established for an infinite number of purposes. On regular school days or Outreach days the room may be used for a place to meet, to relax, to escape, to play music, to paint, or to design and initiate projects. It is also the largest space in the school where all school meetings, celebrations and performances occur. The uniqueness of the student lounge is best demonstrated on an Outreach day. The following photograph and excerpt from my research field notes sums up the diversity of interactions which this room facilitates.

I am sitting here in the student lounge on an Outreach morning. At first there was one student working on the Inglenook archives. But now there is a wide range of activity in the room. In one corner a group of students discuss what they will plant in the Inglenook garden. Across the room three students plan locations for a scene in a movie they are making. In another corner a student sits behind a set of drums playing slow rock and roll rhythms. And next to me is a former student who has dropped by the school to get a transcript and has now come into the lounge to interact with the current students and reminisce about her own experiences.

In the student lounge learning is an active process. What makes this room a meditative space is the lack of learning requirements. It is rare to see a teacher in the room. Instead, the staff leave the room to support the uncarved desires of the students. By leaving a room outside of educational demands the empty space left behind encourages meditative knowledge types.



*Useful emptiness*

*Heaven and earth aren't humane.  
To them the ten thousand things  
are straw dogs.*

*Wise souls aren't humane  
To them the hundred families are straw dogs.*

*Heaven and earth  
act as a bellows*

*Empty yet structured,  
it moves, inexhaustibly giving.<sup>63</sup>*

The value of the student lounge and its empty space is heightened when merged with another mediative resource, slow time. In this room, particularly on Outreach Wednesdays, there is no need to hurry and the pressures of external demands are reduced. Instead of the routine of one hour classes and twenty minute activities, which happens at other times in the week, Inglenook students have every Wednesday for an entire semester to explore one learning activity. Often, students will extend their projects over two semesters and will pursue one course of study every Wednesday for an entire school year. It is in these examples that the Outreach program highlights the need for slow time and open space during the facilitation of meditative knowledge. Uncarved wood and uncarved learning take time and room to grow. At Inglenook, the student lounge and the Outreach timetable demonstrate a meditative approach to the educational

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<sup>63</sup> Le Guin, Ursula K. *Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way*. pg. 8

resources of time and space, and it is through these techniques that the school demonstrates the possibility of a Taoist approach to education.

## **Meditative Relationships**

As with meditative resources, the contemplation of meditative relationships begins with a segment from the Taoist poem, the Vital Secret.

*Not to value the teacher ...  
Causes great confusion even for the intelligent,*

With meditative knowledge, meditative resources and meditative relationships the definition of Taoism inspires expansive possibilities. The standard role of the teacher has been to limit and narrow in on specific educational practices. The Outreach program at Inglenook Community High School models how to devalue the role of the teacher in order to expand educational opportunity. Part of the initial Outreach process involves students finding a sponsor for their course of study. This person cannot be a teacher and instead must be someone who can act as a resource person to help guide, advise, and facilitate the work being done. During the time where the students and sponsors are working on their own curriculum design and learning processes, the Inglenook teachers are involved in the process of supporting and facilitating the needs of the students and sponsors. This process places the professional teachers outside of the authority of knowledge and demonstrates how learning can be encouraged despite the Taoist Pedagogical concept of "not valuing the teacher".

During the Outreach program the responsibility for learning rests in the hands of the student and is only facilitated and encouraged by a wide range of educators. This challenge to the authority of school relationships and standard practices placing the teachers side by side with students and community sponsors encourages unique learning opportunities. The breaking down of authoritative teachers' roles does not end there. Part of the Outreach program requires that projects are mingled with standard classroom instructional time, and the students are asked to introduce their projects into the academic classes they take. The impact of this expectation, and the wide range of knowledge types which students explore, is that inevitably the knowledge being presented goes beyond the expertise of the teacher. Often the students are positioned as the specialists, and as a result the teachers become the students. One female teacher explains how this process is highly beneficial for both students and staff:

"At one point I had thought about returning to University but the amazing thing about the Inglenook environment is that I learn...It is like going to University."

Through the Outreach program, and other Inglenook programs, the typical divisions between student and teacher becomes blurred. Instead, there is the promotion of a learning environment where the authority of knowledge and resources is open for consideration.



The dynamic student-teacher relationships at Inglenook act as an uncarved block since they are highly transient and the relations are determined by the needs of the learning activity. It is this lack of authoritative teacher driven processes that sets the stage for meditative approaches to educational relationships.

*Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.  
The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease,  
Creating, yet not possessing,  
Working, yet not taking credit.  
Work is done, then forgotten.  
Therefore it lasts forever.<sup>64</sup>*

Meditative relationships begin with a meditative teaching approach, since at schools educational power continues to rest in the hands of the teachers. To circumvent these processes and to promote *wu-wei* knowledge or non-active learning, Taoist educators need to be ready for transient learning relationships. Instead of being the center of activity, non-talking and the appearance of non-action are essential for promoting meditative knowledge and resources. In the next chapter, two case examples of meditative teaching styles will be examined in full. For now, meditative teaching is best understood through the contexts of the Outreach program, which encourages learning relationships where the teacher is a less-active participant whose role is to facilitate the natural learning desires of their students.

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<sup>64</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gai-Fu Feng and Jane English. pg. 2

## In the Pursuit of Learning

While not officially recognized as a Taoist school, Inglenook Community High School, and particularly the Outreach program embodies many of the principles of a Taoist Pedagogy. First, this school exemplifies the Taoist ideal of meditative knowledge, *wu-wei*. Through the promotion of students natural learning desires and interests, at Inglenook, the stringent *yu-wei* demands of the external educational world are reduced. Students continue to pursue *yu-wei* forms of knowledge and learning but these experiences are balanced with *wu-wei* processes. In addition to this promotion of meditative knowledge, the Outreach program also exemplifies the idea of meditative resources by encouraging a wide range of possible topics and means for attaining knowledge. To support this process the school has also designed the physical space of the students lounge and the open Wednesday timetable, which act as empty resources waiting to be filled with students natural learning desires. As evident from this case study of Outreach, meditative resources and meditative knowledge also require particular educational relationships. Teachers at Inglenook are required to move fluidly between being authorities of knowledge, facilitators of students interests and even must become students themselves. It is this flux of roles, the emptying of required resources and the expansion of knowledge possibilities which unites Inglenook with the uncarved ideals of the meditative.

*In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.  
In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped.*

*Less and less is done  
Until non-action is achieved.  
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.*

*The world is ruled by letting things take their course.  
It cannot be ruled by interfering.<sup>65</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gai-Fu Feng and Jane English. pg. 48

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

The technological innovations of the late twentieth century have had an accelerating impact on a wide range of social structures and institutions. In the field of education this is apparent in the compartmentalization of knowledge, reduced teaching resources, mechanical learning relationships, and in the standardization of time. In response to these conditions highlighted in chapter one, a Taoist Pedagogy offers the possibility of expanding beyond knowledge categories, decompartmentalizing educational resources, balancing student teacher relations, and promoting slow time. In chapter three, the Outreach program at Inglenook Community High School was presented in relation to the above four Taoist principles. In order to expand on this case study, chapter four will also investigate the human influences behind Inglenook Community High School. This Taoist consideration of the relationships between humans and their machines will be examined as part of the methodological considerations behind this study. Ultimately, the influence of people impact both the structuring of schools and research potential. From this understanding this chapter will forward the possibility of a Taoist inspired research and teaching Methodology.

# Taoist Methodology for Research and Teaching

Similar to the introduction of a Taoist Pedagogy, the best place to begin an exploration of a Taoist Methodology is with the understanding that there can be no such thing.

*To realize that our knowledge is ignorance,  
This is a noble insight.  
To regard our ignorance as knowledge,  
This is mental sickness.*

*Only when we are sick of our sickness  
Shall we cease to be sick.  
The Sage is not sick, being sick of sickness;  
This is the secret of health.<sup>66</sup>*

In Taoist philosophy, ordered knowledge creates ignorance and leads to mental sickness, and methodologies have the same potential to be unsound. Since the literal definition of Methodology is "the system of methods and principles used in a particular discipline"<sup>67</sup>, from a Taoist perspective methodologies can be contagious. Through active or predetermined systems, methodologies have the possibility of promoting ignorance and the reduction of possibilities. This being said, the idea of principles informing method allows for the development of a Taoist Methodology for teaching and researching.

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<sup>66</sup> Lao Tsu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by John C.H. Wu and edited by Paul K.T. Sih. pg. 103

<sup>67</sup> *The Collins English Dictionary*. edited by Patrick Hanks. pg. 970

Taoists understand that knowledge is expressed outside of systemic methods as they distrust theory and predetermined order. As an alternative they turn towards knowledge that is instinctual and non-active in pursuit. Author Ursula LeGuin, in her book of translation and commentary on the *Tao Te Ching*, expresses this insight when she writes:

What you know without knowing you know it is the right kind of knowledge. Any other kind (conviction, theory, dogmatic belief, opinion) isn't the right kind, and if you don't know that, you'll lose the Way.<sup>68</sup>

For LeGuin, and other Taoists, knowledge does not need theory or method to support it. The difficulty with this approach, for methodological considerations, is that instead of predetermined methods, the researcher is left to build methods case by case.

The question arises; what would a Taoist research or teaching Methodology look like? The waterfall saga, previously presented in chapter two, is perhaps the best example of what a Taoist approach might look like.

*We find Confucian standing by the banks of a powerful waterfall. So treacherous are the currents that not even fish can survive in them long. He sees a man jump into the swirling waters and, afraid that he is committing suicide, orders his disciples to pull him out, only to find the swimmer quite unscathed by the incident "May I ask if you have some special way of staying afloat in the water?" Confucius inquires. "I have no way...", the swimmer answered. "I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the*

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<sup>68</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Ursula K. Le Guin and J.P. Seaton. pg. 91

*water goes and never thinking about myself." The swimmer merely flows with the water, never thinking about how or why, forgetting about himself. Likewise, the sage flows with the Tao, wandering through life and never knowing how or why he does what he does.<sup>69</sup>*

This parable demonstrates not only how a Taoist study would look, but through the character of Confucius juxtaposes a Taoist approach. From the Taoist principle of non-action the above Sage learns by following the resources of the water itself and integrating with the natural flow of the subjects. When asked how he studies, the Sage replies "I have no way." In actuality the Taoist Sage does have a way, and a set of guiding principles, based on the nature of the subject itself.

A Taoist methodological metaphor would have researchers jumping in to swim with the subjects. Swimming with the subjects, in this case study requires that the natural dynamics of Inglenook be introduced. At Inglenook despite the thousands of students and staff who have influenced the programming, there are two teachers, both of whom have been at Inglenook for most of the school's thirty year history, who have had a long term impact on the development of Inglenook. It is these two influences within the flow of the school who inform both the structure of this study's teaching and research methodology. In order to proceed with Taoist methodological considerations it is necessary to first paint a portrait of the two teachers: Rob Rennick and Bob Prichard.

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<sup>69</sup> Oshima, Harold H. "A Metaphorical Analysis of the Concept of Mind in the Chuang-tzu." *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. pg. 68





## Rob Rennick...art room Social Sciences, Visual Art

**Nickname:** Robigor (or is that his real name? Nobody knows....)

**Position:** Coordinator - Teacher

**Major:** Weather, Climate, Art, Icons,

**Responsibilities:** Coordinator, A/V, Decorator, Trips, Coffee House, Rants @ Staff Meetings

**Special Interests:** Gardens, Mexico, Drawing, Kitsch, Fun fur

**Special Powers:** Forecasting weather, seeing the grid

**Fav Color:** Bright Yellow, Bright Pink, Orange

**Pet Peeves:** Fast food, Bright amber lights at night

**Obsessions:** Gardening in winter, Hi-Life

**Inspirational Quote:** "Know thyself and be true, Workers of the world unite."

"Wu-Wei-Wu"<sup>70</sup>

Rob is a teacher who stands out in the school. He has a fascination with fashion, design, and a teaching technique he calls "theme dressing", which involves the wearing of iconic attire to highlight lessons and classroom discussions. Theme dressing is an ideal representation of Rob's teaching methods through which he values the artistic and embodies the creative.

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<sup>70</sup> Found Document # 7. *Meet the Teacher Night*.

*The great scholar hearing the TAO  
Tries to practice it.  
The middling scholar hearing the TAO  
Sometimes has it, sometimes not.  
The lesser scholar hearing the TAO  
Has a good laugh.  
Without that laughter  
It wouldn't be TAO<sup>71</sup>*

Playful attire is one of a variety of teaching techniques Rob uses to entertain Inglenook students. Rob promotes learning that begins and ends with laughter by modeling play and embodying it as well.

In my opinion, Rob's most valuable asset is his ability to teach through play and in order to establish this educational approach he practices a teaching strategy based on not-doing. Similar to the Taoist principle of *wu-wei*, Rob identifies “Wu-Wei-Wu” as one of his inspirational quotes. This statement is a central theme in early Taoist texts, particularly in Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*. In definition, the short form *wu-wei* is characterized as being non-active or non-intentional. *Wu-wei-wu* is the further extension of this idea and translates as:

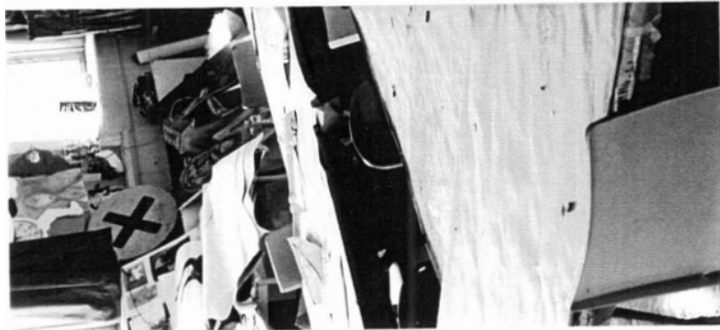
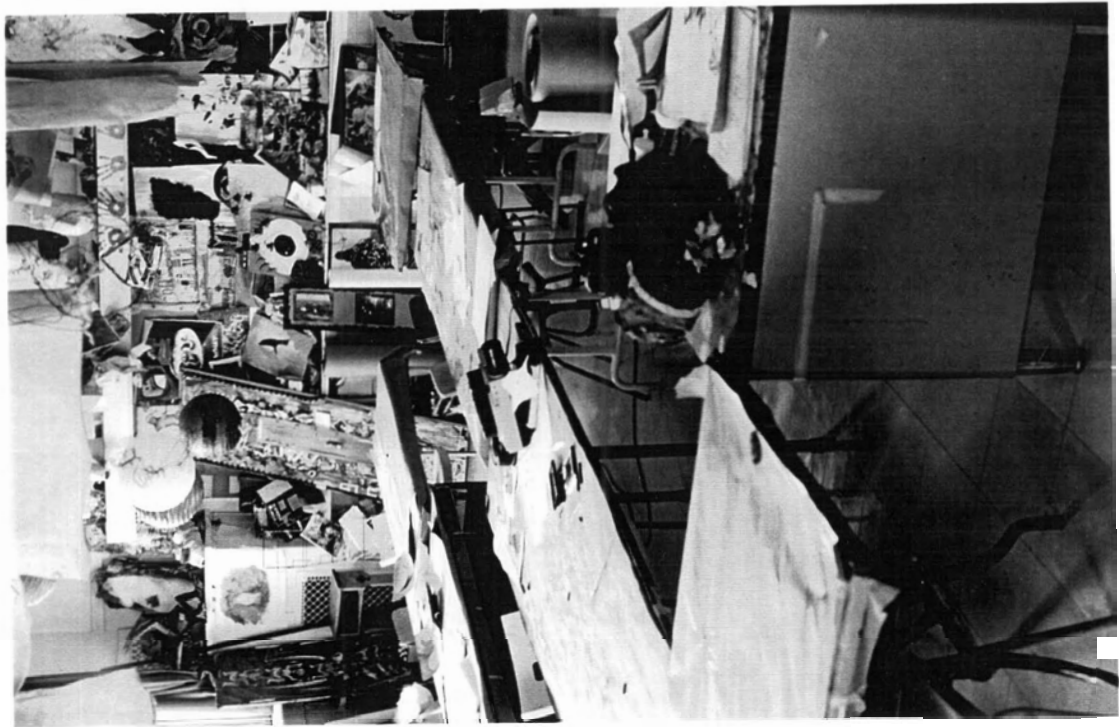
*wu wei wu*: Do not do, Doing not-doing. To act without acting.  
Action by inaction. You do nothing yet it gets done....<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo. pg. 41

<sup>72</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Ursula K. Le Guin and J.P. Seaton. pg. 6

When I talked to students in Rob's classes they regularly commented that they "did nothing" or "learned nothing" during the course and this is the brilliance of his teaching methods. Through *wu-wei-wu*, Rob promotes learning that does not appear intentional. With an emphasis on informal class dynamics and spontaneous activities, Rob teaches without teaching. Having been a student of Rob's, a student teacher, and a researcher observing Rob I have come to the conclusion that his ability to teach through non-action is an extremely difficult teaching technique and a defining quality of Rob's educational approach.



In the preceding photograph of Rob's classroom it is evident that students do not remain idle. Instead, a high level of production and educational outcomes is clearly evident. Through a non-active approach Rob has made overproduction a concern as students projects literally spill off the walls and into the hallways, stairs, school gallery and even into the school yard. Through the appearance of doing not-doing, *wu-wei-wu*, Rob provides evidence that the current fascination with structured and ordered learning environments is only one of many educational possibilities.

In class I observed Rob as an absent minded professor continually lost between thoughts. In staff meetings and in adult spaces I witnessed a different person. From the perspective of students Rob does not do, a technique which is based in doing not-doing, *wu-wei-wu*. The strength of this technique is that it is an empowering practice which puts learning in the hands of the students. Far removed from the authority of knowledge, Rob acts as facilitator of students' interests and desires. It becomes the youth's role to identify knowledge pursuits, to suggest resources and to determine the time allocated to learning. For thirty years Rob's educational technique has invigorated the learning desires of Inglenook students and promoted a profound number of exemplary projects and educational outcomes.



## **Bob Prichard...**is Inner Office....Post Mod Philosophy

**Nickname:** Dr. Bob

**Position:** Teacher

**Major:** Photography, Philosophy, English, Film

**Responsibilities:** Coordinator, OSSTF rep

**Special Interests:** Reading, chess, furniture design

**Special Powers:** Highly telepathic

**Fav Color:** Black

**Pet Peeves:** Garlic, Barking Dogs, Poor design

**Obsessions:** iMac, Elvis, YMCA, Cyber capitalism, Cuba

**Inspirational Quote:** "Life is Good."<sup>73</sup>

Bob, Inglenook's resident philosopher, has extensive academic experience, Doctoral qualifications and teaching experience at the University level. Despite his high level of qualifications and rigor, Bob has continued to teach at Inglenook for over twenty five years. With his retirement in 2004, Inglenook will lose an important personality, central to Inglenook's history of success. Bob, has a predictable persona and is the yin to Rob's yang. Bob's dress code is static: at all times he adorns cowboy boots, jeans, a long sleeve shirt and a leather vest. With a more subtle passion for "theme dressing" Bob also incorporates iconic ties and shirts into his lessons. His mild dressing manner is mirrored in his actions. Bob is soft in movement, of voice, and a stark contrast to the energetic youths he works with. It is this slow contemplative approach that supports Bob's greatest teaching asset: his ability to reflect the talents of each student.

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<sup>73</sup> Found Document # 7. *Meet the Teacher Night.*

*Men do not mirror themselves in running water-they mirror themselves in still water. Only what is still can still the stillness of other things.*<sup>74</sup>

Bob's brilliance as a teacher, has extended from his ability to inspire academic inquiry in students who for a variety of reasons have been unsuccessful in the regular school system. In contrast to the classification of these students as bad or alternative, Bob recognizes their potentiality. In Taoist philosophy the bad and undesirable are also credited with having hidden strengths and resources. Bob's comparable outlook became apparent in a discussion over the participation of bad students in the Outreach program.

“if you mean by bad students one who is unsuccessful in intellectual activity then there isn't a necessarily good correlation between a good academic student and a good Outreach student. Sometimes some of the bad students will do incredible Outreach projects and some of the good students, for a variety of reasons, will not.”

For Bob, and for Taoist philosophers, the idea of a bad student is a concept established by external intellectual demands. Instead, the preference for both Bob and Taoists is to engage learning interests through which students excel.

Taoism as a philosophy identifies the value of alternative and bad students. Bob provides an example of how to teach towards the potentiality of these students. For him, the strategy is not to force students into a mold but to encourage their abilities. His approach parallels the Taoist ideal of *wu-wei*.

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<sup>74</sup> Tzu, Chuang. translated by Watson, Burton. *Chuang Tzu Basic Writings*. pg. 65



The wu-wei principle...can be understood by striking at a piece of cork floating in water. The harder you hit it, the more it yields, the harder it bounces back. Without expending energy, the cork can easily wear you out. So, Wu Wei overcomes forces by neutralizing its power, rather than by adding to the conflict. With other approaches you might fight fire with fire, but with Wu Wei, you fight fire with water.<sup>75</sup>

The alternative students Bob works with have a history of rebelling against the authority of teachers and institutions. To avoid these conflicts, Bob encourages the student's rebellious spirits through intellectual considerations. In his classroom, the main ideas and concepts addressed are those which encourage intellectual unrest in youth. It is not uncommon for students to become outraged over ideas and to voice their disdain, but instead of resisting the insurgent nature of students, Bob invites them to explain their resistance. From my experiences and my observations his classroom and his demeanor are designed to value students' voices and their personal interests and to encourage co-operative intellectual examination. This is an effective teaching strategy.

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<sup>75</sup> Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 88



Students with a history of resistance and reaction against standard educational institutions are an asset for Bob. To support the voice of these students, the chairs in his class are set in a circle, a seating arrangement which promotes the input of the students. More than just class structure, Bob's persona works to reinforce his educational strategies. As an example, when responding to students projects it is rare not to hear him say; "good", "great" or "outstanding". Bob's professional commitment to working with alternative students, his ability to value students and to promote the often undiscovered talents in alternative students acts as a demonstration of the Taoist principle of valuing the bad person as a resource. In the kind of educational program, that most teachers avoid, Bob excels with students who have resisted other kinds of school systems.

In the introduction to this chapter, a Taoist Methodology was identified as being linked to the personalities behind a study. In this thesis, the influence of Rob and Bob as participants and as the primary teachers in the history of Inglenook Community High School, makes them a resource for the methodology of this study. In contrast to methodical approaches (*yu-wei* knowledge types which are based on predetermined action and intent), a Taoist Methodology needs to be influenced by the conditions of each study. For this reason, the following discussions of methodology are based on prominent influences that arise in the programs of the school and the personalities of Rob and Bob.

# Research Methodology

## Knowledge and Method

In research methodology, there has developed a polar position between scientific and humanist approaches. In 1963, C.P. Snow identified the arrival of this distinction in his book *The Two Cultures: A Second Look*. He argued that educational institutions have been divided between two kinds of knowing, a separation, which for Snow, is based on techniques or methods that have arisen from scientific and humanist traditions. In research Methodology this opposition continues today in the separation between qualitative and quantitative methods. For a Taoist Methodology, and the programming at Inglenook, the preference is for interdisciplinary approaches. Instead of a distinction based on opposition, both scientific and humanist methods are considered to have value.

In Inglenook Community High School, the desire for interdisciplinary approaches is represented in the school's symbol of the yin-yang. Inglenook has a lengthy history of promoting interdisciplinary practices. In educational research the interrelation between scientific and humanist thought is a more recent consideration. In 1993, author Karla A. Henderson began to write about the need to recognize the value of dualistic methodologic approaches. In order to offer a visual representation of her ideas she forwarded the symbol of the yin-yang. For Henderson the yin-yang breaks away from Western notions of divided possibility

between what she identifies as a positivist and interpretive divide. Alternately, she identifies that;

The value of the yin-yang lies in its focus on “both/and” rather than “either/or”<sup>76</sup>

She extends this understanding to the research debates between positivists and interpretivists. For Henderson divisive discussion are irrelevant, since both are valuable methods which should complement each other. Despite this insight, Henderson misses an opportunity to link this symbol to a philosophical tradition, leaving her analysis incomplete. Regardless, from a Taoist perspective her exploration of the yin-yang stands as a great introduction to the possibilities of a Taoist Methodology.

The divide between knowledge types in Taoism is based on the principles of *wu-wei* and *yu-wei*. These two modes of thinking discussed in detail in chapter two, are much more than just a separation between kinds of knowledge.<sup>77</sup> Instead of a category of knowledge, the intent of knowing becomes the key distinction for Taoists. Positivists, interpretivists, scientists, humanists, and any research traditions that are based on a fixed methodological tradition follow a *yu-wei* approach. They are being predetermined in practices that defines *yu-wei* kinds of

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<sup>76</sup> Henderson, Karla. “The Yin-Yang of Experiential Education Research.” pg. 53

<sup>77</sup> Taoist traditions, despite leaning towards humanist or interpretive approaches, recognize the value of both positivist and humanist perspectives. Instead of identifying oppositional forces, a Taoist approach dignifies oppositional perspectives as complementary.

knowing. Conversely, Taoism offers another possibility in the understanding of *wu-wei*, or a non-active approach.

When you work with the Wu Wei, you put the round peg in the round hole and the square peg in the square hole. No stress, no struggle. Egotistical Desire tries to force the round peg in the square hole. Cleverness tries to devise craftier ways of making pegs fit where they don't belong. Knowledge tries to figure out why round pegs fit round holes, but not square holes. Wu Wei doesn't try. It doesn't think about it. It just does it. And when it does, it doesn't appear to do much of anything. But Things Get Done.<sup>78</sup>

Through *wu-wei*, a Taoist Methodology interjects that research methods should not just focus on technique but on spontaneity and adaptability.

## **Finding Knowledge**

In the original proposals for this study, standard techniques were identified as the intended research practices. From ethnographic interviews to statistical analysis the techniques were initiated, implemented and analyzed. At the end of the case study a host of statistical evidence and qualitative evidence had been gathered and was assessed. In selection, it was the qualitative information which best demonstrated the Taoist principles at work in Inglenook. In addition, from a range of qualitative selections it was the non-active or unintentional research

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<sup>78</sup> Hoff, Benjamin *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 75

incidents which had the largest impact on this study. As an example, the photographs of the school and staff were not initially an intended research method. Perhaps the epiphany came from the abundance of art and photographic images which adorn the Inglenook walls, or from my own passion for photography. Regardless of influence, for Taoist methodological considerations it was the unplanned addition of a research method that is of the most interest. After the first day of research it simply became apparent that representing Inglenook could be best achieved with photographic evidence. What a Taoist Methodology proposes, through the understanding of *wu-wei*, is that preplanned techniques, whether qualitative or quantitative, should not be the only consideration in methodology and that spontaneous and unplanned methods should be considered an asset in research.

## Resource and Method

Unplanned photography is one example of how Taoist knowledge can be explored and one example of how resources should be initiated into research studies. As a documentary form, there has been a century old tradition of photography as a source of evidence. From naturalists, to ethnographers, to artisans, to nuclear physicists the application of photographic techniques has been ubiquitous. Taoism, also has a photographic history. In a translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, by Gia-Fu Feng, there is the inclusion of landscape photographs by Jane English, which parallel the poetry of Lao Tsu. Notably all the images are in black and white. With an aesthetic representation of tonal balance, comparable to the philosophies of the yin-yang, black and white photography is an ideal resource for Taoist study. In this example of a Taoist methodological resource, the concern is less for the kind of resources but how the resource reflects Taoist principles.

A lack of concern for categories of resources does not mean that all kinds of resources are equivalent in a Taoist Methodology. Through the principle of *wu-wei*, unplanned or non-active learning, certain kinds of resources are preferential. More definitively, *wu-wei* is also based on the idea of reaction, instead of initiation.

At its highest level, Wu Wei is indefinable and practically invisible, because it has become a reflex action. In the words of Chuang-tse, the mind of Wu Wei "flows like water, reflects like a mirror, and responds like an echo."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. pg. 85



In a Taoist Methodology, the study of *wu-wei* promotes a reflexivity in resources. In academic methodologies, reflexivity is the recognition of researcher's values impacting the conduct and conclusions of a study.<sup>80</sup> In a Taoist Methodology, through *wu-wei*, reflexivity relates to the response of the researcher to the subject. As an extension, reflexive resources are those that have an origin in the subject themselves. In this case study my own prior experiences as a student and a teacher at Inglenook are two example of *wu-wei* resources. In a sense, my prior experiences at the school were a reflection of the school itself and greatly informed my research perspective. This approach is only one example of *wu-wei* possibilities and in other studies reflexive resources would change from study to study as the promotion of any Taoist research resources should reflect the ideals and practices of the subjects.

## **Finding Resources**

At Inglenook Community High school, both Bob and Rob teach about the benefits of "found objects": items previously discarded, lost, or left behind by someone else. Regularly they take students out into the community to find objects, and then implement projects around the "found objects". This conceivably is why the Outreach program requires students to find knowledge in the community and then bring the ideas back to the school as found knowledge. As a result of both the

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<sup>80</sup> Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative Research Design An Interactive Approach*. pg. 91

teaching techniques and the school programs, Inglenook is a montage of found ideas and objects. Filling the school with educational possibilities are found objects, found art and found documents which are displayed throughout the school waiting to be discovered again.

Finding resources in bad or abnormal locations, is one of the many Taoist principles. The best strategy for finding these resources in research is to follow a reflexive approach towards resources. In a Taoist Methodology reflexive resources are those which have an origin or natural connection with the field of study. At Inglenook Community High School, found objects are of great importance to the informal functioning of the school. During the research period at the school, it was an instinctual decision to gather some of these "lost" documents for evidence and data collection. These non-planned resources, which have a connection with the personalities and programs of Inglenook, are one example of the value of found reflexive resources in a Taoist Methodology.

## Relationship and Method

In order to facilitate a Taoist approach towards resource development and knowledge obtainment, the relationship between researcher and participant is vital. In qualitative research design, questions of relationship have often focused around concerns over bias, access to information, and the accuracy of observation.<sup>81</sup> Socio Culturalists have extended this field to include concerns over relationships and the nature of dialogue.<sup>82</sup> These discussions are a continuation of an earlier discourse which began in 1934, with a recently rediscovered book, *The Dialogic Imagination* written by Mikhail Bakhtin, a seminal text, which nearly a century later has continued to carry great resonance. For this study, his consideration of authoritative discourse has much to offer. A language which he defines as “religious, political, moral; the word of the father, of adults and of teachers.”<sup>83</sup> Authoritative in tone, discourse of this kind is contrary to Taoist considerations.

*Wu-wei*, as a prime principle, encourages Taoist researchers to act in reflex, or as a reflection of the subject. Authoritative discourse does not allow for this kind of approach. Instead, the dialogical perspectives of Martin Buber, put forward in the late 1950’s, have a closer parallel. Buber introduced a definition of

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<sup>81</sup> Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative Research Design An Interactive Approach*. pg. 66-69

<sup>82</sup> Ladson-Billings, Gloria. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. and Casey, Kathleen. *I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working For Social Change*.

<sup>83</sup> Bakhtin. M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. pg. 342

dialogue which necessitates one person living through the encounter from the standpoint of another.<sup>84</sup> The question that arises from this definition is how to create research relationships that involve one person positioning themselves in the standpoint of the other. An obvious comparison comes from the ethnographic tradition of the participant observer, in which a researcher participates with the people being studied. Instead of participant observer, a Taoist Methodology would promote observer participants, a grammatical change that repositions the dominant noun to emphasize participation. Since *wu-wei* is based in non-action, the continual emphasis on observation reduces non-active or unintentional research. In a Taoist Methodology, observation and study can take a variety of forms of relations. However, the ideal observer is not intent on observation but is actually living through the experiences.

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<sup>84</sup> Roberts, Peter. "Beyond Buber: Dialogue, Education, and Politics." *Journal of Educational Thought*. pg. 184.

## **Refound Relations**

The inspiration for this study began well before any official observation and data collection period. In fact it all began in May 1986, when as a grade 9 student, I attended an information meeting at Inglenook Community High School. For the next three years I learned about Inglenook from the position of a participating high school student and during those three years I was able to gather an in-depth understanding of the school programs, the personalities behind the school, and the informal processes of learning at Inglenook. Fortunately this participation period was not to be my last. In addition, I returned to the school in 1993 as a student-teacher. During a four month period, I made a transition from the role of former student to active teacher and expanded my perspective on the phenomena called Inglenook. It was then that I realized that a completely different Inglenook existed out of the gaze of the student's eyes and this lesson has come to emphasize the importance of multiple roles for any observer participant study.

Relations, in a Taoist Methodology, do not concern themselves with bias, and instead value a highly integrated relationship between researcher and participant. At Inglenook Community High School I have participated as a student, teacher, and now researcher. From these multiple relationships I have gained a wealth of understanding. It was at Inglenook, that I was first introduced to the philosophies of the yin-yang. It was at Inglenook that I learned the talent of

photography. It was at Inglenook that I learned to teach. And, it was at Inglenook that I learned to research. This life history with Inglenook might be interpreted as a potential bias from other methodological positions. However, from a Taoist approach these experiences are of value.

## **Meditative and Method**

In the two preceding chapters discussions of knowledge, resources and relationships have culminated in the concept of the meditative. It would be awkward not to continue that pattern. Discussions of meditative research could involve a wide range of possibilities; including the practices of sitting and being slow of breath, a more mobile study of meditative movement, or even an examination of the meditative moments involved in creativity. Regardless of topic, the primary distinction for a Taoist philosophy is that meditative methods require practices that are detached from having a rushing mind. The potential for a Taoist Meditation approach to research are exponential and worthy of further study.

Earlier in this paper, meditative knowledge was defined as emphasizing non-active learning. This kind of education is exactly what Taoists mean by not rushing minds. *Wu-wei* learning, in Taoism, has an emphasis on non-action and in research projects, non-action may involve the unaware study of an observer participant, a process where the type of knowledge collection becomes less

important than the process of study. For example, a Taoist methodology would value multiple meditations with either qualitative or quantitative techniques; a process that does require a lengthy time frame. Therefore, time becomes one determinant in meditative research techniques. The slow continual study of knowledge over a lengthy period emerges as a major resource in a meditative consideration of knowledge.

Age, in essence, becomes a resource for a Taoist Methodology, with a valuing of meditative learning. In order to encourage reflexive resources, meditative research involves not rushing the study. With mature study, a Taoist researcher experiences more non-active moments, in a wider range of roles, and increases their possibility for insight. Taoist meditation proposes that relationships should also avoid a rushing of the mind. For example, these moments might include meandering conversations and even comfortable silence. To summarize the concept of meditative Methodology it is important to consider that the development of in-depth and multiple relationships takes time, the acquisition of intricate knowledge takes time, and gathering extensive amounts of resources also takes time.

## Returning to the Root

*Be completely empty.  
Be perfectly serene.  
The ten thousand things arise together;  
in their arising is their return.  
Now they flower,  
and flowering,  
sink homeward,  
returning to the root.*

*The return to the root  
is peace.  
Peace: to accept what must be,  
to know what endures.  
In that knowledge is wisdom.  
Without it, ruin, disorder.<sup>85</sup>*

In Taoist folklore there is the repeated story of an old tree, which due to the gnarly texture of the wood has remained uncut, yet over time the tree has grown to become a tremendous resource. At Inglenook Community High School a generation of alternative students have also been left to grow, tended by two teachers, and an intricate system of programming. These roots of tradition provide an alternative to current educational fascinations, in particular, the

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<sup>85</sup> Lao-Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. translated by Ursula K. Le Guin and J.P. Seaton. pg. 22



increased importance of predetermined knowledge, standardized resources, technical learning relationships and a hyper-acceleration of educational time. As a counterbalance, the principles of Taoism have been put forward, with a particular emphasis on slow meditative approaches. Inglenook Community High School is one school, which promotes a balanced approach to education through the school symbol of the yin-yang and the schools programs. In addition to these bureaucratic techniques, the personalities at the school support the promotion of interdisciplinary knowledge, the existence of empty resources, the development of reciprocal learning relationships, and the allowance for meditative time. As a case study, Inglenook Community High School stands as one demonstration of the Taoist desire for a balanced approach to education.

Appendix A  
Ethics Approval

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS



BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CANADA V5A 1S6  
Telephone: 604-291-3447  
FAX: 604-268-6785

January 10, 2003

Ms. Kier Miner  
Graduate Student  
Faculty of Education  
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Miner:

**Re: Taoist Philosophy of Education in an Alternative School**

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the Research Ethics Board. This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the Research Ethics Board. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Your application has been categorized as 'minimal risk' and approved by the Director, Office of Research Ethics, on behalf of the Research Ethics Board in accordance with University policy R20.0, <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20-01.htm>. The Board reviews and may amend decisions made independently by the Director, Chair or Deputy Chair at its regular monthly meetings.

"Minimal risk" occurs when potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weirberg, Director  
Office of Research Ethics

c: Dr. Heesoon Bai, Supervisor  
/jmy

## Appendix B

### Sample of Outreach Project Titles

Earthroots	Exodus fund raising	screen writing
Sick Kids	Humane Society	classroom assistant
photography	grade 1/2 assistant	YMCA fitness
art	yoga	Inglesemester
filming Outreach	interior design	history of music and film
screen writing	Earthroots	Humane Society
Kung Fu	Exotics	Kung Fu in High Park
Computer tech support	screen writing	men's studies
Kung Fu in High Park	Shaw assistantconcierge	music CBAM
birth info package	YAY	Maui Thai
one act play	Getting me to Central America	gourmet cooking
Kenpo Kung	digital music	Descartes contest
YMCA fitness	Inglenook website	digital comic
Yoga	video/music production	meditation
Coach House Press	creative movement	YMCA working out
sewing	screen writing	Men's/Women's group
Kung Fu in High Park	boxing	meditation
Physio outreach	music	assisted living-Lew
Annex Harm	filming Outreach	Shaw
rock climbing	cryptology	YMCA workout
Metro network	Latin dance	art gallery of Ontario
SHOUT clinic	math tutor and contest	violin
native beading	Yoga	in-patient unit assistant
art studio	Animal Alliance	Friends of Shopping Bag
Webmaster-Z	body image and women	www.business.com
filming outreach	Teen Sex Info Line	found art
saving Oakridge	Red Door Shelter	climate change and trees
math tutor	SHOUT clinic	photography of Toronto Port
guitar expansion	folk guitar	Glassworks
Sistering	CBC Counterspin	explorations
Claremont vet	Toronto Rehab Center	turntableism
gifted child	website design	St. Claire School assistant
cooking with Claire	film-Elte's balloons	Blackburn History Project
City View Alternative	Street Help	dig garden foundation
OSSSA	Exodus fund raising	painting
Food Bank	advertising	Found Art
filming outreach	grow sunflowers	architecture
assistant photographer	Inglenook gallery curator	Latin dance
Native child career	Kung Fu in the Park	learning to swim
Who's Emma	meditation	Choreography jam
St. Barnabas day care	life in a new land	Food Access
Buddhist temple	Kensington business	photography
assistant baker		

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- Found Document #1. *School Profile*. A general description of the school and their programs which also includes a picture of the building.

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- Found Document #4. *A Photocopy From an Old Newspaper*. Apparently from the classified section this document includes listings for a lottery, jewelry sales, boat rentals, and notably an image of a running man with a description of Thorton's escape.
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