Spirituality in and for Public School Education:

A Philosophical Inquiry into an Educative Approach to Addressing the Ecological Crisis

by

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Abstract

Public education has a crucial role to play in preparing students to navigate and address the current ecological crisis and the myriad of associated social injustices. Through a philosophical inquiry, this thesis attempts to explicate a better understanding of the potential role of spirituality in public education as a means to promoting the development of pedagogies and practices that would be more effective in developing the sustainable behaviors required to address the crisis and injustices. Informed by four different philosophical traditions, this thesis first looks to better define the concept of spirituality as containing three key elements: awe, interconnection and growth. Secondly, recent literature surrounding spirituality in education is discussed, highlighting themes and obstacles. Finally, two potential pedagogical practices are explored for their promise to effectively incorporate spiritual perspectives within public education and to facilitate the development of the desired sustainable behaviors.

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Chapter 1 - A Beginning

A Personal Starting Point

It may be that my journey into the field of education was different from that of others. My road was a wondering one and started with an exploration into the field of science and math, a modern western scientific paradigm for understanding the world. This was developed throughout my childhood by simple interests and the belief that a good job and solid financial future, as well as a desire to help others, could be satisfied through study in the field of engineering or medicine. This persisted from childhood into high school and eventually into a university degree in biology and biochemistry. There were even numerous attempts to enter medical school and dentistry. In conversations with peers, it seems this is not a common route chosen by educators. Yet, as is often the case, it was the learning occurring in other aspects of my life, while I was attempting to further my formal education, which slowly shifted the perspective of what I thought was important and meaningful to me.

During these formative years from high school to university and even later, I experienced a myriad of events that began to erode my originally unwavering belief that science and technology presented not only the best way to understand the world, but the only truly valid and realistic one. I feel it is relevant to note this, as many of the students that enter my classes daily hold strongly to similar worldviews. I hold the education system and modern western world values to be massive contributors to this bias, and I will come back to this point later.

The events I refer to include a myriad of different experiences. Spending time with wonderful people and friends who challenged my steadfastness; the opportunity to travel, live and experience many places in the world where my worldview was challenged as not only

highly skewed, but incredibly narrow minded; the interaction with literature that suggested powerful concepts that were relatively alien to me (*Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig will forever hold dear places in my heart); and the beginning of an understanding that my roots and personal history were more than dots on a time line, but meaningful markers in the creation of who I was and who I was still to become… am becoming.

The combination of these influences and events eventually led to a place where I was less sure of the ability of science and technology to lead me to contentment and happiness (words that had been relatively meaningless in themselves at an earlier time), and to the idea that interactions with others, relationships and mentoring, guiding and experiencing education in conjunction with others, may be a better path. While I may not have used these words to describe it at the time, in retrospect, it was these ideas that pushed me into education, and directed my development as an educator as I continued in the field.

At the outset of my career, I was passionate and dedicated, and I assumed that everything I did for my students impacted them greatly, moved them in momentous ways, allowed them to feel as if they could change the world. I may have even been a little naïve in my belief as to the extent to which I could positively influence my students, but I do not think this is an uncommon trait in strong, young educators. In time, I grew to realize that I had much to learn as an educator, and in my own way, I feel I have grown and developed, that I can offer more to the experiences my students have then ever before. Yet, it seems that the more I learn as an educator, the more I become versed in the myriad of minute details and pedagogies that support learning, the more the students walking into my room every year are struggling to engage in the process of deep learning; the more I work to develop culture and passion in my classroom, the more it seems that

some of my students struggle with disillusion and resist investing; the more I work to appreciate the needs, diversity, history of trauma and complexity in the lives of my students, the more it seems that they are becoming frustrated with the system of education as a whole, resulting in the creation of barriers to their valuing the importance of their understanding of the world, their understanding of themselves and the interconnection of those two understandings to everyone and everything else.

It was these growing struggles and the feeling of helplessness I was experiencing in speaking to them as I came upon and passed first the 5-year and then the 10-year mark in my career that provided the original motivation for my journey into searching for profound changes in the way I teach my students. This educational journey has had influences on the way I engage in educational experiences with my students, in the ways I try to interact with colleagues and peers, and even in the way I endeavor to live my life as a father, husband and creature of this planet. I do not think it is at all coincidence that the many facets that make up my persona (father, husband, teacher, colleague, etc.) all played a part in creating the need for further exploring these concerns and directing the journey that I am still on.

This journey has taken place in my classroom, in my home, in the deep nature of this beautiful world we inhabit, within the halls of institutions of higher learning and within my own being and soul. Regarding this thesis, it was some of my more recent work, through my master's degree, that has helped me to better define and make meaning of the increasingly complex issues that are faced by the children I have the privilege of working with every day. Through the work of the last few years in university, using the foundation of the experiences that brought me here, I have come to a place where I feel I can begin to name my concerns and identify what I believe are some of the deeper, underlying issues at work.

Gradually, as I studied concepts like holistic education and explored various practices of self-awareness, as I looked at sustainable well-being and other ways of being in and knowing our world, I began to see that it was not just within the walls of my school that I was seeing struggles, but that I was struggling myself. Truly, the work I am doing now is not altruistic by any means, but closely linked with my desire to find my own way and make meaning for myself on this life journey. Sharing that wisdom and learning with others is not only important, but an essential part of contentment for myself, an essential component of continuing to make meaning.

At times, this search has been fueled by a feeling of failure. I have struggled with feeling as though I am failing my colleagues and my students. This feeling manifests when my students express the way they are overwhelmed with world issues and ecological problems, when they indicate that they find little meaning in their education aside from the perspective of making money down the road or meeting the demands of teachers and parents, when they share their struggles with mental health issues and support system breakdowns (e.g., family) and when they express their increasing dependence on escape, whether through chemicals or technology.

Often, I am left wondering, if I believe I am working for the future of my students and my children then what is my role in supporting them to find value and meaning in their learning, and courage and insight into a meaningful life path, whatever that may be? How do I find value and meaning in my own life and this work if I am part of this system and struggling with the same malaise? These questions, confessions and frustrations are haunting. The worst part is the fear that I am perpetuating this pattern and package of struggles on to the next generation through my work in school by maintaining the status quo. What is our legacy of seeking meaning, if we as educators are working for a future only defined by monetary security or success? When I reflect deeply on this definition of success, it holds little value, so why do I

legitimize it as a valuable response to a student looking for meaning in their education? "Because you need it to get a job?" Shameful.

It has been suggested that education is, at best, failing to address these concerns, and at worst, complicit in their creation. Miller notes that "modern schooling is a spiritually devastating form of social engineering that is hostile to human values and democratic ideals" (Miller, 1997, p. 4) and goes on to say

> Education has become an institution whose purpose in the modern world is not to make culture, not to serve the cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. Education, as we know it, from preschool through graduate school, damages the soul. (Miller, 2000, p. 5)

David Orr suggests that "education… emphasizes theories, not values; abstraction rather than consciousness; neat answers instead of questions; technical efficiency over conscience…. Education is no guarantee of wisdom" (Orr, 1994, p. 8). In short, education, for all its advancements in recent decades regarding best practice, assessment, learning styles and myriads of other aspects, has fundamentally failed to promote an education that connects students to each other and to their natural world, to the bigger questions that life poses of us all. One might say that many aspects of education, as it stands currently, fail to prepare students to live meaningful lives, to find value in their actions, learning and relationships.

I would suggest that our students are suffering from a crisis of connection, an ever-increasing isolation from each other, and from an understanding of their deep connection to our planet. While capitalism and modern western world consumerism, along with scientific

reductionism share a large portion of the responsibility for this crisis, education is a guilty partner as well. I believe these issues are deeply connected to concepts such as the environmental crisis, a malaise of modernity, myopia, Eco fatigue, denial, apathy, disconnect, neoliberalism and capitalism, to name a few. Yet these are the symptoms. As I see it, best practices, be they new or old, are becoming increasingly focused on speaking to symptoms of these needs without acknowledging underlying cause, and while they may be practiced and implemented by well-intentioned teachers and administrators, they will remain ineffective in speaking to these needs if they cannot address the bigger context.

There are philosophies, frameworks and ideologies in education that have the potential to speak to these concerns in more effective ways. These include ideas like holistic education, trans-rational knowledge, biophilia, eco literacy and eco-philosophy among others. These ideas have built a framework for me that has given voice to the needs I see and allowed me to label them as a disconnect humans are experiencing, both from each other and from our planet, from the awe of life and from a realization that there is more to the human condition than much of modern society might have us believe. Further, I would label this disconnect as one that is spiritual in nature, one that has resulted in a failure for many in our modern cultures to realize their interconnected nature and deeply intertwined relational being to something bigger than all of us. Miller comes to a similar conclusion:

The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is for lack of a better word, spiritual. I have come to believe in the value of a kind of

inner ecology that relies on the same principles of balance and holism that

characterize a healthy environment. (Miller, 2000, p. 5)

It is here that I will suggest the beginning of a definition of spirituality that will be

further develop throughout this thesis. This spirituality I am describing represents the sum of the

interconnections we have as living beings, not only to each other as living creatures but also to

the ecological spaces and places we exist in and come from. These interconnections are inclusive

of all the living and non-living components that make those environments what they are.

However, this definition is more than just that sum as well. This spirituality also involves the

willingness to explore or embrace the feeling of awe we can perceive just from being alive, from

interacting with, experiencing and realizing the natural environment. Further, this concept of

spirituality includes the cognitive awareness that we have a deep need as living beings to strive

to improve both the understanding of these interconnections and the depth of the

interconnections themselves. In this way, this definition of spirituality speaks to the very act of

making meaning of life, of working to understand what it is to be human. However, in my

experiences, these ideas face criticism and skepticism in the field of education.

I would suggest it is possible to reintroduce the concept of spirituality into public

education and I believe this can be done effectively, promoting students to not only respond to

the big questions about meaning in life, but also to support a reclaiming of the connection we

have with our natural environment, the places we come from. This work is promoting the

understanding of a different way of knowing, of the value of an understanding and way of being

that is not currently part of the dominant educational framework of the west. We need to support

our students as they work to reconnect in a meaningful way, in a deeply spiritual way, to our planet and all the diversity of life that exists on it.

The Ecological Crisis

Perhaps there was a time when the changing nature of the global environment was thought to be too large for humans to impact, to vast to be affected by one species on the planet. I have even heard it said that human beings were entirely too full of themselves to think they could leave a mark on such a massive and integrated system, too prideful, too arrogant, too conceited. However, that time has passed. When conversations arise about the state of decline of our natural environment and the degradation that continues every day, there can no longer be doubt that humans have a direct role and an enormous impact on our global environment.

Jones (2010) describes the environmental crisis elegantly:

> Over the last decade, and more dramatically in the last few years, increasing evidence of major problems in the earth's ecological balance, particularly relating to the issue of global warming, has resulted in a dramatic increase in concern about ecological issues. In the face of the overwhelming evidence of climate change, it is difficult to argue that humans are having no impact, or only a benign impact, on the natural world. It is widely and generally agreed that humans have reached population levels and technological capacities that mean we are capable of destroying the fragile ecosystem that sustains us. The fundamental conclusion drawn by much of the emerging evidence is that there is a crisis and we are the cause. (p. 67)

Jones is certainly not the only voice making this argument. Many more lay out a similar claim, with further research to back them. Gallagher (2012) describes humanities role in creating "wicked" problems. "Environmental problems such as dirty air and water and mountains of consumer waste most certainly fit into the wicked category of problems" (Gallagher, 2012, p. 3). These types of problems are increasingly being defined as wicked in the field of environmental studies due to the systemic nature of their causes, the intense complexity and interconnection of their origins, and the difficulty in identifying, understanding and applying solutions. Govorushko (2016) adds: "Human influences on the environment have reached critical scales, and the existence of a global ecological crisis is generally recognized" (p. xv).

In 2012, The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) summarized the following in their *Global Environment Outlook 5* (GEO) publication, clearly describing the role of humans in the decline of the natural world:

Within the Earth System – which acts as a single, self-regulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components – the effects of human activities can be detected at a planetary scale… based on evidence that atmospheric, geological, hydrological, biological and other Earth System processes are being altered by human activity. The most readily recognized changes include a rise in global temperatures and sea levels, and ocean acidification, all associated with the increase in emissions of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide and methane. Other human-induced changes include

extensive deforestation and land clearance for agriculture and urbanization,

causing species extinctions as natural habitats are destroyed. (p. xviii)

Possibly the most cited research to date on this issue comes from Rockström et al. (2009), who investigated what they described as planetary boundaries. They discussed nine potential planetary boundaries that if crossed, put life on our planet at risk. "Transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental- to planetary-scale systems" (Rockström et al., 2009, p. 1). They explain that the pressure human development is having on global natural systems is approaching a potential tipping point, with three planetary boundaries already crossed. Steffen et al. (2015) furthered the original work done by this group. They discovered that of these 9 planetary boundaries, two (climate change and biosphere integrity) appear to be highly integrated and operate at the level of a whole-earth system. They "provide the planetary-level overarching systems within which the other boundary processes operate. Furthermore, large changes in climate or in biosphere integrity would likely, on their own, push the earth system out of the Holocene state" (p. 9).

As well as pointing out the potential impact of these two specific boundaries, the updated state of planetary boundaries revealed that four of these boundaries have now been crossed. These include climate change, biodiversity integrity, land-system change, and biogeochemical cycles — specifically nitrogen and phosphorus (Steffen et al., 2015). Unfortunately, despite the apparent severity of the situations presented above, the impact humans are having goes further still.

Regarding climate change, one of the two noted "highly integrated" planetary boundaries, the implicated production of CO_2 gas, appears to be accelerating.

Current CO_2 stocks are well over 400 parts per million (ppm), and there is already clear evidence of global climate change in current weather patterns. Moreover, the oceans are beginning to acidify as they sequester more CO_2. Acidification threatens the numerous forms of oceanic life that form carbon-based shells or skeletons, such as mollusks, corals, and diatoms. In short, the weight of evidence suggests that we have already exceeded the critical ecological threshold for atmospheric-greenhouse gas stocks. (Costanza, 2015, p. 285)

Zalasiewicz (2011) supports these concerns:

Dissolution of increased atmospheric CO_2 into the oceans is increasing their acidity. A significant drop in oceanic pH has already occurred, and further decreases are almost certain. The biological response is complex but will stress many calcifying organisms such as corals or the marine plankton that form the base of many food chains. Ocean acidification alone may substantially change marine ecosystems over the next century, contribute to global biodiversity decline, and so produce a distinctive event in the future fossil record. (p. 836)

As of May 6, 2018, at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii, operated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as an Earth

System Research Laboratory (NOAA ESRL), atmospheric CO_2 was 410.26 parts per million (ppm), which already brings into question the ability of humanity to limit global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius. This was suggested as essential in the Paris Agreement (2015, Article 2, p. 3) to prevent unprecedented environmental impacts.

There is no doubt about the seriousness of the impact, and there is no doubt about the cause. Still, there are many issues that will be faced by our species as we move forward that do not yet have the attention of major media or even political figures. The UNEP Frontiers's 2017 report suggests emerging issues that will have global implications soon. They include concerns not yet addressed in this introduction, from antimicrobial resistance to the infiltration of manufactured nanomaterials into our environments, the effects of increasing sand and dust storms in specific regions of the world and environmental displacement due to environmental degradation or collapse, among others. Of the 31.1 million people displaced in 2016, 24.2 million of them were displaced due to natural disasters. "The sudden-onset of natural disasters, such as storms and floods, and the slow-onset of environmental change and degradation, including desertification and sea level rise, can make areas uninhabitable, and displace populations temporarily or permanently" (Frontiers, 2017, p. 70). While the Frontiers's report does not directly mention sea level rise, there are further implications here as well. Shepard et al. (2012) found that between 1992 and 2011, the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets lost 1350 and 2700 Gt of ice, respectively, and this is expected to increase with the predicted rise of ocean temperatures in the coming century. Of course, this will directly impact coastal cities around the world as ocean levels rise correspondingly.

Moving forward, we shall assume as true that "We live in an era of unprecedented environmental change. Human activity has reshaped our planet so profoundly that scientists

suggest that we have entered a new geological epoch they label 'the Anthropocene'" (Frontiers, 2017, p. 70) and that "the 7 billion humans alive today are collectively exploiting the Earth's resources at accelerating rates and intensities that surpass the capacity of its systems to absorb wastes and neutralize the adverse effects on the environment" (GEO 5, 2012, p. xviii). At this point, one must begin to ask questions. Why is it that these issues are progressing unhindered? What is the underlying cause? Are there solutions? And if there are, why are actions not being taken? These types of questions are very difficult to answer, due the to the "wicked" nature of the problems, but also due to the myriad, and dare I say limitless, responses, opinions and beliefs held by the humans involved in the creation of these problems.

The Social Justice Connection

Some insight into these issues may be gathered from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) for the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) at its twenty-sixth session, held in Bonn, Germany, on May 10, 2017. During this meeting, Chris Rapley, professor of climate science at University College London (UCL), discussed the connections between these types of scientific investigation and individual values, as noted by the conference chair in the excerpts below, taken from the UNFCCC COP SBSTA research dialogue 2017 summary report.

> The planet is the most complex system that humankind knows. In order to
> understand it, scientists need to understand the many complex interactions
> between all life on Earth, our own technological civilization, the atmosphere, ice,
> land, ocean and biosphere. He cited Einstein 'To tell a complex story make

everything as simple as possible, but not simpler' and stated that scientists, often,

in attempting to communicate clear messages have made the messages on climate

change simpler than they should be. (p. 6)

The messages in terms of the impacts and consequences of climate change are

economic and political, and thus consciously and/or unconsciously challenge

strongly held values of belief and identity, particularly in the English-speaking

world. (p. 8)

I would suggest that Rappley is accurate when he notes that these environmental issues

challenge beliefs surrounding economic and political biases but go even further to challenge

beliefs about values and identity. These challenges are further connected to issues related to

concepts of societies and culture, general human well-being and global social equality and

justice.

The GEO 5 (2012) report supports this perspective. It states that the issues we are

currently facing have significant implications for social justice concerns. It notes examples such

as the influence of climate variability and extreme weather on food security, the health effects

associated with environmental change like an increase in malaria rates due to rising temperatures

and even the effects of sea level rise on the social cohesion of Indigenous communities, like

those in Alaska, as melting permafrost forces village relocation (GEO 5, 2012, p. 194). Jones

makes further connections between the ecological crisis and social justice issues.

The prominence of environmental issues in recent domestic political debate in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia makes it increasingly clear that the issue of the environment will continue to move from the periphery of economic and social policy to being one of the core issues, if not *the* core issue. Such a conclusion recognizes the centrality of the environment and the ways in which all aspects of human life are related back to the state of the global ecosystem. This acknowledgment also clearly links issues of global social justice with issues of the environment. (Jones, 2010, pg. 67)

The connection between environmental concerns and social issues, between what is sometimes referred to as climate justice and global social justice, runs deep indeed. One cannot discuss the environmental concerns faced by humans as we perpetuate environmental degradation, without also discussing the social and equity concerns and their far-reaching impacts on human well-being, both in the more developed world and in regions with less economic stability and development. When exploring the nature and impacts of the ecological crisis, economic and political frameworks and ideologies must be part of a meaningful conversation.

Our current social order can be viewed as mechanistic, atomizing and fragmented, with the strong undercurrents promoting the drive for individual wealth and the ever-increasing demand to consume. Arguments to support these ideas can be found in the work of Suzuki, Klein, Constanza, Jackson, Orr, Leonard and many others. Goleman (2012) sums up the consequences to our current model as follows:

With 7 billion of us now tapping the Earth's resources, we are having an impact

like never before. Consider the growing scarcity of fresh drinking water, the

decline of healthy soil in which to grow our food, and global climate change… Is

there a breaking point? (p. 3)

Klein (2014) refers to this crisis as a preface for social restructuring, citing several

reasons to believe social change is imminent and needed, from the expanding business of

weapons suppliers to stock markets trading in insuring weather-related events, among others.

Deepak Chopra writes in the introduction to *World Shift 2012* (Laszlo, 2012) of world shaping

trends such as what he calls the dispossessed of the Earth, rising up in a quest for prosperity. He

proposes the notion that resource depletion is a distinct possibility if humans cannot learn to live

in accord with nature; that materialism and consumerism, if left unchecked, will only continue to

accelerate the degradation of the ecosystem. Indeed, it appears that our current potential legacy

may be one framed by unmitigated and thoughtless manufacturing of product as a means to

promoting commercial expansion and economic growth, regardless of the cost to other aspects of

well-being. In this light, it could be suggested that our disregard for the degradation of our

environment is linked to economic ideologies.

Miller adds support for this notion in several instances, when he states, that "the

environmental movement has shown us how everything is so deeply interconnected" and "We

can no longer live under the delusion that we can separate the economy from the environment"

(Miller, 2000, p. 5). Hawken suggests a similar idea, as he is quoted in Louve's *The Nature*

Principle (2011). Hawken's suggestion is that business success and the quest for wealth must

become less important as a determining factor in individual behaviors, political ideologies and social norms.

> Business must change its perspective and its propaganda, which has successfully portrayed the idea of limits as a pejorative concept… Respecting limits means respecting the fact that the world and its minutiae are diverse beyond our comprehension and highly organized for their own ends, and that all facets connect in ways which are sometimes obvious and at other times mysterious and complex. (Hawken in Louve, 2011, p. 273)

The Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard draws connections between the pieces that have been suggested here. As we can see from our growing understanding of the environmental crisis, the actions of all people can have great impact, both for the good, but also for the bad. Ricard notes that "the unbridled consumerism of our planet's richest 5 percent is the greatest contributor to the climate change that will bring the greatest suffering to the most destitute 25 percent, who will face the worst consequences" (Ricard, 2011, para 15). He goes on to draw a strong connection between economic practices, social values and the behaviours that have promoted the environmental degradation humans are experiencing. "Unchecked consumerism operates on the premise that others are only instruments to be used and that the environment is a commodity. This attitude fosters unhappiness, selfishness and contempt upon other living beings and upon our environment" (Ricard, 2011, para 15). He suggests that these deep-seated values may be causing the problems we face. He is not alone.

Diamond, in his book *Collapse* (2011), argues that we may be about to cause the collapse of civilization.

Globalization makes it impossible for modern societies to collapse in isolation, as did Easter Island and the Greenland Norse in the past. Any society in turmoil today, no matter how remote – think of Somalia and Afghanistan as examples - can cause trouble for prosperous societies on other continents, and is also subject to their influence (whether helpful or destabilizing). For the first time in history, we face the risk of a global decline. (p. 33)

Like Ricard and many others, including Costanza (2015), Assadourian (2010) and Max-Neef (1991), Diamond (2011) also suggests an interesting connection to a potential underlying cause when he states, "the values to which people cling most stubbornly under inappropriate conditions are those values that were previously the source of their greatest triumphs over adversity" (p. 285). This may speak to the difficulty many successful nations are having in addressing these issues. Yet, as we can see from the arguments made above, the world has experienced unprecedented change and growth within the last century, and the values, which many of us cling to and which were contributors to success in the past, need to profoundly and swiftly change.

Despite all the knowledge we have acquired in relation to the ecological crisis we face as a species and the ever-increasing issues of social justice and human well-being that are intertwined within that crisis, in the last few decades little positive change has been made. As indicated above, an argument could be made that these situations have actually continued to

degrade. Where then can we turn? What could possibly promote effectual and meaningful change to the behaviors and desires of those driving the greatest aspects of this crisis? Are there alternatives to the business-as-usual model? Does education have a role in speaking to these concerns? And if it does, what could it do to instill an understanding of the issues we face as human beings and societies?

If the decline of the planet is directly, or even partly, related to consumerism and capitalism, if it is related to a deeper issue we have as humans with an understanding of our place on this planet and our role as inhabitants, where then can we look for solutions? If these problems are "wicked" enough and the solutions are complicated enough that our best ideas are only vague hopes, if we cannot agree as to where to start, because the challenges to our values, biases and identities are too deep, are there any possible solutions? I would suggest there are solutions and would advocate that a more active role of spirituality in public education may be one of those solutions.

A Role for Spirituality: The Thesis Guiding the Philosophical Inquiry

It is not unreasonable to suggest that education is directed by the political climate of a given society. In fact, in many democratic countries, including Canada, laws are structured to try and ensure this result. I would also suggest that a major driving force in the political and educative systems across the modern western world and global north is the promotion of technical proficiency, to increase global competitiveness. Whether this is enacted as STEM or STEAM skills, the use of technology throughout the curriculum or even as the inclusion of coding as mathematical problem solving, the underlying motive appears the same. Increasingly, it is suggested that these proficiencies will result in the fiscal success of our nations and societies. Our

need to increasingly grow powers our economies, our societies, and ultimately our educational systems. As O'Sullivan (1999) notes "Educators teach their students to function within the social order" (p. 46).

This can result in educators seeing our educative systems as institutions of economic and material indoctrination and promotion of the status quo, rather than a force to promote positive social change, to prepare our youth to create the change required to see a social equitable and ecologically just world. One could argue that the opposite is true, and education functions to serve society rather than change it.

> Cognitive science is just one of the many innovations in educational research that competes for the attention of educators who desperately try to find one technical solution after another to deal with the declining effectiveness of schools in the lives of students as all levels of education. (Sullivan, 1999, p. 55)

To this end, some educators suggest that our efforts to best educate the youth of our planet may be woefully inadequate. It is not a new idea, but the weight of the evidence to support this claim, and the ever-increasing potential for damage should it not be corrected, may be approaching a critical mass. Matthew Fox states this bluntly. "The incompetence of the educational system is reflected in graduates' moral and ethical impoverishment. It has fostered citizens who prioritize profits over human welfare. To remedy this crisis, educational thrusts should stir the compassionate side of their students" (Fox, 1998, p. 49).

Understanding the potential fallibility of education at a deep level begins to break down the ideologies that protect our current structures of politics and economics. It opens new ways to

see the world. It begins to rip holes in societal values invested solely in consumption as a means to growth and happiness. It can be unsettling, as it breaches our securities and disorients us to our surroundings. Yet, if we are willing to appreciate this idea, we begin to see more clearly the issues all around us. We may begin to see our role in the environmental and social crisis referred to above, and the critical role the education system has in speaking to it.

My interests lie in determining the ability of public education to address these underlying needs. At the root, I feel the "malaise of the western world", the issues with scientific reductionism and the neo-liberal, capitalistic, and economic disaster we are in the midst of living through, are ultimately caused by and positive reinforcement to, our lack of spiritual connection to each other and to our planet. As an example, key characteristics in holistic education, in particular, the deeply spiritual and interconnected relationship humans have to each other and the entirety of the community of existence on Earth are often not discussed or brought to light for students in public school classrooms (Miller, 1997). Through Goleman's (2012) work on eco-literacy, we can see how important these connections and learnings are to our well-being, how our ability to see humans as interconnected and deeply responsible to the entirety of the web of life on our planet promotes acting in ways that are sustainable for all life on earth. Further, Goleman suggests that these practices may also foster greater empathy and positive social behaviors between students. Hathaway (2016) makes a strong argument for the importance of the role spirituality plays in creating motivation for sustainable behaviors.

While it needs to be acknowledged that there can be concerns related to ideas surrounding religiosity and religious dogma in public education, in particular in relation to the history of residential schooling and in light of reconciliation, the term *spirituality* has a much broader meaning and the concept is vastly deeper and intricate, as this thesis will attempt to

explore. One might think of spiritual education as acknowledging that there is another way of knowing our world, outside of the realm of rationale, scientific, western understanding. At times, spiritualty has been described as mystic, intuitive and something inner, while others describe it as something bigger and vastly, perhaps infinitely, interconnected and aware. Moore (1992) described it as a way of experiencing the world around us, "a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance" (p. 6).

Barrett et al. (2017) has done much work on accepting and acknowledging trans-rational ways of knowing. One could describe this way of knowing as leading with a spiritual connection, instead of reason and logic. Pedagogies that are inclusive of spiritual learning fall under the framework of trans-rational knowing and interactions of these types can promote great change. "Such encounters often take students into spaces of liminality and, if successfully grasped, prompt epistemic and ontological change" (Barrett et al., 2017, p133). The idea that trans-rational knowledge is a valid way of knowing as a contrast to scientific reason, can impact work and life, and even change the discourse through which students operate and interact with the world (Barrett et al., 2017).

This thesis seeks to advance the idea that spirituality is an essential component in public education that has for too long been set aside as less important than a scientific and atomistic paradigm for understanding the world. I would suggest that it has been set aside partly as a response to the beautiful plurality of our current cultures and a fear of marginalization of any individuals, but this is because the concept has been poorly defined. It has been suppressed due to the concerns surrounding indoctrination, appreciation of diversity, political climate and historical issues with organized religion. It has been omitted by a society that has moved away

from holistic perspectives and become ever increasingly atomizing, mechanistic and data driven. It has been withheld by strong teachers who are afraid of offending students or parents or administrators, or who are uncomfortable with the concept themselves and cannot broach it confidently. However, with time spent working to unpack and clarify the concept of spirituality, to better determine what exactly it is and also what it is not, spiritualty as an essential component of public education, can move from the margins of daily life in the public school system, and can become part of the fabric and makeup of every class, every school wide plan, every policy decision.

Education can speak to the problems outlined above. However, the education model of maintaining the status quo will not provide the solution. Introducing spirituality into the framework of education, working to nurture not just the mind or the body, but both in conjunction with the soul as well, has the power to speak to all the issues above.

I would go further and suggest that educating students in a way that is inclusive of spirituality allows them to learn what it means to be truly well and may aspire them to attain their own version of a good life moving forward, one potentially outside the norms of our current societies and expectations. While this may pose a problem as a standard to be assessed, it is none the less essential. It is essential because the concept of spirituality is fundamental in allowing education to speak to the crisis described above, in moving education forward to a place where it is again relevant in supporting humans to better pursue a meaningful existence within their world, which may include concepts related to well-being, agency, living more sustainably, appreciating greater interconnection, among many others.

Spirituality speaks to environmental issues by meaningfully connecting humans to their planet. Spirituality speaks to social justice issues by meaningfully connecting humans to each

other. Spirituality speaks to finding value in learning and meaning making in public education by introducing students to the awe of the world around them and by promoting an understanding of the value in learning and becoming better, becoming more, growing and seeking the good life.

Positioning Philosophical Inquiry

As members of a diverse and complicated society, engaged with various political, economic and cultural forces, our expectations of education are often diverse. In our current social and political framework, one could suggest education is often provided with technical challenges that seek to make students more competitive in the global market or more desirable to technologically based industries after graduation. Such challenges may be reflected in the enactment of practices or procedures directed at things like increasing test scores or promoting graduation rates. Often empirical studies are used to provide insight into the efficacy of new strategies or find the validity of new practices, seeking the most effective implementation possible to speak to these types of technical challenges.

Yet, there is another very important and sometimes overlooked set of challenges at work within education. While technical problems are valid concerns, there is another entire realm of human struggle and challenge that cannot be addressed by these types of technical procedures. Max-Neef (1991) suggests this when he states:

> We seek the justification of the models in the models themselves, so that when
>
> the solutions fail, it is not due to a failure of the model but to entrapments set up
>
> by reality. That reality, the presence of which is strongly felt, is not perceived as

a challenge to be faced, but rather as a problem to be brought under control by re-

applying the model with greater tenacity. (p. 12)

Bai (2005) describes these other struggles as belonging to the meta-physical realm, of

existing in places "beyond the tangible, quantifiable, measurable, and even effable" (Bai, 2005,

p. 1). These challenges fall not only outside of the realm of technical solutions, but often present

in a way that leaves positivist approaches unable to form meaningful questions for further

exploration, effectually rendering them useless. So where can answers be found when faced with

these types of enduring and meaningful challenges? Perhaps Bai (2005) says it best: "We have to

learn to navigate in the sea of the metaphysical and work with life's uncertainty and complexity.

Inquiry is this kind of navigation" (p. 2).

It is the intent of this paper to use philosophical inquiry as a means to logically and

deeply "grapple with the big questions at the centre" (Kessler in Vokey, 2001, p. 4). These types

of metaphysical explorations, of value inquiries, will better be able to speak to an ever-

increasing list of global concerns, crises or impending disasters, in ways that bolstered test

scores or financially viable student careers never will.

While some may suggest it is well beyond the realm of education to solve said issues, in

this thesis I argue that, at the least, education should be working to foster what Bai (2006) refers

to as "the cultivation of autonomy as human agency" (p. 7). This would seek to promote the

ability of students to think for themselves and provide them the capacity to act on that freedom

to re-imagine the "good life", a life lived in balance with one's self, one's community (be that

local or global) and one's natural environment. Education has the potential to play an essential

role in empowering students to see an alternative to serving the societal status quo: transforming

their future by realizing an existence outside of a system "besieged by the global forces of corporatization, fundamentalism, consumerism, and other ideological and structural malaises and inertia that render human beings increasingly powerless to *act* and reduce them to only *behave*" (Bai, 2006, p. 8).

In this regard, scientific inquiry and empirical research have little to contribute. While, as previously mentioned, there are a great many things that scientific inquiry can help humans to better understand and explore, technical concerns such as the type of matter located within our solar system, or the biological processes in action as our bodies fight off illness, when it comes to the metaphysical realm of human experience, or the challenges of values in a world besieged, positivist and mechanistic perspectives offer little to no insight. Philosophical inquiry can, very effectually, provide a place to start explorations into these challenges. Barrow (2000) describes the pursuit of philosophy and philosophical inquiry as a pursuit of "logical coherence" and "conceptual clarity" that provides a further understanding of the human experience:

> Then there are human beings and their actions: these, although there are
> obviously scientific questions to be asked about aspects of them…, cannot be
> better understood in their specific humanness, by any form of scientific inquiry…
> inquiry that is scientific will inevitably fail to tell us anything reliable about
> human beings: It will assert universal laws where there are none. (p. 316)

To this end, philosophy can be used as a method to generate knowledge of a less empirical nature. This knowledge may be more able to speak to the cultivation of human agency, while also generating perspectives inclusive of concepts such as value and belief which are

fundamental in answering the "why" questions that are such an essential part of the complexity

of all human practices, but especially so within the realm of public education (Burbules &

Warnick, 2006, p. 489). I would suggest these "why" questions are even more essential within

the realm of education simply as an appreciation of the level of complexity they present in

individual growth. These types of questions also foster inquiry within a social institution built

around supporting the development of these concepts in students with a myriad of limitless

varying perspectives, values, world views, personal knowledge and commitments to personal

growth.

From the perspective of philosophy in education, the notions and ideas that worked to

explain the purpose, method and aims of education could not be distinguished from questions

regarding the nature of morality, knowledge, nature and questions of a just society. Burbules and

Warnick (2006) note:

Debates about what the proper aims of education should be, individually and

societally, deal with some of the most fundamental and significant questions

imaginable… for many philosophers throughout history, these educational issues

were not regarded as part of a separate, let alone derivative, field of inquiry. It

may be time to revive that perspective. (p. 496)

This speaks directly to the importance of philosophical inquiry and the role it needs to play in

education, now and moving forward.

It is a daily occurrence where voices in my head suggest "shouldn't be's". At times, they

are incessant. They say things like "children should never be harmed by someone acting out in

frustration over injustices they don't understand", or "people should never be hurt because of who they love, or where they worship or the color of their skin", or "it should never be permitted that leaders of the free world are misogynistic and racist", or "there should never be people allowed to live in ways so detrimental to our environment that others are forced to fight to survive". There are more of these "shouldn't be's", and often they are more worrisome in content. At times, it is a struggle to reclaim the passion, to remember the rationale that led me to believe being an educator would allow me to empower myself and my students to fight these "shouldn't be's". It is philosophy and philosophical inquiry that have empowered me to understand my role in these struggles. There has never been and will never be an empirical study that can do the same. Barrow (2000) speaks to this notion as well:

> Straightforward empirical questions about education are generally not straightforward: They involve conceptual questions which, if they are not adequately dealt with, can (and generally do) lead to inappropriate and confuse empirical research and, if they are properly dealt with, often lead to the conclusion that it is not empirical work that is needed. (p. 317)

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that philosophical inquiry provides more than just a viable alternative to positivist approaches. More than this, philosophical inquiry works to support a force that some may see as aligned against a mechanistic and fragmented approach to acquiring knowledge. It works to ensure logic and reasoning takes precedence over expediency, even in a fast paced and results-driven field such as education. It works to ensure consistency of

purpose, attempts to acknowledge fairness of views and justice in action and encourages the sort of reflection that prevents political convenience (Barrow, 2000).

In a world obsessed with atomistic models and modern western world science, with individualization and the commercial drive for economic success, it is a philosophical perspective that can support the development of a conceptual framework to stand against this. Philosophical inquiry supports the exploration of a holistic practice. It supports the creation of a vision that is outside of our current scientific paradigm. It may even speak, in a unique way, to ideas related to decolonization as it promotes and validates other ways of knowing our world.

Outlining the Research Project

The following is an outline of the research project presented in the following chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 2 explores aspects of spirituality as they are framed by and related to the ecological crisis, through an exploration of the works of various authors, representing different perspectives. These include the work of Arne Naess and George Sessions in relation to Deep Ecology. Indigenous perspectives on spirituality as a lived way of life in relation to the ecological crisis will be presented through the work of Blair Stonechild. Thomas Berry will inform perspectives on ecology from a monotheistic standpoint, including concepts of religiosity and spirituality. Finally, aspects of Eastern Wisdom traditions will be presented through the work of Heesoon Bai and Claudia Eppert.

Chapter 3 utilizes philosophical inquiry to further explore and ultimately explicate a concept of spirituality through a synthesis of the four philosophical approaches discussed in

Chapter 2. This synthesized, three-part concept of spiritualty is the one used in the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 4 explores the issues currently surrounding spirituality in public education. This discussion includes current positions and tensions, problematic relationships and arguments that further support inclusion of spirituality in public schools in Canada.

Chapter 5 presents a new perspective on spirituality in the classroom, analyzing the structure of Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) as a spiritualty pedagogy. I have chosen IBL to demonstrate the potential of a spirituality perspective for education and its purpose because of the widespread use of IBL in school education.

Finally, in Chapter 6 I reflect on the entire process and project that has become this thesis. This section has been broken into three sections that include professional reflections, personal reflections and potential next steps for further research. This chapter attempts to share some of the personal and professional growth that has occurred during this process and also suggests some areas that still present as problematic, potentially suggesting avenues of further research for others.

Chapter 2 – A Multi-Perspective Inquiry into Ecology-Based Spirituality

Introduction

I would like to spend some time outlining a journey I have begun. While I am unsure of the final outcome, the process has been beneficial from the outset and may possibly result in some insight that could benefit others.

One might wonder at the vagueness of this introduction, but the words used here have been chosen carefully and arranged intentionally. It is the nature of this particular idea that lends itself to uncertainty. The concept I want to present can be elusive and at times confusing. In my experience, this is often the case when we attempt to explore the big questions in life, the one's Palmer (1983, 1997, 1998) suggests are worth wrapping one's life around.

The concept presented here, in this journey, is philosophical in nature and involves many big ideas that work underneath what we might describe as our day-to-day existence. These ideas come before, and in philosophy are sometimes referred to as apriori. They do not play directly into the myriad and limitless decisions or choices made every moment but build the framework within which these decisions and choices are made. This journey, the position I will try to frame, is fundamental. Yet, in many instances, it is left largely unexplored. Truly this is tragic for all involved. In the realm of education, and as it relates to the future of our children, it is tragic… and dangerous.

Our world is in crisis. The argument to present this case is extensive and robust, and outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Moving forward, this will be treated as fact. This crisis is manifesting itself in pathologies across a wide range of human experience. It is impacting us socially, economically and emotionally. It is affecting our environment, cultures and nations. It

looks like consumption, and disconnection and malaise and environmental destruction and human rights abuses and on and on and on. It has many labels and many faces, but at its root, Miller (2000) would suggest, the issue is a spiritual one. Perhaps more clearly explained, it might be said to be an issue of lack of spirituality. I would agree. Driven at the same time by my own existential crisis and the need to find a bigger context and drive through which to practice sustainability as a response to "eco-fatigue" and a fear of ineffectuality that was becoming anxiety producing and overwhelming, I came to the same conclusions as have Miller and many others.

Perhaps the vagueness of this introduction begins to make sense. Spirituality is a difficult concept to define precisely or to measure directly. To quantify the spiritualty of one individual or a group and assess it as greater or larger or deeper than the spirituality of another is, in many cases, futile. Yet, despite this, I would suggest that this distinction can be felt. I would suggest that the stuff that makes some individuals or groups more "spiritual" can be experienced meaningfully, should be experienced meaningfully. I would suggest that the solution to the aforementioned crisis may absolutely depend on it.

By no means is it my intent to suggest that I am an expert on any of the epistemologies or ontologies related to the worldviews that I will discuss in this chapter. However, through reading, reflection and introspection, as well as a healthy dose of humility, I believe I can suggest that there are structures at play in each of these ideologies that are mutual or similar and can be used to outline or present a model or working definition of spirituality that may have a place in a public education system. Naturally, such a definition must appreciate and respect the inherent diversity presented through these ideologies, while at the same time being robust enough to be meaningful in relation to the crisis presented and valid to the individuals involved.

I would suggest that this definition speaks to these concerns but will allow that it is still a work in progress, which is why I continue to refer to this definition as a *working definition*.

I am writing with an acute appreciation for the need to avoid appropriation and dilution of truth and meaning in each of these philosophies, but at the same time, with a positive intent I can make meaningful growth in my own journey to understand an ecological spirituality. At the same time, I want to further explore this path that may result in the application of these ideas in my own school, with my own students, while also potentially paving the path in such a way that others may wish to follow. I fully suggest, up front, that these ideas will not present a universal framework, as this journey is idiosyncratic. It is my own, and like the journey suggested in the Cree spiritual tradition, different for everyone. Yet, I hope that this path may shed light on a similar journey that others might take.

At this point in my journey, I believe I can pull three key ideas from the philosophies I have researched. These are ideas that are present to some degree in all of them yet speak to a definition of spirituality that lacks dogma or religious doctrine. Moving forward, I will define this ecological spirituality I am writing about as being composed of three main ideas. I will label these ideas as (1) the *awe* of appreciating that we are part of something bigger than ourselves as individuals, (2) the understanding that everything around us, inclusive of the biological and physical aspects of our environments, are intimately *interconnected* and interdependent, and (3) the deep realization and acknowledgment that we are on a *growth journey* and must work to be better in conjunction with the bigger context we are a part of, which may also be described as praxis, or actions connected to, but distinguished from, the underlying theory. We must walk the talk.

In this chapter I develop these three ideas for understanding ecological spirituality further using the literature and writings from four separate philosophies or worldviews, all of which have their own connections to an ecological ethic in some way, to develop the definition I am proposing. These philosophies are Deep Ecology from the perspectives of Arne Neass and Gary Sessions, among others; Monotheistic perspectives, as presented by the writings of Thomas Berry; Cree and Anishinaabe spirituality as shared by Blair Stonechild and his interviews with Elders; and finally Eastern Wisdom Traditions and philosophical perspectives presented by Eppert and Bai. To begin this discussion, it is important to briefly outline the essential components of the philosophies that will be explored, so as to scaffold the argument for ecological spirituality being made. The following section begins with a discussion of the basic tenets and ideas associated with each philosophy.

The Four Philosophies

 Deep Ecology and spirituality. The philosophy of Deep Ecology describes a way of being in this world that is built on values heavily influenced by an organic or earth centered paradigm. Fundamental to this philosophy is the commitment and belief in the essential nature of self-realization and growth as a vehicle to drive an understanding of deep interconnection with nature and all living things, so as to "achieve a fundamental ecological transformation of our sociocultural systems, collective actions and lifestyles" (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. xix).

 There are 7 key characteristics that underlie this paradigm in a general sense. As support for these ideas, Naess points out that these ideas are normative regarding behaviour and both philosophical and scientifically determined (Naess, 1995d, p. 7). The first characteristic is the idea that there is no such concept as a human *in* an environment. Rather, this philosophy

suggests a total-field image, or an absolute relational image. To describe this, Naess suggests we need to appreciate the absolute interconnection of all things in an environment to such a deep extent, that to sever any of these relationships would fundamentally change the definition of the organism or object being described. Naess describes this as "organisms as knots in the biospherical net" (Naess, 1995d, p.3). Perhaps this concept is best summarized and explained by Rothenberg when he states, "A thing does not exist without its relation to other things" (Rothenberg, 1987, p. 186).

A second characteristic of Deep Ecology is that of *biospherical egalitarianism*. This is not to be confused with ever peaceful co-existence, as there is sometimes great violence within natural systems, however, it does call to task the master-slave relationship created via anthropocentrism and seeks a balance to this belief, noting that there is great satisfaction to be gained in living in close partnerships with lifeforms and environments that are not solely human (Naess, 1995d, p. 4). This is closely related to a third characteristic referred to as an *anti-class posture*, which seeks to end all exploitation or suppression within group interactions for any reason and promotes ever increasing class-less diversity (Naess, 1995d, p. 5).

A fourth characteristic is the belief in the value of enhancement of any behavior that promotes diversity and the "ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships" (Naess, 1995d, p. 4). This is true of ecological diversity, but also true in human cultures, occupations and even economics. As a fifth characteristic, Deep Ecology would support the fight against pollution, environmental degradation and resource depletion. However, from this perspective, this fight must be waged in conjunction with the consideration of all seven characteristics presented here. As an example, it would not be acceptable to simply charge extra for an anti-

pollution service, as that would effectively promote class separation, and that works against the previous characteristic of an anti-class posture (Naess, 1995d, p. 5).

A sixth characteristic of Deep Ecology is a consistent and practiced appreciation of the incredible complexity of our world, and an understanding of our need for humility when we navigate the vast systems of biospherical relationships within which we exist. Naess describes this as appreciating complexity of a unifying system without over complication of our actions within it (Naess, 1995d, p.6). An application of the sixth characteristic may be a way to appreciate the seventh, and last, characteristic of Deep Ecology: decentralization. Decentralization speaks to decreasing influences on any organism or region that act from afar. This could include everything from pollution to political influence. Simply put, the aim here is to maintain local autonomy in as many situations as possible as this functions to decrease complexity and improves outcomes for everyone and everything involved (Naess, 1995d, p.7).

It is important to note, that while Naess expresses the importance of application of the scientific principles of ecology, he strongly points out that Deep Ecology is more than a dedication to science. It is the application of philosophy from an ecological perspective but also from wisdom traditions and normative debate:

> Ecology is a limited science which makes *use* of scientific methods. Philosophy
> is the most general forum of debate on fundamentals, descriptive as well as
> prescriptive… By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or
> equilibrium … it contains *both* norms, rules, postulates, value priority
> announcements *and* hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe.
> (Naess, 1995d, p.8)

Naess goes on to further describe a guiding framework of Deep Ecology through the concept of the apron diagram. Within this concept, Naess suggests there are four levels that make up the entirety of deep ecology as a platform. He labels these four levels as ultimate premises, platform principles, general views and practical/concrete decisions. Naess would suggest that there are many ultimate premises and starting points that, if logically pursued, will allow an individual to arrive at the same or very similar set of platform principles proposed as norms by Deep Ecology. However, he comments, "One must avoid looking for one definite philosophy or religion among the supporters of the deep ecology movement. Fortunately, there is a rich manifold of fundamental views compatible with the platform of the deep ecology movement" (Naess, 1995b, p.11).

The Platform Principles of Deep Ecology, as developed by Naess and Sessions (1995), are:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purpose.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

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5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect the basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. Ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

(pp. 49-50)

The final piece, as I see it, in outlining the philosophical stance that is Deep Ecology is to describe Naess's notion of self-realization. Equated to a deep examination of the roots of our environmental and social problems, sometimes also referred to as growing self-awareness, this self-realization aims to reconnect us deeply with our ecosystems, resulting in contemplation and care leading to a desire to further analyze and then change behaviours. What Naess calls self-realization may be the act of finding a better way to be on this earth and the process of becoming a mature human in context and interconnection with the Earth community, both living and abiotic members. Sessions (1995) describes it this way:

This spirituality tradition, and sense of what constitutes a mature human, also provides a sharp contrast to the secular cultural relativism of modern industrial

societies, which seems to justify much of the thoughtless and callous exploitation

and abuse of both humans and nonhumans, thus leading to a highly immature

destructive economic orientation and consumerism of modern life. (p. 58)

Naess would argue that this spiritual, internal growth is essential to developing our

ecological self. He describes this as the internal knowledge of self and interconnection to other

living things and places, with the intent of getting better and increasing understanding,

contemplative and meditative practise, of becoming what he calls both wide and deep. Through

this term *wide and deep*, Naess is proposing the development of an *all sided* maturity. The

implication here is that, as humans, we can be at the same time mature in some respects, while

immature or naive in others.

Rothenberg (1987, p. 186) suggests three potential results that may be direct results from

using a Deep Ecology framework as a means for rethinking our relationship and interactions

with the natural world. Not only can this philosophical perspective provide a firm grounding for

activism while also functionally connecting philosophical and spiritual concepts with policy

development, but it also provides a means through which individuals may begin to rethink their

relationships with nature, in new and different ways. Standing alone, the framework of Deep

Ecology is presenting an excellent alternative to much of our current interactions with nature. As

they are elegant and capable of promoting change to practice, one might only be left asking if

humans can afford not to adopt these practices, considering the crisis described in Chapter 1.

A monotheistic spiritual perspective. "These are the two radical positions – the

industrial and the ecological – that confront each other, with survival at stake" (Berry, 1988, p.

213). Thomas Berry, a catholic priest of the Passionate Order, a cultural historian, and Eco theologian, a student of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and an author, with a life-time of experiencing creation and pondering existence in his possession, has much to share about the nature of spirituality and its relation to ecology. For Berry, there is no doubt that we are in the midst of an ecological crisis. Berry actually suggests that the crisis is much more then simply the result of poor judgement in ecological behaviours however and traces the issues back to the very roots of our interpretation and interaction with the Universe. Berry believes the crisis is a result of the stories by which we have used to explain our evolution, existence and direction.

The story Berry paints cannot be simplified into anything smaller than what he refers to as a journey towards a cosmology of peace, and any attempt to describe it needs to do justice to this idea. One might start by relating his suggestion that humankind needs a new story. Berry explains that we need a new story because the old story of traditional religious thought no longer functions to connect us to our planet and each other, due to the changes we have experienced in the last several centuries. We need the new story to speak to the issues we face.

For the majority of the evolution of our species, Berry suggests we have been deeply interconnected and intimately aware of the cosmic or ethereal aspects of our world. Berry suggests that our entire history as a species, until quite recently, was lived in a way where we "felt ourselves sustained by a cosmic presence that went beyond the surface reality of the surrounding natural world" (Berry, 1988, p. 39). However, this story began to change with the onset of the Agriculture Age, the growth of industrialism, and the pervasiveness of the atomistic and mechanistic understanding of the world promoted through the growth of scientific discovery.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the invention of new technologies had begun, whereby we could manipulate our environment to our own advantage. At this time also an "objective world" was born – a world clearly distinct from ourselves and available not as a means of divine communion, but as a vast realm of natural resources for exploitation and consumption (Berry, 1988, p. 40).

At the same time, Berry (1988) notes that "the experience of sacred communion with the earth disappeared" (p. 41). The result, according to Berry is our modern western world society, which many consider broken, a "counterproductive, addictive, paralyzing, manifestation of a deep cultural pathology" (p. 32). This pathology has resulted in an unsustainable economy and a disintegrating natural environment. Our societies are caught in the middle and the prognosis is not good. "Millennial expectations are reduced to endurance in a desolate natural world" (p. 31).

Correspondingly, many people, intellectuals and spiritualists among them, are looking to fix this or find the means to change it. Berry would suggest two choices seem most prevalent here. Analytical sciences could be applied to greater extent, used to discover the variables that need change and to analyze the issues and determine the correct solutions moving forward. Yet for some, there are no answers to be found there. That road has been traveled on already. For those, religious tradition and fundamental perspectives suggest the necessary changes, which often include appreciating a grand or master plan, invoking self-discipline and re-establishing a moral compass. Berry would suggest however, that neither of these will provide any help.

The scientific method has paved the way for us to understand the energies and intricacies involved in our deepest interconnections to everything else. Still, science alone is void of answers to the big questions of our existence. Berry (1988) states:

Natural selection involves no psychic or conscious purpose, but instead a struggle for earthly survival that gives the world its variety of form and function. Because this story presents the universe as a random sequence of physical and biological interactions with no inherent meaning, the society supported by this vision has no adequate way of identifying any spiritual or morale values. (p. 130)

If science cannot find answers, it makes sense that a catholic priest would turn to the great religious traditions of the western world to speak to these concerns. However, at this point, Berry suggests that monotheistic traditions, particularly those of the Christian church, are also fundamentally flawed. To explain this, Berry describes the Christian perspective, in generalised terms, as a process of rising through various realms of being, where the divine is appreciated as the culmination of multiple stages or steps; First geological or physical realms, then biological forms of living creatures, through the aspects of human consciousness and finally on to the soul, inner life and God. And while that model has sufficed as a valid story of spirituality for great multitudes of people all over the world for centuries, there are major concerns. It results in a disconnect, a temporal and physical separation of layers of existence.

The difficulty with this cosmology is that it represents the world simply as an ordered complex of beings that are ontologically related as an image of the divine. It does not present the world as a continuing process of emergence in which there is an inner organic bond of descent of each reality from an earlier reality. (Berry, 1988, p.129)

According to Berry, the result is that "the redemption story [of Christianity] has grown apart not only from the historical story but also from the earth story. Consequently, an isolated spiritual power has eventuated that is being victimized by entropy" (p. 130). At best, the result is a religious tradition that fails to connect us to the earth in a way that requires a change in the behaviors resulting in ecological degradation. At worst, it may promote these behaviours through an inability to speak to the ecological crisis in any meaningful way.

The difference between this age and those we have moved through is the gifts we have received from scientific inquiry. While many have been beneficial, we also now have the power to dominate nature in a manner similar to that in which nature used to dominate us. The result has been ecological devastation, ironically, in the name of progress for all (which could be linked to a Christian ideal). Just as our planet has taken part in an evolutionary process, from the original infinite mass through to the formations of atoms, elements and planets, all the way through to the birth of life on Earth, Berry (1988) would suggest so too is religion and belief part of a process and there needs to be an evolution here too (p. 116). There is another means to finding this balance of meaningful interconnection and appropriate environmental behaviours, however, and the solution is available to us as another unique result of this evolution of existence Berry refers to.

This current and problematic monotheistic perspective, as presented by Berry, fails to provide a framework for individuals that would allow them to effectively make sense of the realities in which they are struggling to find meaning.

Personal realization involves a unique creative effort in response to all those interior and exterior forces that enter an individual life. So, too, with each

historical age and each cultural form, there is need to create a reality for which,

again, there is no adequate model. (Berry, 1988, p.134)

Berry is suggesting here that a common monotheistic perspective cannot provide the

needed framework, and as it fails to allow people to connect meaningfully to their world and

environments, the results are what we see today, and what we struggle to explain and justify

regarding our interactions with each other and our natural world. It results in a trance like state

of existing in the industrial age. "That is what needs to be explained – our entrancement with the

industrially driven consumer society" (Berry, 1988, p. 38).

He suggests humans need to create an entirely new story, one that is based much more on

understanding our deep interconnection to the universe as a whole and to all living and non-

living components of our planet, down to the very fundamental elements, atoms and molecules

that create our existence. He refers to this new story, this understanding of deep interconnection,

as the *ecological age*. He suggests this is the only way we can "produce the commitment

required to stop the world of exploitation, of manipulation, of violence so intense that it

threatens to destroy not only the human city, but also the planet" (Berry, 1988, p. 46). While we

have forgotten this knowledge recently in our evolution, we need to return to an understanding

of what this means.

Berry suggests that this ecological age will be the result of humans re-establishing what

he refers to as the three principles upon which the universe functions, which we knew at one

time, but have forgotten during our lapse into the technological age of the 19th and 20th centuries

(Berry, 1988, p. 40). These principles upon which the universe functions are *differentiation*,

subjectivity and *communion* (Berry, 1988, p. 45). Berry believes they were intrinsically and

intuitively known to our species at an earlier time. Even more interesting, Berry presents the notion that these ideas are currently strongly supported by science, yet under-whelmingly understood and acted upon by our species.

Differentiation is described as the "primordial expression of the universe" (Berry, 1988, p. 45), resulting in a limitless variety of qualities for solar systems, ecosystems, life and plant systems and human existence itself. "Life on planet Earth finds expressions in an overwhelming variety of manifestations" (Berry, 1988, p. 45). Increased *subjectivity* results in more complex forms of being, from atoms to molecules, to organisms, to the human nervous system and brain. As organisms begin to elicit more control over themselves and their environments, "planet Earth becomes ever more subject to the free interplay of self-determining forces" (Berry, 1988, p. 45). Finally, we reach a place where *communion* becomes fundamental, the "communion of each reality of the universe with every other reality of the universe" (Berry, 1988, p. 45). As Berry suggests that our species was once aware of what science continues to prove, namely that we exist entirely, absolutely and undeniably interrelated as a "single, if multiform, energy event" (Berry, 1988, p. 46).

In order to re-establish these three laws, Berry suggests two practices that would promote this change: The first is Berry's idea of being present and the second is the idea of committing to the rituals used to establish divinity.

"We are losing splendid and intimate modes of divine presence. We are, perhaps, losing ourselves" (Berry, 1988, p.8). For Berry, presence and ritual exist hand in hand. Presence is that ability to feel and wonder about and be part of the great mystery that is our existence. It appreciates that so much of what we cannot see or yet comprehend is part of who and what we are. But perhaps most importantly, it acknowledges that all of this is wrapped up in the places

we inhabit, the land and sky and water and communities. It is what speaks to us of something bigger than we are, and what encourages us to be humble as individuals. Berry sometimes refers to it as the numinous aspect of the world (Berry, 1988, p. 8), that ethereal component that is powerful and raw and mystical. At other points, he suggests it is the creative energy that is all around us, which is exchanged and transferred in each and every interaction of which we are a part (Berry, 1988, p. 25).

If we are open to the beauty, awe and majesty of the world around us, if we open ourselves to the gifts of Earth and the amazingness of life with sensitivity and gratitude, we will begin to reaffirm our honor to earth and make changes to our pathologic behaviours. One means to reaffirming this honor may be through ritual and courtesy (Berry, 1988, p.14).

It is from this experience of presence and in seeking it with regularity, that we begin to develop ritual. Ancient rituals acted in ways that deeply connected us to the earth, brought us into presence with the divinity of this planet and creation, invoked deep and meaningful interdependence. It is ritual, which moves us to experience this presence again and again. In this way we learn and remember our place, we appreciate the need for courtesy in our actions, with the world and with its populations, "recognizing the primacy of the natural world and its spontaneous functioning in all that we do" (Berry, 1988, p. 48). In a very special manner we have lost our presence to the life sustaining forces of the earth.

Whatever our gains in terms of scientific advances or in our industrial economy, neither of these is very helpful in establishing an integral presence to the more profound depths of our own being or into the more powerful forces shaping both the universe and the planet on which we live (Berry, 1988, p. 199). It is these concerns, re-establishing presence and ritual as a means

to better appreciate our interconnection and belonging to this planet and our universe that the philosophy of monotheism, as presented by Berry, seeks to speak to.

Cree spirituality. At the outset of the argument presented by Stonechild (2016), he makes it very clear that humankind urgently needs to "apply spiritual principles to how we live" (p. 7). Throughout his book, Stonechild, similar to Berry, suggests a lack of spiritual connection has resulted in enormous detrimental effects for human beings and our planet. "Relationship with the spirit world is just as, if not more, important than the relationship with the physical/human world… In contemporary society, human concerns are the only ones taken seriously. The natural world suffers" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 88). Stonechild stresses that materialism and the search for economic prosperity that has become so prevalent in the recent history of humankind has become the figurehead of a false god, offering false promises. "As the ultimate solution, however, economic prosperity is a 'false god'" (p. 196). Yet, the pursuit of these misleading promises have lead to devastation of the natural world and the collapse of human interdependence and interrelationship. "Materialism controls populations for economic and political purposes; it is not concerned with liberation of the soul" (Stonechild, 2016, p.196).

Referencing a spiritual regime and lifestyle that was once all encompassing on Turtle Island (North America), Stonechild suggests that these issues were absent in traditional societies. The worst excesses of today's social anomie and environmental abuse were avoided. Through spirituality, they maintained healthy relationships with the land, natural environment and other Indigenous groups. The lifestyle did not emphasize materialism or give priority to exploitation. Interpersonal considerations trumped economic development and resource extraction (Stonechild, 2016, p.181).

However, like Berry, Stonechild notes that an attempt to return to spiritual understanding todays society is incredibly difficult. He points to "powerful and entrenched forces" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 5) of materialism and economic systems, as well as a school system that functions to produce "cogs in the economic machine" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 5) and social identifications linked solely to occupation. In this world, "Little serious thought or consideration is given to the idea that after a life spiritually lived, another cycle begins that carries one to new heights in the supernal world" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 5).

According to Stonechild (2016) however, there are solutions to this crisis. "Traditional Spiritual teachings will help the world live in balance again" (p. 189). Throughout his work, Stonechild explains the details and nuances of this spiritual perspective, suggesting there are some key ideas, which frame the worldview of Cree spirituality, the world view which may support a transition away from the crisis we face.

According to Stonechild, the development of European civilizations placed humanity at the centre of all creation. This was fostered by their anthropocentric cultures and institutionalized by their religious traditions, which made these ideas infallible (Stonechild, 2016). Contrasting views form key aspects of Indigenous spirituality, where "humans are not the centre of Creation… humans are one aspect of a created world, and because of their dependence on the other kingdoms of life, they are considered to be among the most vulnerable" (p. 3).

Another key component of Indigenous spirituality is expressed by Stonechild when he makes a distinction between spirituality and religion, noting that "spirituality involves direct engagement and connection with the mysteries of the transcendent" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 4), and it is the responsibility of the individual to work on seeking out this connection and learn from it.

Further, Stonechild notes, again similarly to Berry, that spiritual practice evolves according to the changing needs and times of humanity, yet the purpose, need and affect are the same, and does not change. In this way, despite changing times and political climates, Indigenous spirituality remains relevant and fiercely important (Stonechild, 2016, p. 6). "Eventually as spirit beings we all find our way back to the creator" (p. 7).

Through the teaching of the Elders he has spent time interviewing and learning from, Stonechild (2016) frames Cree spirituality in terms of the great principle and the great law, both of which have much to say about our current crisis. From these two basic tenets, much of the ceremonial tradition and practice of Cree spirituality can be explained. This is in no means suggesting that the ideas presented are simple, rather they are incredibly elegant and at the same time very unified, resulting in a robust world view that is deeply interconnected and speaks to an enormous richness of human philosophical spiritual existence.

Stonechild notes how "highly focused traditional cultures are on spirituality" (p. 46), citing the incredible array and meanings behind the complicated ceremonies and practices, which include regular prayer, naming ceremonies, vision quests, sun dance, powwows, sweat lodges, spirit lodges and many others. Intertwined through all of these ceremonies is the idea of the constant presence of the creator and the concept of holism and balance taught through the multitude of teachings presented by the medicine wheel. "One need only look at the extent to which ceremonies are practiced daily, seasonally and at important stages of life to realize that this assertion is not just a platitude" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 46).

The first component of this spiritual framework, according to Stonechild (2016), is the great principle of Cree spirituality, which is the understanding that human beings, as well as all plants and animals and inanimate objects are actually spirits of divine origin from the mother

aspect of the Creator, who have taken on a physical form as humans as part of a journey that is taken to provide knowledge and experience. This is absolutely central to this world view, as it implies that we are all spiritual creatures, all divine and all interconnected. Further, it implies the notion that there is a higher calling to which we need to learn and attend to, and that is the reason we are here (p. 49).

This journey is undertaken so as to provide spiritual beings the opportunity to "experience choices and learn from them" (Stonechild, 2016, p.51). As well, this journey helps spirit beings learn about respect and interconnection and a holistic life, "necessarily encompassing physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 57). This is often presented as four components within the circle or medicine wheel. This journey is taken to help find the balance, which we are often lacking. In relation to our current crisis, Stonechild (2016) draws the parallel, "today the imbalance is generally due to a deficiency of spiritualty" (p. 57).

Stonechild (2016) notes that all "philosophy, teachings and healings of Elders flow from this principle" (p. 67). This includes the seven sacred spiritual disciplines of First Nations, as Stonechild calls them (p. 53), which include fasting, sharing, parenting, learning, teaching, praying and meditating (p. 53). There are also the seven virtues (respect, courage, love, generosity, honesty, humility and wisdom) (p. 84), the seven great laws, the four forces of creation and the four great spiritual laws (p. 61). All of these are needed to learn control and balance on this journey, and to support us in finding our way back to the Creator or *Manitow* (p. 53). Further, the notion that learning and growing is sacred flows from this principle. "The purpose of life is to struggle and learn… knowledge and the Creator are one" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 55) as we learn to live in the order created for this existence, with the balance and respect

required. In short, "there is more to life than what we see, and in reality, we are spiritual beings" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 66).

The Great Law, the second basic tenet of Cree spirituality, is sometimes also called the Great Law of Relationships, the Great Law of Peace or the Law of Harmony. This idea comes directly from the understanding that we are all spirits on a journey as physical creatures and objects of this planet. By instigating this journey, we have become separated from Creator and from each other. In turn, "having assumed physical being and the separateness this implies, there is an imperative to restore unity among all created things" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 69). *Wahkohtowin* is the name of the Cree doctrine that speaks to ending this separation. Therefore, according to Stonechild (2016), the laws suggesting the good life for humans in this physical world are derived through spiritual insight (p. 69). In the Cree spiritual tradition, this good life for humans is a product of having respectful and reciprocally responsible relationships with the self, the community, the natural world and the spiritual world, implied as spiritually essential by the Great Law (p. 71).

In the Cree worldview, illness is "disharmony or lack of a healthy holistic relationship between an individual and environment" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 89). It could be that many of the ills we currently face, noted as the crisis above, stem from a lack of these healthy relationships with each other and our environment. From the perspective suggested by Stonechild (2016), "Western society encourages individualism and fails to highly value our interconnectedness to others and all things around us. Elders feel that humanity is currently in the depths of materialism and secularism" (p. 90). As I have laid out in Chapter 1, I agree with this assessment.

Eastern Wisdom traditions. "Our secular age has emphasised reason too much and at the expense of all the dimensions that contribute to a full experience of our humanity" (Eppert, 2010, p. 226). In this quote, Eppert speaks to the multi-dimensional perspective that is the full experience of the human condition. While it is challenging to define or explore tenets of Eastern Wisdom traditions that are common to all their philosophies due to their very integrated nature, a central premise or tenet of these philosophies is the notion of integration: integration of ideas, of mind and body, of the inter-being of all beings. One might describe it as appreciating the full experience of humanity, while also finding a balance within this experience.

A further note regarding the term *Eastern Wisdom philosophies* is required. It should be obvious that the ideologies and philosophies I am considering here (Daoism, Buddhism and Vedic philosophies) are very different in many important ways. Further, I do not suggest that I am a scholar of any of them, never mind all three. Even within each, there are myriads of different groupings and subgroupings. I am attempting, with humility and respect, to pull out some of the big ideas that may be common to many of these philosophies or spiritualties, and in that sense, use the big ideas, similar to the work of Bai and Eppert, as a combined wisdom presented by these traditions.

Buddhism. While there are many different branches and beliefs associated with Buddhism, there are some common underlying doctrines. These would include the four noble truths: (1) suffering exists; (2) suffering is caused by ignorance, attachment and desire; (3) actions can be taken to end suffering; and (4) the actions to be taken involve following the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is grouped into clusters that involve (1) pursuing wisdom; (2)

acting ethically; and (3) working toward concentration and focus of the mind (Bodhi, 1994; Nhat Hanh, 1991).

The fundamental teaching in Buddhism is that wisdom can be developed through proper behaviours and practice, namely meditation, concentration and reflection on personal experience. The development of this wisdom leads to joy and happiness as one learns to let go of desire and attachment that are the result of ignorance. The attainment of wisdom involves understanding what are referred to as the Three Dharma Seals. The first of these is understanding the impermanence of all phenomena, or that all things change. The second is the notion of the non-self, or the idea that everything exists in context, dependent on other things in order to be. Finally, there is nirvana, or the connection to the ultimate reality which is enabled when one can understand and perceive the true nature of reality, after following the Eightfold Path. This attainment, from the Buddhist perspective, results in the termination of suffering and an end to the cycle of rebirth known as Samsara (Nhat Hanh, 2006).

Vedic philosophies. The Vedic period of Hinduism is suggested to be the most authoritative regarding Hindu texts and is know as the period of knowledge and sacred teachings (Billington, 2002). According to these texts, the central aim in Hinduism, the drive for all of life's actions and commitments, is to attain *moksha*, or enlightenment, so that one may see and recognize what is real and see through the illusion of the material world, or *maya.* In order to achieve this goal, one must be aware of the three aspects that may interfere with this end, namely *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure) and *dharma* (duty). It is the understanding of the interconnection of these ideas and the consequences of their pursuit, that leads to *moksha*, and the avoidance or destruction of *maya*, cosmic ignorance. When one reaches *moksha*, the *atman* described as soul

or higher self, unites with the *brahman*, or absolute and infinite (sometimes described as God), "with which all individual selves would be at one. This is the heart of Hinduism, and its unique contribution" (Billington, 2002, p. 25).

While there are many orthodox systems of Hinduism that have different emphasis, they also have much overlap and commonality and all six are spoken to in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, considered by many to be the greatest Hindu text. Of the six, the fourth is commonly referred to in the western world as it is Yoga-Sutra. It speaks of eight steps that can help to settle the mind, in order for a practitioner to achieve spiritual harmony and progress toward moksha. These steps are: (1) *yama* (the laws of life); (2) *nijama* (the rules for living); (3) *asana* (the physical posture); (4) *pranayama* (the rhythmic control of the breath); (5) *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the mind from sense objects); (6) *dharana* (concentration on a single object); (7) *Dhyana* (meditation); and, (8) *samadhi* or *turija* (entry into the superconscious state). It is from these steps that the practice of yoga has been developed, with the western world paying particular attention to steps three and four. As well, step 1, the *yama*, meaning self control, is the basis for the five ethical practices associated with Hinduism. These include non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), self-control (*brahmacharya*) and non-attachment (*aparigraha*) (Billington, 2002, p. 27).

It is the sixth orthodoxy or state of Hinduism, known as the *Vendanta*, that is widely consider representing "the highest peaks of spiritual experience" (Billington, 2002, p. 29). However, even within this orthodoxy, there are key differences surrounding the notion of dualism. On one end of the spectrum regarding dualism, the *Dvaita Vedanta* posits that God and individual are separate and will remain so forever. At the other end of the spectrum, the *Advaita*

Vedanta school is non-dualistic, suggesting there is one universal consciousness and that atman and brahman are one and the same (Billington, 2002).

Regardless of the orthodoxy or school of Hinduism, a key component of this journey is the concept of *karma,* deeds or actions that result in an accumulated moral effect. *Karma* represents the idea that an individual has absolute free will to choose actions, but that the consequences of the choices made dictate future events. For followers of Hinduism, these events may span generations, and even eons, of rebirths through the process of *samsara* (similar to the Buddhist tradition). One may be born into a life of struggle as a result of previous poor karma, but one still remains free to choose right action and deed that will result in benefit in the future, either in this life or a future one.

Daoism (Taoism). Billington (2002) suggests that at the root of all Chinese literature in this field, there are common elements that differ significantly from Indian perspectives related to Hinduism or Buddhism and cautions the use of the all-inclusive term or idea described as "Eastern Philosophy". Fundamental differences within these Chinese philosophies include the concept of humanism, focussing on interpersonal relationship and social empathy as opposed to personal achievement or individual freedom. As well, the notion of absolutes is less demanded from these philosophies. "Behaviour is both a human and a spiritual matter, and the search for truth is both a human and spiritual enterprise" (Billington, 2002, p. 87). The result is commonly a synthesis of ideas that lends itself to greater tolerance of various perspectives. Finally, these philosophies have a history of rural development, and as such, are deeply backdropped and laden with imagery that is ecological in nature, such as images of plants, animals and rivers. There is a

compulsion and need to see the word ecologically rather than automatically or mechanically (Billington, 2002).

Tradition suggests that the *Tao Te Ching*, the spiritual classic of Taoism, was written by Lao Tzu in the 6th century BCE. However, there is much speculation about the date in question and even the existence of Lao Tzu himself. Others suggest that the *Tao Te Ching* is a collection of ideas related to Taoism developed over centuries, with the earliest copies thought to be written around 200 BCE (Billington, 2002). Regardless of its origin, the *Tao Te Ching* has been described as genius, relatable to people of different faiths, or of none, void of religious dogma and relevant throughout changing culture and time (Billington, 2002, p. 90). Fundamental to Taoism are the notions of *Tao*, *Te*, *Ch'i*, *yin* and *yang*. While a brief description of the basic tents and relation of these ideas follows, it is far from complete, as the concepts are individually enormous, intricately interconnected and, by original nature, mysterious.

While Taoism indicates the *Tao* is ultimately indefinable, mysterious and unknowable, it may be described as the "all-embracing origin of all things" (Billington, 2002, p. 90). It is said to be the ground of all being and the origin of the origin. The *Te* is the manifestation of this source in our existence. The *Tao* is said to be the source of the *Ch'i* which is the described as the breath, energy or spirit that pervades or exists in all things, and that brought the universe into being. This force can be described as the *yin* and *yang*, the opposites and balance in all things. *Yin* and *yang* manifest as Heaven and Earth, making up two of the legs of the tripod, of which humanity and all living things compose the third leg. According to Taoism, it is in this relation that all things come into existence.

Another important aspect of Taoism is the concept of *fu*, or cyclical returning. This may seem to follow natural law, where one acknowledges that from the *Tao* all things come and to

the *Tao* all things will return. *P'u* is another example of this returning, however it is described

more profoundly as "achieving simplicity against the background of experience. Not out of

ignorance but with, and despite, the full awareness of the human condition" (Billington, 2002, p.

92). One aspect of *p'u* is the idea of *wu-wei*, which may be translated as both non-doing and also

as perfect spontaneous action. It implies being in touch with one's true self, of perfect

attunement with the *Tao*, "a sense of oneness with the source of being" (Billington, 2002, p. 93).

As it is sometimes described as non-doing, *wu-wei* may also be described as an emptiness,

devoid of material influence or passion, a state beyond material concerns. This is described in

Taoism as *ming*, becoming spiritually at harmony with the *Tao,* becoming enlightened.

In this way, it is reminiscent of aspects of both Buddhism and Hinduism. However, one

important distinction to make is that the Tao is unknowable, and there is no process of

intellectual reasoning, self-denial or spiritual ritual alone that can support the achievement of

ming. It is the recognition of the ineffectiveness of all striving that provides the path to the *Tao*.

Billington (2002) describes the complexity of this idea when he notes that in Taoism, nature is

complete and perfect in itself. So, in order to be one with the *Tao*, one must be completely

natural, fluid and spontaneous. Any attempt to change that which is perfect can only result in a

lessening of perfection.

> The Tao is absolutely loyal to itself; it denotes the highest expression of being,
>
> which is a state of changelessness, of non-becoming: and therefore (and here lies
>
> the supreme mystery), of emptiness or non-being. It is the state of total
>
> spontaneity, and those who wish to be at one with it must also live

spontaneously, laying aside their human intentions and becoming oblivious to

external pressures or motivations. (Billington, 2002, p. 94)

It is not a difficult task to read through the very simplified philosophical outlines of the

Eastern Wisdom traditions presented above and to begin to see some similarities or

commonalities. Perhaps a summary of this section can be made by quoting the words of Eppert

(2010), as they provide some insight into the connections between the underlying tenets of these

Eastern Wisdom traditions and the overlying goal of this thesis.

We are challenged to heal in ways that re-support a journey within through an

integrative participation with soul, body, emotion, mind and spirit. Indeed, living

vibrantly and relationally calls for deep reach into all we have to offer that can

increase our wisdom and compassion. The Asian wisdom traditions variously

attend to 'the Way'. (p. 226)

This quote speaks directly to the three aspects of spirituality this thesis is attempting to

develop. Eppert speaks of living vibrantly, which might suggest finding the awe in the

experience and learning in which one is surrounded. Eppert refers to integrative participation, of

mind, spirit and body and of living relationally. This is a manifest of a deep understanding of

interconnection; interconnection within one's self and between all living things. Finally, she

references a deep reach that may increase our wisdom and compassion. This is the growth or

journey to which we must see as important and commit. All of these ideas come together as

described in the term "the Way". It is these ideas that will be further synthesized in the next

chapter.

Chapter 3 – Synthesis

In this chapter I synthesize the philosophies and their respective ideas presented in the last chapter into a framework I am suggesting could be used to support the developmental, implementation, and acceptance of an ecological spirituality in the classroom. While each philosophy presented previously provides unique insight and perspective on the *big questions* elicited through any ontological examination of human existence, there are common themes and ideas that can be extracted, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 2. Below, I will look to synthesize the four philosophies as each pertains to the framework previously discussed, namely *awe*, *interconnection* and *growth or praxis*.

Awe in Spirituality

"I would say that complexity is the single word for the virtue and perfection of nature that we are slowly discovering more about, leading to an increase in awe and wonder" (Rothenberg, 1987, p. 159). The first aspect of spirituality I wish to propose is the emotional aspect. This may be described as the awe experienced by a human when confronted with the vastness and enormity of the concept of life. It is visceral and raw, frequently overwhelming and often poorly described, due simply to the difficultly we have at appreciating its depth and power. It is a feeling as much as anything else, palpable like a heavy weight. It is experienced when we are present in a moment that speaks to us of the infinite aspects and interconnections of life, but also of space and time, of diversity and complexity of all things. It is the awe and it speaks to us of complexity and diversity and humility and something bigger than us.

It is this feeling that suggests there is more then meets the eye to our existence as living things. This challenging feeling is what suggests to us that there is more here than simply a

scientific quantification of minute particles and their behaviours that can account for the sum of all experiences that are human. This awe is a key component in the human experience. It is essential as for many it is this spark that begins an internal struggle to seek or know that which cannot be explained through mechanistic atomization and deconstruction. This awe may be an impetus to look deeper to the sages of the past or to religious traditions of the East or West, or even to ponder anew the feeling that there is more in this experience than the sum of its parts. Regardless of the next steps in the exploration of *the more*, this feeling could be the beginning of the concept of spirituality as I would suggest it here.

There are several aspects of Deep Ecology that describe or relate to the notion of awe presented here. A key aspect to developing an ethic of Deep Ecology or what Naess (1995a, pp 31-48) sometimes refers to as "ecosophy", is to spend time being in the presence and wonder of the natural world. It is through these experiences that one can begin to see the extent of diversity, beauty and interconnection so fundamental within the natural world. While the concept of interconnectedness will be developed further in the next section, it is an important point to note here, as appreciation of the vastness and intricacy of this interconnectedness is, in itself, awe inspiring. To perceive and realize this, deeply and meaningfully, is to begin to approach the natural world with the appropriate sense of humility. How is it possible to not be awe-struck when one is present in the midst of the infinite interconnections and roles of the millions of species that inhabit this planet? How can one not be humbled by the diversity of creatures which have evolved to thrive in the extremes of environments and ecologies present on this planet?

As noted in the first of the platform principle suggested by Naess and Sessions (1995, p. 49), the flourishing of all life on earth has inherent value in and of itself. The second platform principle speaks to the means by which the richness and diversity of life contributes to this

realization and speaks to us as humans of a required humility that must be developed in our approach to these myriads of systems and species. To be so humbled is key to an appreciation of Deep Ecology and is both a result of experiencing the awe of nature, while at the same time, a path through which to fully realize the value and awe-inspiring quality of the natural world, as suggested by Deep Ecology. Awe is an integral component to the philosophy that is Deep Ecology.

Another aspect of awe within the framework of Deep Ecology is revealed as Naess and Sessions (1995, p. 50) describe the seventh platform principle, that of developing an appreciation for the quality and value of life situations. This can be equated to finding moments of awe and humility, of contentment and peace that lay outside a materialistic desire for greater standards of living. Awe is key to understanding the different between big and great, which as Naess and Sessions suggest is crucial.

Finally, as Naess (1995b, p. 11) develops the apron diagram in relation to Deep Ecology, he notes the plurality of fundamental views that are compatible with Deep Ecology principles. Deep Ecology is so openly compatible with other philosophies, spiritualities or even religions, specifically because its fundamental tenets are developed simply from opening oneself to the wonder of the natural world. In this regard, one could consider awe as a fundamental tenet of Deep Ecology, the feeling of which may begin the exploration of the entire philosophy further. As further explanation, it is this aspect of the Deep Ecology framework that allows it to be inclusive and valid in the presence of great plurality and diversity of ultimate premises presented by many different wold views, religious traditions and philosophical underpinnings.

From a monotheistic perspective as presented by Berry (1988), the aspect of awe is presented in his concept of presence and divine energy and also developed from the inclusion of

ritual. As previously described, the idea of presence, of being and experiencing the divineness of the cosmos, is an act of experiencing and appreciating awe. Further, it is this awe experience that Berry (1988) references when he speaks of the reciprocal development of ritual. He describes divine energy as being a unity of the divine, cosmic and human, but of being essentially built on personal presence. The result was the development of firmly established ritual codes, that led to spiritual movements providing structure for individuals and societies. Berry suggests it was these ritual patterns and spiritual disciplines that provided the great societies with their ability to maintain proper energy cycles and avoid the degradation of entropy. Entirely, the concept is based on experiencing the awe of this life.

As a further method to reclaim this idea, the validity, of the experience of awe, Berry (1988) notes that relearning how to live with earth or beginning the process of ushering in the ecological age, may begin with the intention of returning to our native place, which he describes as returning to the divine after wandering away (Berry, 1988, p. 2). Berry suggests that the values of traditional Indigenous perspectives provide a pathway forward, as they are "the original dwellers in this region of the world" (Berry, 1988, p. 181). Berry (1988) states "they [Indigenous peoples] have this position of honor not merely by their temporal priority, but also by their mystical understanding and communion with the continent" (p. 181).

With this argument, Berry effectively takes the components of awe that can be developed as fundamental to a monotheistic perspective and unites them with the aspect of awe developed from the Cree spiritual perspective. Berry goes on to suggest that we must work to further recognize and appreciate the resources available in our Indigenous communities to understand the rhythms and traditions of their deep and profound interconnection with nature and her divinity and spirit (p. 182).

From a monotheistic perspective, Berry (1988) notes, it is the modern western world and European religious traditions that struggle so viciously against the spirituality presented by Indigenous values, yet, it is the recognition of the validity and power offered by these Indigenous understandings that may provide our way forward. The inherent and undiminished strength of Indigenous ways of being and knowing are another learning that may promote ushering in of the new ecological age.

> The native people of this continent… give to the human mode of being a unique expression that belongs among the great spiritual traditions of [humankind], … their own special form of nature mysticism. (p.184)

> Awareness of the numinous presence throughout the entire cosmic order establishes among these peoples one of the most integral forms of spirituality known to us… This is precisely the mystique that is of utmost necessity at the present time to reorient the consciousness of the present occupants of the North American continent toward a reverence for the earth. (p.184)

These quotes both speak to the role of awe, of mysticism and numinous presence that are vital to the monotheistic perspective of the ecological age presented by Berry. Further they introduce the essential awe aspect that is a core component of Cree Indigenous spirituality. However, there is a key distinction that must be made between the two ideologies described above, whether it is the philosophical perspective presented by Deep Ecology, or the Monotheistic worldview suggested by Berry, and the world view that is presented from a Cree

spiritual tradition. The simplest way to describe this distinction would be to label the Cree

spiritual tradition as a lived form of spirituality that is constantly practiced and enacted. At times

this distinction may seem to imply that the Cree Spiritual perspective is less philosophically

complicated or demanding however, the lived aspect of this worldview is a powerful example of

praxis, directly enacting the behaviours which the above philosophies outline but may struggle

to bring to realization for lack of clearly actionable steps. In this way, it may appear that the

connections to awe, interconnection and praxis from this worldview are more direct and less

convoluted in their understanding. I would suggest that that is an inherent strength of this

worldview, as it is explained below.

> In the Indigenous world view, all Creation is sacred and spiritually alive… once a
>
> person sets foot outside his lodge, the entire world was his church. Land is a
>
> living entity that must be treated with respect. Spirituality is to be practiced
>
> daily… Our purpose on earth is to develop an understanding of how to live in
>
> harmony with all of creation. (Stonechild, 2016, p.75)

The awe aspect of spirituality as presented from this Indigenous perspective is a

fundamental and pre-existing component within this worldview. As Stonechild notes above, the

awe of living and existence is all around and appreciated as a lived way of being in every

moment. "The entire world is his church" makes specific reference to seeing awe in everything

and every moment we experience.

This notion is also tightly intertwined with the concept of ritual.

Religion in Indigenous cultures is practiced in its truest sense as a means of

connecting with the supernatural. It is a way of life, and up to a third of daily

routine is devoted to this. But American Indian practices are highly

individualistic. Personal spiritual power is highly valued in terms of how it can

benefit or be passed on to others. (Stonechild, 2016, p. 103)

As mentioned above, the ritualistic aspect of Cree spirituality is also fundamental to the

worldview. It is an essential component of interacting regularly with the world. It functions to

constantly bring individuals into presence of the Creator and the divinity of this existence and to

promote realization of the divine aspect of this journey that this worldview suggests we are all

travelling on. As Stonechild (2016) notes, "Ceremonies are deemed essential to keeping open

connection with the spirit world, that realm that is beyond our ordinary sensory experience" (p.

47). Truly, these rituals are a long standing, highly sophisticated and deeply personal, developed

practices that functions to promote understanding of the need to be awed by this existence, to

experience this awe profoundly and acutely as an essential component of what it is to be human.

As expressed by Stonechild (2016), "One need only look at the extent to which ceremonies are

practiced daily, seasonally and at important stages of life to realize that this assertion is not just a

platitude" (p. 46).

There is an important distinction that needs to be outlined in regards to the experience of

awe as we move from awe as a fundamental concept of spirituality in the three philosophies just

discussed to the role awe plays in spirituality from the Eastern Wisdom traditions. Eppert (2010)

suggests "ours has become a hyper-age – of hyper-consumerism, hyper-individualism, and

hyper-fear, articulating and manifesting itself as anxiety, trauma and terror" (p. 222). It is

possible to confuse the awe experience being developed within this thesis with the hyper-age described by Eppert. There is a clear distinction to be made between the hyper-age with its energized and anxious filled moments of borderline panic, and the awe experience being developed here: the ability to feel small in the magnificence of universe, life and creation, versus, the awe of impending destruction or an anxiety based on loss of perceived control.

This anxiousness or anxiety (that must not be confused with the sense of awe being developed here) may be manifesting as various pathologies across our culture, and is sometimes described similarly to an awe feeling. Media makes frequent use of these types of human feelings, often as a means to inspiring fear and promoting consumption, or to re-enforcing certain behaviours that promise relief from these types of fears (or inappropriately labelled awe feelings). This is not the awe experience being referred to here. Rather, the awe being referred to here is an awe of acceptance, of peace, of tranquil understanding at the divine and eloquent massiveness and infinity of existence, and of our sublime connections to it.

Whether the awe moment is identified as a component of the natural world, as a part of the universe or as a glimpse of God, Eastern Wisdom traditions would hold that these awe moments are those that enliven us to see, feel and seek to understand the vastness of what one might call our oceanic inner peace or our enlivened connection with others and our surroundings. These are moments of vibrancy, of color and clarity and insight, of creativity and curiosity.

Bai (2012), in "Reclaiming Our Moral Agency"*, describes the notion of *bodhicitta* from the Buddhist tradition. She suggests that it provides a resource that educators may access in order to address alienation within the context of framing environmental education as moral education. It may also be seen as a means to reinventing the notion of awe in education, one that

refs to recognizing the peaceful and sublime vastness of creation/existence and experience, as described above. *Bodhicitta* is described as referring to the core aspects of both compassion and passion (Brazier, 2001). Many of the meditative practices associated with Buddhism are built around trying to access this inner passion, and further develop and grow it. Ultimately, from this tradition, it is desirable to achieve a state of mind and being, whereby one can experience what Bai (2012) refers to as "glimpses of bodhicitta consciousness naturally occurring in our daily lives" (p. 321).

This *bodhicitta consciousness* describes times when we can recognize and reflect on those awe moments all around us. Perhaps it is losing one's breath at the sight of a sunrise. Maybe a gasp escapes at the sight of new growth on a tree stem in spring. It could be that the howl of a coyote in the dark brings the feel of the vibrancy of life so close it is almost a physical sensation. Educators may describe it as the wide-eyed gaze of a student in a moment of transcendence, as they make connections between things they had previously seen as disconnected, in a profound and meaningful way. Moving forward, with practice, it can become possible to extend this awe moment, to spend time within it, to use its potency to draw back the curtains on the conditioning and programming we so often fall victim to in our modern western capitalist, individualistic and mechanistic monocultures. This awe is key from these traditions as it is that place where our consciousness becomes "boundlessly warm and radiant, spirited and courageous, at the same time, clear-sighted and calm, loving and compassionate" (Bai, 2012, p. 321).

The concept of awe can be found within other aspects of Buddhism as well. The concept of *sunyata*, defined as meaning zero or nothing, is another concept capable of inspiring awe. *Sunyata*, as described by Bai (2012), provides the basis for looking at the structure of thoughts in

a way that is foreign to most in modern western educational institutions. The idea contrasts the thoughts one is thinking with the container in which the thinking is being done. If we attempt to remove the connection between the container and the discursive content within the container, it is possible to begin to see the extent to which truth and reality are obscured, influenced, or even created by devices used to describe them, such as language or concepts, what we may refer to as the content within the container. Further, it is possible for one to realize the extent to which these words and concepts create meaning within the content. To be able to step back into the emptiness, to realize deeply that these words are, as Bai describes, subjunctive of reality, or not realistic mirrors of reality, is nothing short of awe-some. "Reality is far bigger than what anyone can name with his or her words… reality is fundamentally ineffable" (Bai, 2012, p. 323). Indeed, to experience moments such as these result in inevitable impact on an individual and cannot be described in any other way than with reference to the awe they inspire.

Other Eastern Wisdom traditions also develop the concept of awe being described here. The concept of *wu-wei* is one that describes the essentialness of awe. Bai (2004) describes the Daoist concept of *wu-wei* as the ability of an individual to enter into a liminal space of awe and ambiguity, to experience or participate in another's reality by finding the perfect balance of actively engaging the other, while simultaneously being completely open and receptive to what is happening in the moment in conjunction with the other. The state of grace or openness that *wu-wei* describes is so powerful, in part because of the potency of the experience of attaining or grasping that liminal space. In another sense, *wu-wei* can be described as optimal efficiency (Bai, 2012, p. 324), to find the effortless resonance with another. To experience the state of being known as *wu-wei* may be equated to feeling or experiencing awe. At the same time, seeking *wu-wei* requires practice in finding awe. One must develop excellent skills of listening,

observing and knowing, of being sensitive to one's self, to others and to that which surrounds us, in potent and meaningful ways. In short, to reach this state of being one must spend time finding awe in existence, from moment to moment.

Interconnection and Spirituality

Another key aspect underlying the philosophies outlined in chapter 2 is the concept of interconnection. Deep Ecology is critically dependent on the notion of interconnection as a building block for its development. However, the notion of interconnection within the framework of Deep Ecology is also closely tied to the idea of self-realization or growth journey and praxis. While the components of growth and personal journey will be developed more in the next section, by necessity, there is some overlap as the notion of interconnection in Deep Ecology is discussed.

Naess (1995, pp. 13-30) begins to explain the critical aspect of interconnection in Deep Ecology when he begins to discuss the role of human growth and development within the philosophy. He discusses the beginning stages of ego development with the very young, where there is typically an obsession with personal and immediate feelings, experiences and their associated wants and demands. Naess goes on to suggest next there is a development of the social self, a stage of development that sees humans come to be more deeply connected to family and friends. As theses connections grow, they begin to move outward, enveloping the larger family, community, culture, ethnicity, country, species and eventually nature and environment. Finally, Naess suggests we may come to a place where we begin to develop a metaphysical awareness, looking to understand or make meaning of principles related to being, knowing, identity, cause, time and space, among others. This clearly outlines a process of growth and

development, to be dealt with in the next section. However, it also points out the essentialness of interconnection from within the Deep Ecology framework. The growth being described here is that of the fundamental realization and understanding of the deep connections humans have to each other, and the places they inhabit. If this development is lacking, there are many issues that can arise, but from the lens of Deep Ecology, all too often, as suggested by Naess (1987), "nature is then largely left out of the conception of this process" (p. 35).

Fox (1995, p. 149), in discussing this development of interconnection, suggests three such developments are varieties of self-realization processes. He likens the idea of self-realization to that of learning to identify with the outside world in varying ways, from the personal to the ontological and from the ontological on to the cosmological. The later two, ontological and cosmological, he refers to as transpersonal, or having moved past the issues that often are associated with only a personal identification. The later two stages provide the means by which to overcome or prevent potential issues of a solely personal based world identification, such as the easy slide to valuing existence through attachment and proprietorship only, and associated behaviours like possessives, greed and exploitation.

In this context, the development of interconnectedness may look like taking steps to move our identifications towards those of ontological or cosmological perspectives. Fox describes an ontological perspective quite well when he describes it as occurring when "the utterly astonishing fact that things are impresses itself upon some people in such a profound way that all that exists seems to stand out as foreground from a background of non-existence" (Fox, 1995, p. 138). Indeed, what a moment that would be! It might be said that words are part of the problem when trying to describe such a means of identifying with existence and one cannot

overstate the work that would be required, within the realm of the spiritual or consciousness disciplines, to reach such a point.

If the idea of developing such an ontological perspective is daunting, a cosmological identification may offer another means through which to seek understanding of the depth of interconnection required from within the Deep Ecology perspective. If a personal identification can be represented as an inside-out perspective, a cosmological identification may be described as an outside-in perspective. This perspective is strongly supported from a scientific standpoint, through the theory of the Big Bang and the Standard Model, shares many commonalities with systems thinking and promotes the realization of *feeling* one with all that is.

While speaking from outside of the realm of Deep Ecology, there are other significant seekers and philosophers that have discussed this notion of cosmic interconnection. Gandhi speaks of it when he describes individuals as the drops of water that make up the ocean. Spinoza references it when he discusses nodes of a single substance. Whitehead describes it in his philosophy of process, and Wilber describes it when he explains *holons*, all things part of something bigger. Einstein refers to it when he muses on the interconnections of the universe:

> A human being is a part of the whole called by us *universe*, a part limited in time and space. He experience himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. (Einstein as cited in Sulivan, 1972, p. 1)

Simply put, this identity presents as having "a lived sense of an overall scheme of things such that one comes to feel a sense of commonality with all other entities" (Fox, 1995, p. 144). Ontological and cosmological identifications are forms that promote impartial identification with all other entities. They are examples of the kind of profound self-realized interconnection that lays at the heart of the Deep Ecology philosophy.

It is worth noting that there are other paths of development which may support interconnection through identifying with others. At times, arguments are presented, whereby there is a dutiful or moral component to identifying with others. It is sometimes called *altruism* and is defined as dutifully putting others before yourselves. While it may seem counter intuitive, another staring point for the personal realization of deep interconnection may come from honest reflection and the resulting death of such dutiful altruism. Naess (1987) notes "It is, unfortunately, very limited what humankind is capable of loving from mere duty, or, more generally, from moral exhortation" (p. 40). Indeed, as a product of religious dogma myself, this has been a difficult personal learning. A perspective of self-realization suggested in Deep Ecology promotes the deepening and widening of the "self" to such an extent as to include all living things, without any form of self-sacrifice. When all living things are included in ones understanding of the self, one sees the act of supporting oneself as contingent in the supporting of all and vice versa. Further, acting in a way that is detrimental to any one thing, results in the detriment to all, including the self. No longer is there a duty of self-sacrifice, but instead a desire to act well, for all. In this way, Deep Ecology describes interdependence and interconnection as essential.

Interconnection is also spoken to from the monotheistic perspective purported by Berry as he explains his ideas surrounding the nature of our interrelated evolution as members of the community of Earth. "The human is less a being on the earth or in the universe than a dimension of the earth and indeed the universe itself" (Berry, 1988, p.195). Looking back to the three practices, Berry suggested as essential, that the concepts of *differentiation*, *subjectivity* and *communion* (Berry, 1988, p. 45) can speak to greater human understanding of interconnection, place and value, meaning and existence, resulting in the ushering in of a new ecological age, void of the issues surrounding the impending crisis discussed in Chapter 1. Currently, humans are much less subject to the power of nature in regard to life and death than we have been in previous generations. While this development seems to be very much interwoven with many of the current cultural issues mentioned in chapter, Berry suggests this is a step in the direction towards a new mature and reciprocal relationship where we understand that we have a commensurate responsibility to Nature due to the greater knowledge that has been shared with us (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 48). We have struggled to use this knowledge appropriately, not so dissimilar from the juvenile mistakes of young adults. "The human community is passing from its stage of childhood into its adult stage of life. We must assume adult responsibilities" (Berry, 1988, p. 47).

Continuing with the concept of interconnection entwined throughout Berry's monotheistic perspectives, an intriguing idea is the way he presents interconnection through his development of a "mystique of the land" model. It bridges the move from awe to interconnection as it connects the sense of the divine to a practical understanding of the interconnections existing between all things.

Beyond the country's political and economic needs, and possibly a prior

condition for any sustainable political structure or functional economy, is the

need for a mystique of the land such as supplied by the nature poets, essayists

and artists; for educators and religious teachers with a sense of the islands as

revelation of the divine; for lawyers with as sense of the inherent rights of natural

beings. The mythic dimension, the sacred aspect…is needed if anything

significant is to be done to remedy the devastation already present and to activate

a program of renewal. (Berry, 1988, p. 33)

This land mystique is suggested to be a counterweight to the industrial mystique. Both

are created through culture and society, one being no more right than the other, simply due to its

current popularity. This mystique described by what may be referred to as the sages of our time,

expresses several commitments, including "the ecological age as the only viable form of the

millennial ideal, and to a sense of progress that includes the natural as well as the human world"

(Berry, 1988, p. 33), again due to the absolute interconnection of the natural and human world.

Berry (1988) stresses the magnitude of these interconnections yet again when he invokes some

of the greatest philosophies of our species history.

Such consideration brings us back to the ancient sense of Logos in the Greek

world, of rita in Hinduism, or dharma in Buddhism, of tao, ch'eng, and jen in the

Chinese world. These are the ancient perceptions of the ordering, or the

balancing, principles of the universe, the principles governing the interaction of

all those basic forces constituting the earth process. (p. 20)

Cree spirituality not just appreciates awe, but also the notion of interconnection. The notion that all things are interconnected is a central tenet of this worldview. A good example of this can be seen through the words frequently used in ceremony and blessing. "First nations often refer to 'all of my relations', reflecting spiritual ties to all that exists" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 71). In this, there is an aspect of what was earlier described as the Great Law of Spirituality or Harmony. As all beings are existing in this life as part of a journey, it is an essential understanding that all are connected as spiritual beings from previous existence, remain so through this existence, and will reconnect again in the next. In this way, all things, animate and inanimate, have value in their own right, and all function in the great interaction that is this existence. Stonechild (2016) notes, "Everything in Creation has its role and interacts with other beings in exchanges of energy" (p. 77). He further expresses this idea by describing how at times, it can be a struggle to appreciate this concept due to our overdeveloped egos, yet the truth of the concept from within the worldview is unmistakeable.

> While we all appear to be individual egos, we are all unmistakably human in our characteristics… We are like the leaves on a tree – all seemingly separated but in reality, all joined to the same trunk. It is only our ego that gives us the sense if separation. (Stonechild, 2016, p. 78)

While I have used aspects of Buddhism and Daoism to develop ideas related to the creation of awe, the integrated nature of these philosophies permits developing the idea of interconnection from the same basic principles. The implication here is that while the concept or

state of *wu-wei* can inspire awe, it can also be used as a resource to better understand or develop interconnection.

As previously mentioned, cultivating *wu-wei* is dependent on cultivating "highly attuned feeling and knowing in-the-moment…. All of this requires one to be supremely relational with the world" (Bai, 2012, p. 324). *Highly attuned* and *supremely relational* clearly express the essential nature of interconnection that is required for and developed by the state of *wu-wei*. In "The Three I's for Ethics as an Everyday Activity", Bai (2004) uses the term intersubjectivity to describe *wu-wei* (p. 61). In this context, she speaks of the grace of being in balance with another being, neither the alienation of approaching another with complete objectivity, nor the consumption or appropriation of the other through a subjective lens, but the intersubjective space where one becomes receptive and susceptible, through actively seeking a state of resonance. If one can imagine a state of being so attuned and balanced with another that there is participation in mutual co-creation, moment to moment, then this state of being might be what the intersubjective being, that state of *wu-wei*, would be like. The attainment of such intimate understanding of interconnection is powerful but also a key aspect or goal in meditative traditions such as Daoism. The result of developing such states of being impacts greatly the way in which one can see, understand and interact with others and the surrounding world. In the way that the term is used here, *intersubjectivity* is both the practice of entering into the liminal space of grace or *wu-wei* and the attained state of consciousness wherein one does not see the world as if "out there", separate from oneself, but whereby one experiences the co-emergence of the world-self, (Bai, 2004, p. 62), fundamentally interconnected.

Thurman describes Buddhism as a form of education for our civilization that looks to "go from the dualistic consciousness of subject-object dichotomy that precedes and precipitates

instrumentalism to the non-dualistic consciousness that experiences intersubjectivity" (in Bai &
Scutt, 2009, p. 99). To know another being with such intimacy as to have their wellbeing and
welfare in some way bound together with our own, the impact of this would be nothing short of
enormous. Both of these definitions speak to an intimate understanding of interconnection of
beings, the study and attention of which is a powerful means of promoting interconnection in
action.

The understanding of the Buddhist notion of the construction of the five aggregates
speaks to one example of our difficulty in seeing the interconnection of all things, in becoming
intersubjective. In short, we construct these aggregates in response to our unease in the face of a
potential inner emptiness or groundlessness. The result of these constructions is an ego that is
developed based on what we perceive as external experience, and to what degree these
experiences provide us with the perception of pain or pleasure. We further enact, constantly, a
will or volition to either chase the pleasure or run from the pain. The result is what Eppert (2010)
refers to as an "I bubble" (p. 224), that attempts to define everything that "I am", in contrast to
everything out there, that is "not me". This is the beginning of the development of the distinction
to be made between the "self" and the "other". It is the beginning of all the ills of a culture that
goes to such extents to determine and define what is "mine". Eppert (2010) would suggest that
all of this is done to fortify the self against the "terrifying possibility that there is no separate
self" (p. 224). Times of peace may be indicative of cultures that are better philosophically and
spiritually prepared to, or able to, confront and embrace this undeniable human interconnection
understood as an intersubjectivity, rather than seeking to manifest all of the qualities developed
by the incessant pursuit of the separate self and ego, of which capitalism, the development of
personal wealth and mechanistic science are the ultimate actors. Eppert (2010) notes:

All of these investments, because they have constituted attempts to compensate

for lack rather than squarely address it, have only served to create more suffering

and have normalised greed and aggression in self and society, to the point of

allowing for mass atrocity. (p. 224)

The development of an interdependent worldview, appreciating the issues created from

the toxic over pursuing of "the self", could provide a means to addressing the roots of issues,

rather than just looking to continual treat the symptoms after the fact. "The idea here is to initiate

personal and socio-political paths toward wholeness and renewal that are preventative in intent;

an intercultural healing ethic… that renews cultures of peace" (Eppert, 2010, p. 225)

However, while it may be difficult to see from within our "I bubbles", there is an understanding

that in our current modern western world monoculture, both secularism and religious

fundamentalism are to be "criticized for diminished ethical, moral and spiritual insight and

capacities" (Eppert, 2010, p.221). Both secularism and religious fundamentalism work to protect

the sense of self and distinguish and demark differences between self and other. Neither works to

speak to the issue described here, the lack of understanding of interconnection and appreciation

of existential ambiguity. Developing this interdependent world view as healing requires a deeper

understanding of the interconnected nature of our being as humans and the interconnected nature

of that being to every other being on this Earth.

If we can feel this deep inter-being and resonance with the earth and its myriad

sentient beings, and can regard the earth as continuous with one's body, then

most naturally we would be the kind of environmentalist… who can defend,

protest, and speak on behalf of the significance of the value they experience in

nature. (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p. 102)

Finally, in regard to developing the essential notion of interconnection expressed in the

Buddhist tradition, we can look one more time at *bodhicitta*. Bai (2012) suggests that there are

three things which may happen over time to an individual who is working to develop their

experience of *bodhicitta*. Of these three, the last speaks simply to changes that will result in

feeling more "integrated, fluid, connected, authentic and alive" (Bai, 2012, p. 322). The common

objectivist view practiced in our modern western mechanistic monoculture results in definitions

and descriptions pointing towards objective inherent properties. This results in a metaphysical

realism whereby the world becomes a fixed place full of discrete objects and entities,

unconnected and disembodied. This objectivist position results in an inability to see the world as

composed of reliant and nascent relationships, deeply interconnected in existence and becoming

(Bai, 2004). Buddhism has at its heart, the notion of breaking down this objectivist viewpoint by

developing the understanding of dependent origination (among many other ideas). It is journey

and growth through meditation and other practices that allow us to learn the extent to which we

are all interconnected, and the need to further ourselves in these learnings for the betterment of

all, and so also for the betterment of ourselves.

Again, we see the essentialness of developing this concept of ultimate interconnection as

a key goal, an absolute necessity to speak to the concerns addressed by these particular Eastern

Wisdom traditions, but also the greater concerns facing our modern western civilization.

It has been suggested that many of the issues we are facing currently as a species, or perhaps more specifically as a western modern monoculture, stem from a lack of appreciation of interconnection or an understanding of the depth of interdependence of humans with each other and with their local places and biospheres. The understanding and appreciation of interdependence has been replaced or forgotten or intentionally hidden; perhaps as an act of promotion of the atomistic, scientific data driven view of the world; perhaps with good intent, or perhaps with contrived malice to promote consumption. Regardless, from the context of education, the result manifests as a decline in this sense of awe and humility in the modern world of students and peers, resulting in fragmentation of individuals and communities, and a loss of understanding of interconnection and interdependence. It does not seem inappropriate to ponder a connection between this loss and what appears to be the resulting numbness to the issues, events and moments surrounding us, consumption, be it chemically, digitally or economically to cope with the isolation and ultimately, apathy and emotional disconnect. An absence of awe and interconnection may very well be at the root of many of these bigger concerns.

Growth and the Journey in Spirituality

The concept of spirituality as personal growth or a journey is manifest in each of the four philosophies investigated in this thesis. Further, this growth or journey concept is a central component of each philosophy. As such, any of the four could represent a valid starting point to begin the discussion surrounding growth and the journey, but perhaps Naess and Deep Ecology frames the idea most adequately here.

Naess (1995d, p. 8) expresses the importance of the hybrid nature of Deep Ecology, the idea that it combines the philosophical search for wisdom and understanding in conjunction

with, but not limited to, scientific description and prediction. It fundamentally acknowledges that there is more to our being on Earth than only the scientific description of our physical interactions. In this way, Naess suggests that as one works towards a deep understanding of vast interconnection to everything else in existence, there inevitably comes a "realization" that one is part of a self-maintaining system. This self-realization is the result of a deeper seeking, an internal belief that there may be a better way of being human on our planet. The result is an intellectual and spiritual pursuit congruent with this realization. It involves looking in and looking out. It manifests as a willingness to grow and be different, in thought and action, then previous and to see our place as humans as deeply interconnected with and interdependent on the people, animals and environments all around us. As we begin to (re)connect to our environments and places, and to learn from all of them, there is a development of a well-rounded maturity that comes from both the commitment to seeking growth areas and opportunities, but also the act of growing in and of itself. This development of a well-rounded maturity or growth is key to a praxis with Deep Ecology at its root. Yet, it is not an easy road to travel.

It is common in our current culture to be mature in many aspects that are in and of themselves valuable, yet not in line with the idea of all-sided maturity as suggested by Naess (1987). We may be deep intellectual thinkers, or perhaps great practitioners of the scientific principles required to solve complicated practical problems. We may be deeply compassionate, care about others and be willing to act in their defence or support. We may be resilient and have strong internal grit and confidence to overcome issues and trails. These characteristics are important and sought after, but not without balance. Maturity, as described by Naess (1987), is multi-faceted. For example, being a deep intellectual thinker is important when attempting to wade through the complexities of our highly social, political and complicated world, however,

intellect without praxis and application is ineffective. Compassion for others provides another example. While compassion is an absolute necessity, a fundamental component of being alive, it is not just important to understand when to give, but also when to take, when to meet your own needs and maintain your own health and well-being. Self-sacrifice in the service of others may be highly prized in certain instances in our culture, but also emotionally and physically dangerous if not balanced with a personal understanding of, and commitment to, well-being. Confidence to prevail during challenges may be seen as a key factor in finding success in our world. Furthermore, in education we talk of the importance of resilience, especially when we are concerned for our most fragile populations. There is no doubt that resilience is an essential component of well-being. Yet, single-minded ambition and over-confidence can become a vehicle for unconscionable behaviours. Naess summarizes the notion elegantly when he says, "Man can deceive himself about his real self-interest if he is ignorant of his self and its real needs" (Naess, 1987, p. 37).

One aspect of self-realization identified by Naess is growing both wide and deep from looking inwards. This can begin to develop an understanding of bias, of personal lens and worldview, of the limitations of our understandings and fallacy of the constructs through which we know. Yet, this is only one part of this self-realization indicated by Naess (1995a, p. 31) in his Ecosophy T. The other part is turning out, turning to *the other*, with the same openness that has been developed through looking in. This turning out involves concentrated effort in learning (or understanding) to see the world as deeply and inseparably interconnected and interdependent. Further, it involves developing the realization that in order for an individual to be truly self-actualized, every living thing needs to be fully actualized as well.

Being special human beings realizing intellectually the role we have in ensuring the potentialities of all living things, just through this realization, creates an obligation to act in favour of these potentialities. We are but part. (Naess, 1992, p.56)

Put another way, one might interpret this idea as the beginning of an investigation into and the development of a deep understanding of our own values, the work needed to peel back the layers to find the reasons behind our actions and behaviours, the determination of what our real "good lives" might be, and the full understanding and appreciation that a "good life" may fall well outside of the successful life defined by mass media and the consumption culture. "Self-realization has no artificial boundary" (Devall, 1995, p. 107).

Of the 8 basic principles of Deep Ecology, numbers 6, 7 and 8 speak to action:

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect the basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. Ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

(Naess & Sessions, 1995, p. 50)

These principles effectively promote an understanding of the importance of changing behaviours and the contexts of society within which those changes need to take place. However, they do not directly suggest what these changes may look like in practice. With some thought, however, it may be possible to outline what such a growth journey and resulting praxis may look like from the perspective of Deep Ecology.

First, praxis must evidence a changed way of being, manifest both through individual ideologies and also behaviours, resulting in actions that promote change to the structures one is living in. As examples, the structures referred to here may be societal, economic or political in nature, but could also represent any structure that inhibits or opposes the changed way of being one is seeking to practice. Second, praxis must include aspects or behaviours (perhaps regular ritual) that acknowledge the difficulty in maintaining the ideological changes that have been gained or developed, while at the same time encouraging continued growth of the underlying philosophy that resulted in the changes in the first place.

While both of the above steps seem critical in relation to the journey being described or outlined, it seems that Deep Ecology has more still to offer in regard to this process of self-realization. From within Deep Ecology, there seems to be a deep-seated value that honors existence and life, in a way that is not often included as important or influential in the institutions we are involved with, including education. One could label this value as spiritual, as it seems to fall into the region suggested by Naess, where wisdom and scientific understanding overlap. However, from this philosophical perspective, this value is not simply another set of laws and rules that need to be obeyed or followed. It is not a value of conditioned socialization or indoctrinated citizenship, but a spiritual value coming from an underlying, ultimate rationality

for existence. This is the depth of the journey and growth being described through this philosophy.

When described in this way, one of the first behaviors that may be expected from one looking to live in congruence with such realizations may be a cessation of avoidance in confronting the value questions that underlie our actions as directed by so many of the standard operating practices perpetuated by the institutions of our culture in our daily lives. Beyond this vague outline it is hard to be more specific, as this will likely look different for every practitioner. Yet, the driving value discussions will surround the essential care and the resulting effect on every entity and relationship, in the many different aspects of our lives where they lie unexamined or left intentionally hidden. Imagine the impact this may have in the field of education or economics or any other. Questioning the underlying value and intent of these institutions may not immediately result in massive change but it is the beginning of looking to find a new balance and direction in our interaction through these systems.

In some cases, these types of value-driven praxis may evidence themselves in specific ways. Naess suggests some in a paper he presented at York University in 1983, and it would not be surprising to see these behaviours as components of the praxis suggested here. Among them, he included a distinct leaning towards anti-consumerism, appreciation of cultural differences, awareness of satisfying essential needs rather than desires, working to protect local ecosystems and acting non-violently. Naess describes this as the need to develop and adopt "lifestyles which are universalizable, which are not blatantly impossible to sustain without injustice towards fellow humans or other species" (Sessions, 1995, p. 61). Naess further notes

highly consumerist lifestyles in industrialist countries are totally unjustifiable in

relation to the living conditions of the poor of the world, quite apart from the

immense negative impact they are causing in the destruction of wild ecosystems

and biodiversity throughout the world (Sessions, 1995, p. 61)

Truly, a fundamentally determined value capable of supporting, actually promoting, such a praxis would be awe-some indeed. In acting out such a spiritually derived value, perhaps a measure of success would simply be that personal behaviors make personal worldviews and ultimate commitments clear, beyond doubt, to others. This could represent a more specific version of praxis and the growth journey from the perspective of Deep Ecology, but it is only the first step.

Maintaining such a value as described in the previous paragraphs in modern, technocratic, industrial, atomistic, consumer driven societies poses another challenge altogether, and provides the need for the step in the praxis suggested by Deep Ecology. The second essential component of the sustainable praxis suggested here involves actions that can maintain the appreciation, connection to and further development of these spiritual values. While there are many, two in particular are discussed here. The first is working to promote a deep connection with the land and natural spaces one inhabits, including regular time spent in wild spaces and natural landscapes. The second is development and regular practice of rituals.

Ecology and biology combine to firmly ground human beings as existing in nature. Yet, for many people, it is a belief that humans are separate from nature. Our modern western culture seeks to see us as separate from nature, in control of nature, using natural resources to serve us. When we are confronted with the realities of our existence within nature, it is difficult for some

to admit or understand. Snyder (1995) notes, "To thus locate the human species as being so completely within "nature" is an upsetting step in terms of the long traditions of Euro-American thought" (p. 238). And so, it is often that we are slowly convinced, through subtle messages and prompts that this is not so, that we are separate from the environment around us. Louv (1984) supports the thesis presented here when he argues that human health and well-being is dependent upon a reconnection to the natural world. A deep connection to a place results in a contemplation of care leading to a desire to analyze and then change behaviours for the better of everything involved. A praxis as described here needs regular time spent being in and with nature and our wild places. This time is essential in maintaining this spiritual perspective. Further, regularly spending time in silence and contemplation within these spaces provides the continued realization of the importance of this praxis.

There are many movements around the word, in education and elsewhere, that are seeing people working to renew their ties to their environments, to the land and the places they live in and through. They are eco-villages and green living colonies, forest schools and numerous others. Snyder (1995) speaks to these examples, and more, when he says, quite powerfully, "knowing who and where are intimately linked" (p. 71). If knowing *who* is part of the self-realization being explored, then the idea or method of knowing *where* represents another method or aspect of self-realization. Indeed, the concept of *returning to the land* as a means of self-realization and praxis is key. Scientific understating may result in a rationality and practicality that overtakes the human ability to be humble and appreciative of what is received from the land, both the grounding and peace it is able to provide, but also the components of the ecosystem upon which our species depends for survival. Rappaport explains that

knowledge will never replace respect in man's dealing with ecological systems,

for the ecological systems in which man participates are likely to be so complex

that he may never have sufficient comprehension of their content and structure to

permit him to predict the outcome of many of his own acts. (La Chapelle, 1995,

p. 224)

Rituals provide the experiences through which we can express that respect. Further, they connect us deeply and spiritually, "grounding" us metaphorically and reminding us of our interdependence and interconnection. As well, they provide a healthy dose of humility.

La Chapelle (1995) describes the topocosm as the entire complex of any given space, including the living and nonliving components, as well as the human community and cultural value incorporated there. Ritual and ceremony can function to maintain a relationship between people and their places or topocosms. Personally, having taken part in many ceremonies and rituals, be that of Indigenous ceremonies close to my home, or through rituals of a scientific cosmology with like-minded peers, I have frequently found myself deep within nature, in the midst of ritual, intensely experiencing awe and wonder. "A community with appropriate rituals, social mentors, languages, art forms and methods of education can facilitate exploration of the ecological self" (La Chapelle, 1995, p. 107). From the perspective of Deep Ecology, this ritualistic connection to the ecological self is an essential component of the second step, the developed praxis or growth that allows one the ability to maintain the value which promotes the changes one is seeking to make.

There is a complexity in speaking to the growth journey and praxis from a monotheistic perspective as suggested by Berry (1988/2015). The difficulty is in part due to the fact that the

praxis presented here begins with a revoking of many components commonly associated with the great religious traditions of our history. In fact, it may be that Berry's interpretation of the causes of our current pathologies resulting in the environmental crisis presented here, and the corresponding need for re-structuring that monotheistic philosophy, results in some of the struggles apparent in further implicating spirituality in public contexts, like education. To begin, one must identify some of the problematic issues that have developed from singularly religious perspectives of life and existence. These perspectives are deeply entrenched, either as positive aspects of a worldview for the majority, or as deeply concerning ideologies for many in marginalized positions.

It is not inherently concerning that monotheism suggests that humans have a divine role to play in the process of the Earth and the Universe becoming. As a matter of fact, the idea in itself does not immediately appear to be in conflict with other philosophies discussed here, such as Deep Ecology or Indigenous spiritual traditions. It becomes problematic, when it results in the development of the human belief and arrogance that "we are the measure of all things" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 204). Followed through to its conclusion, this belief results in a "dream vision of the coming day of the Lord as mentioned by the prophets… a blissful period beyond the human condition" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 205). Berry believes this ideal has become the central vision of the majority of the human community, not as a part of this earthly community but somehow above and more deserving, resulting in a disconnect and a lack of awe for this experience and the belief that we are not interconnected and interdependent on the Earth. Berry (1988/2015) refers to this idea when he says, "The difficulty of our times is our inability to awaken out of this cultural pathology" (p. 205) and "This pathology is manifest in the arrogance with which we reject our role as an integral member of the earth community in favor of a radical

anthropocentric life attitude" (p. 208). A large component of essential praxis from this perspective is to break apart this ideology and begin to appreciate the roots from which it was developed, prior to its distortion, which Berry feels still have contributions to make towards mending these cultural maladies.

"Whatever the validity of the original vision of an unfolding spiritual progress, this vision has proved too much for humans to manage in any disciplined way" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 205). It is from this ideological stance that many have made the leap to the idea that progress, through science and technology, through the vehicle of modernity and the corporation and capitalist society, can ultimately control all things, make life worthwhile and give meaning to the entire history of our evolution. Further, it is this perspective that suggests we are deserving of this vision as humans (p. 206). Truly, to begin to undo such widespread and deep-seated belief requires difficult steps. Of course, Berry suggests some possible steps. Among them, Berry (1988/2015) suggests that an initial step is to come to an understanding of the role of patriarchy in our social evolution as a species.

> The sense of patriarchy has now evolved as the archetypal pattern of oppressive governance by men with little regard for the wellbeing or personal fulfillment of women, for the more significant human values, or for the destiny of the earth itself. (p. 143)

Further however, Berry (1988/2015) suggests that it is what he calls the feminist perspectives, the associations with seasonal rituals and renewal perspectives, the concepts underpinning the deeper interconnections and care for the interdependence of all things, that are

key counter points to the patriarchal values of our current social functionings. These feminist

historical visions may provide avenue to the places we need to go as a species to usher in the

ecological age. "They (feminist vision) enable us to go beyond the rational processes derivative

from classical philosophers and our later theologies" (p. 145). In other words, it is these

traditions that may help us surpass our fixation with scientific rationality and religious dogma,

both of which have a role in supporting the industrial destructive culture we are operating in.

However, in order to permit this, we need to find a way past the cultural ideas that suggest such

rituals and feminist perspectives are somehow "considered destructive and unacceptable within

the religious-humanist traditions of Western society" (p. 145).

Berry (1988/2015) states that while there are four principal patriarchal establishments

that have created this perspective, namely the classic empires, the ecclesiastical establishment,

the nations state and the modern corporation (p. 146), I would suggest the most relevant

component to discuss here is the ecclesiastical establishment.

It is a simple idea that has become difficult to circumvent or evolve past. The Western

religious establishment has exerted much moral control over many, developmentally key,

regions of our planet for more than a thousand years. It was a deep source of support of

patriarchal ideology (namely aggressive, plundering and male dominated, vision of progress and

future perfection) and the influence on our development has been nothing short of massive. Yet,

it is crucial that this is changed moving forward. The difficulty, as mentioned, will be that after

so many years of religious authority, the tradition has come to dominate what is currently define

as sacred and divine, making it almost impossible to question. As Berry notes, "The sense of the

sacred in any civilization is precisely that which cannot be questioned, for the sense of the sacred

is the unquestionable answer to all questions" (p. 149). It may be that there is a need for a

fundamental change in what is seen as sacred in order to progress to the ecological age, and that

involves overcoming these types of barriers. "What I am proposing here is that these prior

archetypal forms that guided the course of human affairs are no longer sufficient" (Berry,

1988/2015, p. 215).

Berry (1988/2015) is not above sarcasm when he expresses his frustration at the direction

the human species has progressed. When referring to human evolution and the natural

interconnection to the divine that was manifest at one point, through interpretation of dreams,

rituals, acknowledgement of cycles, of beginnings and endings, of listening to and being aware

of genetic coding as strongly as cultural codings, he states:

We looked back at all this with a certain disdain for these dark ages. Although

with a restrained envy of the visions recorded in their sacred literature, of their

heroic experiences, and often of an artistic grandeur that we could not match …

We were the sane, the rational, the dreamless people, the chosen people of

destiny. We had found the opening to a more just society, a more reasoning

intellectual life. (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 203)

Indeed, without romanticising a past void of modern medicine, human rights, and a deep

understanding of the physical functioning of our world, Berry is suggesting that an ushering in

of an ecological age is co-dependent on undoing much of what we have lost during this

transition. This monotheistic perspective suggests another crucial step would be to re-develop

those "pre-rational, instinctive resources" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 208) that have been either lost to

the atomistic and mechanistic scientific world view, or intentionally forfeited through the domination of religious dogma and its associated teachings.

> The new cultural coding that we need must emerge from the source of all such codings, … intuitive, non-rational process that occurs when we awaken to the numinous powers ever present in the phenomenal world about us, powers that posses us in our high creative moments. (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 211)

Berry submits that we need to turn to traditional shamanic personalities, those that are becoming more present at this time of crisis. It may be that individuals need to develop their own shamanic personalities, to become more in tune with the world and its creatures and patterns and cycles. This is not the work of a philosopher, a priest, scholar or scientist, but the work of humans who are trying to reacquire that presence, awe and integral relationship with the source of our creation (p. 212). It is worth noting that this idea thoroughly supports the role of philosophical inquiry as a counter point to that of a positivist study, as actionable application of this praxis. An intent of this thesis would be to aggressively threaten all the cultural modes of coding that have brought humans to this place of ecological devastation, to hold them out in the open for all to examine, while asking for the justification and rationale. It appears Berry would suggest there are no legitimate answers. In this sense, "ecology can rightly be considered the supreme subversive science" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 212).

The idea presented here is that the "Earth itself, as the primary energy, is finding its way both to interior conscious expression in the human and outer fulfilment in the universe" (Berry, 1988/2015, p. 47). As humans,

we must simply respond to the urgencies imposed on us by the energy that holds

the stars within the galactic clusters, that shaped the planet under our feet, that

has guided life through this bewildering variety of expression, and that has found

an even higher expression in the exotic tribes and nations, languages, literature,

art, music, social forms, religious rituals and spiritual disciplines over the surface

of the planet. (p. 47)

Berry (1988/2015) implies there is a direction to be moved in and a greater power

moving humans in that direction, if our species can just stop and listen. Clearly, Berry implies,

there is a master plan, a grand vision of the creator of all matter and energy.

As with our Earth in all of its processes, so with the human community: there are

inner, spontaneous, all-pervasive forces present which are gradually responding

to this integral functioning of the total system. What we need, what we are

ultimately groping toward, is the sensitivity required to understand and respond

to the psychic energies deep in the very structure of reality itself. (Berry,

1988/2015, p. 48)

This ability to understand and respond to these psychic energies is the goal of the inner

journey and praxis from the monotheistic perspective presented here. Further, the ability to

respond to the direction of a greater power is also observable within the Cree spiritual

perspective. Similar to both previous characteristics, awe and interconnection, the concept of

praxis and working towards becoming is central. Stonechild (2016) repeatedly describes this life

as a spiritual commitment to a journey that requires certain learnings to complete. These

learnings involve coming to better understand balance and holism, and our absolute

interconnection and interdependence. "The purpose of our existence is to learn. Development of

the mind is essential to learning in the physical world, and spiritual development is paramount in

the evolutionary process" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 110). Similarly, there are many references made

by Stonechild that represent Elders interpretation of the importance of continuing learning on

this journey: "Knowledge and creator are one and the same, and learning is considered to be a

sacred activity" (p. 47).

However, the knowledge alone is not enough. As previously mentioned, a third of daily

routines, of practical actions, are undertaken with the intent of working towards these

behaviours. "The quest for spirit knowledge and interaction is a central feature of Indigenous

life. Ceremonies, prayer, meditation, visions, and dreams are all part of the spiritual endeavour"

(Stonechild, 2016, p. 91). Working to improve personal behaviours and actions in relation to all

of existence, through a myriad of spiritual understandings, ceremonies and realizations, is

undoubtedly key from this worldview. This is the definition of the praxis suggested by this

thesis. "Learning about the transcendent is better described as a 'journey' than a 'religious

practice'" (Stonechild, 2016, p. 73). This insight is directly speaking to the individual work and

reflection needed to understand and appreciate our role and purpose in this life.

As referenced throughout this paper, an interweaving thread common to all of these

philosophies is the notion of growth. Within this paper, it has been referred to as a journey

towards a changed way of being in this world. It has also been described as praxis, or the lived

application of the ideas discussed, resulting in changes to patterns of thoughts and behaviour for

oneself and a model of potential change for others. While it seems that such actions (praxis)

follow naturally from internal reflections, such as what this thesis has become, this is perhaps

not so common in our modern lives. Some authors even suggest we have moved away from

these kinds of internal journeys or reflective stages required for growth. Needelman notes, we

are now missing "ideas and practices that were meant to penetrate behind the screen of one's

automatic thoughts and motivation" (in Eppert, 2010, p. 57). It might be that a spiritual

resurgence in public education has a role to play here. Evidence for this fact can be found

through the importance and prevalence of such a journey as it is demonstrated in the Eastern

Wisdom traditions being explored.

　　　While meditative practices are common to many traditions, from the Eastern Wisdom

traditions in particular, we can learn about the importance of contemplation and internal

reflection. While the steps may look different from each tradition, the intent is the same. With

practice, the goal is to develop an ability to deal more peacefully and compassionately with

oneself and others as one encounters the circumstances of this existence. It is an inward journey

seeking truth, calmness, oneness or contentment, within the vagaries of life experience. Eppert

(2010) refers to the *Gita,* when she describes the metaphor of the candle. Life exists for us like a

candle buffeted by the winds of thought and emotion. When one embarks on the path of

contemplation or meditation, regardless of the particular practice used, one can learn to still the

mind, resulting in a steadiness, less prone to the shifting and flickering that may result from

impulsive reactions to the stressors and situations of life, more aware of the deeper causes of and

meanings behind thought and emotion. By itself, this practice supports a journey towards a more

content and peaceful existence, which some in society pursue through other, at times more

personally destructive, means. However, such a peaceful and content existence is but one of the potential benefits of contemplative practices.

Developing an awareness of negative feelings is becoming central to education for many reasons. As previously mentioned, much of our recent development as a modern western world monoculture has been built around the "truths" provided by scientific knowledge and objective perspective. This has occurred to such an extent, that feelings and emotions have become topics unexplored in many modern educational institutions. This results in the creation of vacuums, in spaces where strong emotions exist but are neither discussed nor accepted and explored, instead hidden and disciplined. If more visceral responses to events are not used as introspective moments, if these reactions are not explored, teachers and students both may never come to the realization that there are forces at play that have enormous impact on thinking and feeling. There may never be the realization that there are options to the way one responds and the ways in which one can choose to use emotion and energy. Humans are capable of choosing peace instead of anger, introspection instead of anxiety, awareness instead of impulse. However, the choices are not apparent until one is able to know oneself well enough to understand personal responses and their underlying causes. Eppert (2010) would suggest that the way of contemplation provides a spiritual resource to be accessed so as to support this sort of internal growth and realization.

Whether one embarks on a Buddhist journey to find enlightenment via mediation and the Eight Fold Path, or one uses Hatha yoga to prepare for meditation as means to reaching enlightenment from the *Vedic* tradition, perhaps one adheres to a Daoist tradition of visualization or maybe an individual attempts to become more mindful in relation to the scientific perspective and cognitive psychology, regardless, there are commonalities. Some of these commonalities

include an understanding of the need to be attentive to the nature of the breath and the way that this allows one to be more present in a given moment, the realization that much of what is experienced day to day may not be reflective of a shared reality for all, that somewhere inside everyone lays an ocean of vast tranquility and peace and that all of these ideas may support a greater understanding of the interconnections of all things. Further, as one becomes more adept with meditative or contemplative practices, it becomes easier to see, understand and appreciate these learnings. In short, these meditative traditions point to the fundamental notion of a journey that is undertaken in order to grow and become better, better at personal understanding, better to others and better to the world.

"Peace with the Earth excludes victory over the Earth, submission or exploitation of the earth to our exclusive needs. It requires collaboration, synergy, a new awareness" (Panikkar in Ogilvy, 1992, p. 244). Developing a new awareness speaks to the journey and growth and describes what this journey entails, developing a new awareness and as a result, a changed way of being in this world. "The tragedy of secularization is the loss of the journey to and realisation of this still and deep connection" (Eppert, 2010, p. 228).

To further this idea, I look again to Bai (2004), who writes that "among ecological thinkers and activists, there is increasing agreement that environmental and social problems are first and foremost problems of the mind" (p. 54). Orr (1994) continues, "Ultimately, then, the ecological crisis concerns how we think and the institutions that purport to shape and refine the capacity to think" (in Bai, 2004, p. 2). To make change, action must differ from the behaviors which led to this place. To act differently, one must be different, for actions come from inside. To be different, one must be able to think differently, and according to Eastern Wisdom traditions, practices that have the power to change thinking include the practice of philosophy

(deep thinking, discussion and internal searching) in conjunction with meditation. Yet, philosophy is often despised or sneered at in our data-driven, reductionist, efficiency orientated mindsets and worldviews. At the same time, meditation is either dismissed as religious dogma (or worse, New Age superficiality), or stripped of soul and tradition, and practiced only as a cognitive science. The argument here is that this journey, the growth and practice, the internal time spent working on being different, is essential.

As noted in the philosophies discussed previously, without the praxis, without the inner journey, there is no change; no personal change, no change in actions, no change in the world. From the Eastern Wisdom traditions, one can see the importance of this praxis through the fundamental need for meditation and contemplative practices.

Concluding Thoughts

Ours is an era of large-scale social and environmental destruction enabled by technologies that can give broad vent to our aggression and insatiable greed and that seem, to date, to have outpaced out progress in learning, embodying, and practicing wisdom, compassion, and peace. (Eppert, 2010, p. 221)

In conclusion, the preceding chapter has attempted to explore a definition for understanding spirituality informed by four very different philosophical perspectives. To this end, this thesis would suggest that three key aspects of spirituality are common to these philosophies: awe, interconnection and a growth journey. Developing these ideas surrounding spirituality serves as a template. It provides a means through which aspects of spirituality may

find a greater presence within public education, a potential to redefine some aspects of education from a spiritual perspective. Through this effort, students may find an alternative framework through which to negotiate their futures. Whether they ultimately decide to serve our current cultures, societies and systems, transform them into what they feel they need to become, or transcend them altogether in the pursuit of their own definition of the *good life*, all are required to face our future as a species. All three will be needed to speak to the myriad of ills and concerns that confront our societies, none more important then a complete renegotiation as to understanding our place within the great balance that is the living system of Mother Earth, in order to put an end to the environmental degradation and destruction that threatens the living existence of all things.

If one was to assume that there is potential in these ideas, that the arguments presented previously may be able to speak to the bigger environmental issues described and the role of these three aspects of spirituality in speaking to it, questions follow. Two specific questions seem important to address moving forward. First, if spirituality as described here has the potential to make meaningful change in public education, why is it not more readily accepted and applied? What are the obstacles or struggles that are preventing its inclusion? Secondly, what might a practice that incorporates this concept of spirituality look like within a public education institution? It is the intent of the following chapters to speak to both questions.

Chapter 4 – Struggle and Obstacle

In his article entitled "Longing to Connect: Spirituality in Public Schools", Vokey (2001) attempts to frame the state of spirituality in public schools, noting themes surrounding rationale for the inclusion of spirituality in education. He then moves on to discuss what he sees as potential obstacles to the implementation or utilization of various aspects of spirituality-based pedagogies in public schools. This framework presents as a useful model for framing the argument surrounding the state of spirituality in public schools, and as such, a similar model is used in this chapter. It is important to note that the concept of spirituality being discussed in this chapter and the next is one that has been developed in the preceding chapter of this thesis, namely an understanding of spirituality as being characterized by a belief in awe, an appreciation of interconnection between all living things and their environments, and the involvement of personal growth.

Initially, this chapter will investigate some themes found in the literature regarding the benefits of spirituality in education. This will be followed with a discussion surrounding some of the various obstacles in place that are working to inhibit the incorporation of spirituality into public education. Chapter 5 will continue this discussion, looking at two specific practices that may speak to the obstacles suggested in this chapter, showing some promise for furthering the inclusion of spirituality in public education.

Themes in the Literature on the Rationale for the inclusion of Spirituality in Public Schools

Vokey suggests that the literature provides three reasons or rationales for promoting spirituality in public schools. The first is the idea that spirituality will work to create wonder and return awe to learning environments by promoting the connection between education and higher purpose and meaning through investigating the mysteries of the world and seeking to answer the big questions in life. Vokey cites Palmer (1983), noting that spirituality is a means that may help "young people find questions that are worth asking because they are worth living, questions worth wrapping one's life around" (Palmer in Vokey, 2001, p. 4). Second, Vokey submits that spirituality in public education may address the continuing need for more compassion in our world, both compassion for others in the forms of respect, care and concern, but also compassion for the self in terms of self-acceptance and understanding. Whether through appealing to our common humanity, the sacredness of all life or the need to seek justice for the down-trodden or oppressed, "incorporating spirituality in public schools means bringing students to an experience of … an (appreciation) of the intrinsic worthiness of all beings" (Vokey, 2001, p. 5). Finally, Vokey identifies the rationale in the literature that spiritualty in education may promote a transformed consciousness, or way of being on this earth, that is needed to speak to the biggest crises we face as a species, such as environmental degradation and climate change, among others. "Seeing the interconnectedness of all things, with nature as the foundation, is the basis of the new mind that the world needs for survival… the creation of this mind is the first responsibility of education" (Vokey, 2001, p. 6). Connecting these three rationales from the literature for promoting spirituality in public education is one over-arching theme:

If there is one over-arching theme in the literature on spirituality in education, it is that of *connection*. Spirituality is typically presented as consisting of, or leading to, student experiences of connectedness with (a) their deepest selves, including all their hopes and fears; (b) other human and non-human souls, in all their similarities and differences; (c) the natural world and cosmos beyond, in all its awe-inspiring complexity, beauty and mystery; and (d) the larger purposes, potentials, and powers that transcend ego's limited concerns. In virtue of the antidote to student indifference towards a fragmented curriculum, their rampant materialism and random vandalism, their callous indifference to social justice, and their appalling apathy in the face of impending environmental catastrophe. (Vokey, 2001, p. 6)

Truly, these are key aspects of spirituality in public education, as suggested in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Further, Vokey is not alone in making these claims regarding the benefits of incorporating spirituality into public education. Kessler, Palmer, Smith, Miller, Miller, Glazer, Hayward, Hooks, Walsh, Wastson and Orr, among many others, all contribute to the literature that acknowledges the potential value of incorporating spirituality in education. These ideas, brought forth by educators that are willing to push back against so much of the atomistic, individualistic and capitalistic thinking of recent years, are of great importance. It is these ideas that have the power to shift education from a process that currently alienates children from themselves and their world, from a process based on the meaningless recollection and retelling of facts that are valueless and unconnected, from a process dependent on standardized and uniform testing and constant comparison.

However, in reading through the extensive literature that speaks to the benefits of spirituality in education, it became apparent to me that an important component of this thesis would have to be to try understanding the obstacles facing the incorporation of spirituality in public education. If the literature on the incorporation of spiritualty in public education is so promising, why is the concept not finding greater resonance in education? The next section of this chapter will focus on this question by identifying and discussing some of the relevant obstacles that apply when we consider incorporating spiritually within our current educational framework, but also within secular society as a whole.

Obstacles to Incorporating Spirituality into Public Education

Choices to be made – if spirituality, then whose? In 2000, Watson undertook a study that attempted to identify characteristics of spirituality. This project was undertaken out of a growing concern that "educationalists may be assuming they know what spirituality is" (Watson, 2000, p. 92). Watson interpreted her findings to suggest that "there was sufficient variety in people's understandings of spirituality to call into question the assumption that spirituality is universally understood or that it can be developed by general, universal methods" (Watson, 2000, p. 96). This interpretation would contradict a common theme in education, that spirituality can be incorporated through a secular humanist model, one that can develop the values and perspectives of care, compassion and interconnection promoted by the inclusion of spirituality, as noted above, while at the same time, offering "hope for social cohesion in a complex pluralistic society" (Watson, 2000, p. 98). This argument suggests that there are too many different perspectives at play when it comes to developing a *universal spirituality* which could represent a meaningful alternative way of knowing the world. The end result, according to

Watson (2000) is that "spirituality can only be developed by buying into one of those cognitive understandings – that is, a particular belief system or world-view" (p. 96), which then becomes unsuitable for adoption or inclusion in our pluralistic and universally diverse classrooms. Watson (2000) continues: "The logic of this argument suggests that spirituality *cannot* be developed within a state school because such a school is bound to cater for people with a range of spiritual traditions, or none" (p. 99). While the legitimacy of the argument for inclusion of spirituality in public education is in no way reduced, the concern presented by Watson appears to be quite valid. Yet, there are other voices to be heard here.

Anderson (2016) writes about the need for a neutral or non-traditionally biased perspective of spirituality in education and states that "in order for such a paradigm to be accepted by the academic research community, its assumptions cannot be confined to one religious tradition or to adherents of no religious tradition but must be broad enough to be applicable to all humanity" (p. 37). This would seem to oppose Watson's interpretation completely. Anderson (2016) is not alone. The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, notes that "when we talk about trying to promote a sense of caring or compassion, forgiveness and loving-kindness, these values are not particularistic: These values are important to all the major world religious traditions" (Gyatso in Glazer, 1994, p. 89). The Dalai Lama seems to suggest that while pluralism poses many challenges, there are universal aspects fundamental to human spirituality that can be developed.

It is very difficult to speak about spiritual education or spiritual development in the context of public education, as there are no standards upon which to guide or assess the learning, that can safely claim to be free from any one given tradition or value structure or institutional belief. Often, it is only as one develops in the normative processes of a given wisdom tradition

that we can begin to assess their growth, whether that is Buddhist or Christian or Islamic etc. In particular, this is problematic in our pluralistic culture, which is grounded in the idea of respecting all members of our education systems (Vokey, 2001). This notion is demonstrated in the work of Andy Puddicombe (2018), who described the benefits of meditation that he noted from his time spent training as a Buddhist monk and shared them with the population of a secular society. While his Headspace application has seen recent business success, he openly discusses the difficulties presented (both from a business model but also personally and philosophically) by removing the practice of meditation or what he describes as the essence of what the practice of meditation is, from the tradition of Buddhism or the culture of thought that has produced it over thousands of years. This again suggests the struggle to remove aspects of spirituality from the religious traditions or world-views in which they are entrenched, despite their potential for a secular society.

Vokey (2001) suggests that we are left with two choices. The first would be to adopt and position spiritual education within one specific tradition. While this appears to raise an ethical concern within education, as suggested above, it would also likely result in resistance from educators and practitioners alike, including myself, who are unwilling to paint in such a broad stroke across the multiple ways of knowing that are relevant within our current diverse classrooms. It seems that this idea would work against so much of the learning done in the last few decades regarding various valid ways of knowing and appreciations of the reality of these ways of being for many diverse groups.

A second option, according to Vokey (2001), is to leave the definition of spirituality so wide as to include a variety of perspectives and entry points. Weaver and Cotrell (1992) cite Parker Palmer to this end as he defines spirituality as "the ancient and abiding quest for

connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos" (p. 6). While I happen to find much of the work of Parker Palmer not only insightful, but also provoking and instructive, it is difficult to deny that this broad definition does pose considerable issues when it comes to implementation of those ideas in a classroom. As Vokey (2001) points out, if this is our baseline, "who decides, and how, what is and is not 'more trustworthy' than our egos?" (Vokey, 2001, p. 8). He concisely summarizes this idea as follows: "Because we disagree on the nature of human potential and on the means of its realization, we lack consensus on the substantive criteria of genuine human development that responsible public education in spirituality would require" (Vokey, 2001, p. 9).

If the path is painted too wide, the result is meaningless and ineffective for understanding what spirituality is. This obstacle also outlines that secular humanists' perspectives, those free of any particular tradition or philosophy, may not effectively include the aspects of spirituality that are the fundamental pieces enabling its efficacy and its power to impact students and create meaningful change in society. If the path is too narrow, the result is exclusive, breaking apart the realization of the community that could be built. Confining the incorporation of spirituality to one wisdom or spiritual tradition risks alienating some members of our school community's (potentially those most marginalized already) and also creates tensions in deciding which tradition to follow. It is clearly a fine balance that is being sought. The end result is a debate which answers no questions, but simply points out the balance which must be struck in order to begin a discussion on appropriately incorporating spirituality in education. This balance is the heart of the obstacle discussed. According to Bai (2016), this balance may be found by looking at the spiritual roots of human existence, however this idea also has obstacles, as I will discuss in the next section.

Invalidation of the subject. Bai et al. (2016), list some of the subjective experiences that are traditionally associated with spiritual experience, based on their personal experience and their extensive research. This list includes

> (a) sensorially or perceptually extraordinary or non-ordinary, including experience of enhancement; (b) could include peak experience or heightened performance; (c) comes with a sense of wholeness, integration and even cosmic harmony; (d) is imbued with abundant heart-qualities such as compassion, love, kindness, joy, etc.; (e) registers a sense of sacredness and ecstasy; (f) could be endowed with extraordinary clarity and insight into things; (g) and/or is charged with creativity and vitality. (p. 79)

It is these types of experiences that could demark or promote the *awe* and *interconnection* suggested here. Further, these type of experiences may denote signpost on the *journey* that may be possible, yet as a teacher in a public school, the list above elicits apprehension; it is a subtle internal nudge that suggests sharing, discussing or encouraging these types of experiences would not be valued or valid within a classroom. Perhaps it is a concern with the politics of discussing such experiences with a diverse group of students, or the fear of stigmatization for those who can relate or connect to such events (or those who cannot). Regardless, the feeling of hesitation, the need to pause or tread lightly, is palpable. Therein lays a significant challenge or obstacle to moving forward. Bai et al (2016) go on to further define this notion, stating of these types of experiences, "the spiritual roots of human subjectivity have been shaken. The subjectivity has been invalidated or marginalized in modern and postmodern history" (Bai et al., 2016, p. 79).

The issue with these sorts of subjective experience are not easily dismissible, and if we look to the foundations of our education systems, or perhaps more broadly at current modern western culture, we can see validity of this concern. In speaking to these concerns, it is important to avoid obstacles like the soft relativism discussed by Taylor (1991), in effect undermining the entire intent of this important work, by reducing it to unexamined opinion. The opponents of these ideas surrounding our "spiritual roots" would draw parallels between this notion of subjectivity and soft relativism. However, like any idea left largely unexplored, this is a mis-interpretation of the intent or basic meaning. The difference is depth; depth of feeling, depth of seeking, depth of commitment, depth of effort. The concept of relativism and personal experience is a valid way of knowing for many, but it comes from learned wisdom and extensive work, deliberation and thought, and this is not often the case when we see individuals' default to this position for subjective justifications or rationale for action or opinion, from an individualistic perspective. Restated, depth is the feeling, the weight behind the difference between individualism and subjectivism in this idea, and this cannot be overstated. However, in our current modern western culture, such depth is sorely lacking, resulting in the resistance we see to a greater acceptance of the "spiritual roots" of our humanity.

The argument above attempts to highlight the means by which our western empirical traditions have led us to a place where it is unacceptable to include deeply personal aspects, or subjective experiences, as framework for learning and making meaning. This stance of exclusion of "spiritual roots" or subjective experience results in an invalidation of the knowledge that can be gained, the growth that can be experienced by an individual. This is clearly an obstacle to including spirituality in public education, as currently its value is concomitantly invalidated along with the subjective experience that is part of its core.

Problematic paradigms. Upon reflection, it appears that many of the issues above could be addressed by changing the underlying framework of our current education systems. The current, dominant model has been repeatedly outlined here as being mechanistic and highly individualistic, lacking depth, interconnection and soul. "The mechanistic world view needs replacing because its materialism, determinism, and reductionism leaves no room for a spirituality dimension to reality" (Vokey, 2001, p. 7). In congruence with Vokey, I would suggest that such a perspective shift is required, but conversations to date about how that may happen have been fruitless.

This fruitlessness is not a fault of the educators seeking the change. It is not due to a lack of understanding or defining the problem. It is certainly not due to a lack of passion or commitment, or an inability to stay the course. I would suggest the problem here is much, much larger, and the more recent work that unpacks the needs of a spiritual research paradigm may help to fill in the pieces that have yet to be addressed. This research represents the work being done in education that speaks to the big questions, those that work at making meaning in life, at defining what is good and what has value, and while some may find questions such as these irrelevant to the needs of students in a classroom, or the educators teaching them, I would suggest these big ideas are not only beneficial, but of utmost importance if we are to move forward in a positive way in addressing the host of issues currently faced by our societies and in particular, our education systems. It is definitely time for philosophical inquiry to re-emerge as a valid research methodology to speak to educational issues, which makes the following paragraphs all the more interesting as they discuss the origins of the invalidation of these types of ideas. The authors of this more recent research on spiritual paradigms note that the foundations of modern science, namely materialist empiricism, have marginalized the subjective.

"The objective and reasoned truths of the modernist focus, . . . are dominant as research methodologies in Western (especially academic) culture" (Bai et al., 2016, p. 79). Bai et al. (2016) go on to suggest that this marginalization of the subjective is true of postmodernity as well. While interconnections between the interiors of human experience and other factors, such as historical or sociocultural influences, were acknowledged within this framework of thought, that over emphasis has ended up "marginalizing and even denying the subjective, phenomenological realities" (p. 80). Objective, exterior influences dominate the explanation for human experience and behavior, leaving little if any room for validation of interior and spiritual understandings, and these influences emanate from the founding of science, the pillars of western civilization, the world view that has built our current cultures and which is the basis for the way almost all of our modern western world institutions operate. In this regard, education is no different.

In order to understand the complexity of this problem and dismantle its power, one must understand the notion of paradigms, and in particular, appreciate the paradigm(s) in which we are currently enmeshed. Ergas (2016), building on the work of Tauber (1997) and Palmer (1983), suggests our current paradigms "reflect how the epistemology underlying science that determines the status of valid knowledge is by no means a mere prescription for detached scientific research, but rather a way of being that permeates our ways of living as ethical beings" (p. 2). These are not simply unbiased worldviews but rules that define how we study phenomenon, interpret results and make meaning from the knowledge gained. Ergas explores the work of Kuhn (1996) in regard to paradigm conceptions to better define these issues, and that exploration is very helpful in further explaining the argument being made here.

According to Ergas (2016), Kuhn (1996) describes a paradigm as a system of thought that frames the way science endeavors to solve problems. It supports development of ideas and construction of new knowledge by scaffolding research, including methodology. Further however, Kuhn (1996) also suggests that a paradigm works to provide validity to the *types* of questions that can be asked and delimits what is *worth* asking. Ergas notes (2016) a paradigm "can thus be viewed as a set of broad principles, premises, and practices that underlie the way in which we approach the methodological study of phenomenon" (p. 3). While this notion of paradigms is beneficial, providing cohesion of ideas, outlines for further exploration and structure for thought, it is important to understand that, often, these frameworks or structures become so internally robust, as they continually support research that *fits* within the framework, one could say they become self-perpetuating. The danger here is that such a system or paradigm may actually prevent the exploration or investigation of knowledge that does not *fit* the framework of said paradigm.

While understanding this would appear to present enough of a clear and present danger, Ergas (2016) suggests Kuhn's work also shows that these paradigms are "socially constructed phenomenon… and define a consensus around the concept of knowledge and the legitimate ways of its pursuit" (p. 3). The implication here is that these paradigms are then replete with all that is human in their construction, including historical, political and cultural bias and influence, and further, are incomplete and subject to change (Ergas, 2016). Yet, they provide the groundwork for everything that can be known and the ways in which we can come to know it. Truly, when it comes to new ideas and profoundly different word views, these paradigms can become deeply problematic to supersede or circumnavigate.

When discussing such concerns, Ergas (2016) suggests Kuhn's work describes phases of progress within a paradigm. He outlines periods of normal science, which represent the vast majority of growth under a paradigm, where scientists operate in compliance with the 'rules' provided by the paradigm in which they are working. Much more rarely however, there are periods of scientific revolution, where "the framework itself is challenged for findings cannot be explained, or research cannot be conducted appropriately by adherence to the framework" (p. 3). It is these periods we come to see as revolutionary and during these times when, historically, the greatest leaps in our conceptions and understandings occur (Ergas, 2016).

Perhaps the dangerous paradox is obvious, but it is worth pointing out regardless. Ergas (2016) is succinct in his analysis: "The most dramatic progress occurs through challenges to the framework itself, but these challenges are the hardest to accept" (p. 4). The relevance of this quote cannot be overstated as I would suggest education is currently a victim of such a paradox and perhaps trapped within a paradigm that is functioning to limit what is acceptable in regard to new knowledge and learning, what is valued as conceptual knowledge worthy of teaching in education. Anderson (2016) explains, "no longer is a paradigm a typical instance of a conceptual idea; now the conceptual idea is itself the paradigm" (p. 29). Currently, education runs the risk of becoming self-perpetuating regarding this paradigm, educating within a paradigm further enforces that paradigm, making it harder to validate forms of knowledge that exist outside said paradigm. Anderson (2016) follows a line of reasoning suggested by Crotty (2010) when she notes that "in education, for example, we teach that learning is subjectively constructed, then presume to define learning objectively so we can measure it in positivist (post or otherwise) terms" (p. 31). By so doing, regardless of the stated value of constructivism or subjective knowledge, we perpetuate a vision of success which values the objective bias as truth,

effectively marginalizing other ways of knowing and being. The end result is that those who are successful in our educational institutions come to see this objective knowledge as the only way to truth, and go on to perpetuate this further, sometimes even returning to these educational institutions, or other professions, to do so. Hence, education as a system becomes a vehicle for perpetuation of mechanistic, objective methods of knowing, limiting the value or validity of other ways of knowing, like a spiritual research paradigm (see Lin, Oxford, & Culham, 2016).

While Kuhn (1996) and Anderson (2016) provide many examples of such historical paradigms and shifts, the work of neuroscience in education, and the undeniable push for secularization of meditation and mindfulness (which will be discussed further in Chapter 5), may be used to illustrate this point with respect to the current paradigm operating in education. In the introduction to a special journal section on the interconnection of contemplative sciences, education and child development, Roeser and Zelazo (2012) explain the notion of contemplative science as a "transdisciplinary effort to derive a new understanding of the mind/body system in light of insights gleaned from contemplative traditions that have explored the prospects for social and self-transformation through practices such as mindfulness, meditation and yoga" (p. 143). They go on to note that a "key aim of contemplative science is to learn whether (and if so, how) secularized versions of these practices can both alleviate distress and cultivate positive human qualities" (p.143). Davidson et al. (2012) elaborate this idea further:

> Our discussion may raise legitimate practical concerns about using contemplative
> practices in public school settings and whether there are worldview and church-
> state concerns implicated here… Any use of contemplative practices in schools

must necessarily be thoroughly secular, developmentally and culturally

appropriate, and predicated on evidence-based practice. (p. 150)

The point made here is not that these considerations are to be dismissed or are not

relevant or prudent. However, the extent to which the authors continually express the importance

of secularization, despite the nature of these practices being deeply enmeshed within spiritual

settings, speaks to the power of this paradigm as only finding value in knowledge that is

objective and wholly atomistic and mechanistic. In short, the authors suggest that the value of

these "contemplative traditions" does not come in the form of the integrated, interconnected

world view or acknowledgement of the need for some sort of transcendence and personal growth

relevant to undertaking these practice, some system of integration and subjective understanding,

but rather that these practices can be "secularized" and dismantled into objective pieces that may

or may not be useful in "cultivating positive human qualities". Even the name applied to these

transdisciplinary studies, as contemplative sciences, seeks to distinguish this field from any

spiritual pursuit that may be intertwined within the nature of these practices they are

investigating. This is but one example of the current paradigm perpetuating one valued way of

knowing and being at the expense of others. In the book, *Education and the Soul: Toward a

Spiritual Curriculum*, Miller (2000) describes the spiritual as the divine essence within. "It is the

part of us that is beyond time and space… Simply put, the spirit calls us to look towards the

heavens" (Miller, 2000, p. 24). Things such as these cannot be objects for research in a world

that conceptualizes objective inquiry, based in sense and reason, as the only valid way to know

(Ergas, 2016, p. 5).

The struggle to move forward with spirituality in education within of the notion of Kuhnian paradigms is formidable. Unfortunately, Ergas (2016) would suggest that there is yet another paradigm at play that may also be preventing the required "revolution" necessary to include spirituality as a relevant component of public education. The philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1787. In this treatise, he indicated that because of the human limitation of knowing worldly phenomenon only through sense and reason, we are unable to truly comprehend of that which lays beyond a phenomenon. Essentially, Kant suggested that God lay outside of the abilities of human beings to know, "beyond the grasp of reason" (Ergas, 2016, p 5) and as such, beyond the grasp of science. If we follow this argument forward, any metaphysical pursuit becomes one which our reason and senses are insufficient to explore and understand. Kant's final conclusion, according to Ergas (2016), is that our time should be spent exploring what science can support us in knowing, leaving "the realm of God for belief, for reason and sense are insufficient cognitive apparatuses that cannot accommodate for its knowing" (p. 5). It is worth clarifying that Kant does not argue against the existence of God or gods, only that we as humans, cannot truly come to know or understand these concepts, and as such, should concentrate on the arenas in which we can become knowledgeable. Ergas (2016) suggests that this idea formed the foundation for Auguste Comte's positivism and Karl Popper's post positivism, the result of which was the creation of the modern scientific paradigm, within which we are currently mired. Regarding education specifically, science has created a dangerous educational paradigm that is self-perpetuating.

Moving forward,

if, as Kuhn's (1962) thesis stated, paradigms change when reality doesn't match

what scientists think they know, then perhaps, instead of following a strictly

empiricist or strictly rationalist path, researchers ought to return – boldly and

without apology – to more open, more metaphysical based paths. (Anderson,

2016, p. 37)

Palmer (1983) would agree as he suggests that "any path walked with integrity will take us to a

place of knowledge" (p. xi), not just the path of positivism or post positivism so valued in our

current, western, scientific, monoculture.

Navigating post-secular education – relevant debates. This section presents some of

the ideas that can be found in the literature as to why our current secular society is struggling

with concepts related to spiritualty. Attempting to understand and clarify secular society's

struggles with spirituality is an important component of this thesis, as these struggles are clearly

connected and intertwined with the issues of including spiritualty in public education.

These struggles range from difficulties in understanding, or perhaps more accurately

appreciating, the development of the ideas that are part of the concept of spirituality as they

appear to be anathema to much of current atomistic western culture, to the relatively recent

commodification of the concept of new age spirituality, which appears to coincide with recent

political and philosophical changes to our societies towards more subjective, personal and

intuitive based ideas about life, experience and even success. These very much fly in the face of

some of the previous generations' morals and values. In this way, the obstacle here is the

struggle to disengage or disconnect the concept of spirituality from other, problematic issues or

difficulties that appear to be (incorrectly) interconnected with the idea of spirituality. These struggles result in a negative predisposition or criticism to all aspects of spiritualty, valid or not, which present an enormous obstacle when looking to incorporate spirituality into public education. These are complicated arguments and debates, not easily understood or dismissed, and as such, very relevant to the conversation about struggles associated with implementing spirituality in education.

In an article published in 1998, Foxworth suggested that the resistance to the incorporation of spirituality in education may have been due to a false belief that religion and spirituality were one and the same.

> At the base of these assumptions, however, is the mistaken belief that religion and spirituality are identical. Religion is produced by spirituality, rather than the converse. Spirituality is not peculiar to 'a people' or to a religion but is what makes us all 'people'. It is universal. (p. 51)

While there seems to be a certain underlying truth or sentiment in what Foxworth noted, it is somewhat oversimplified, and in much of the work done in understanding notions of spirituality since, the debates and discussions surrounding spirituality in a post-secular society are far from simple. As a demonstration, the following pages will outline some of the relevant issues.

Hotham and Wexlar (2014) propose that there are three social movements currently taking place: the digital revolution, the new ecological awareness and the post-secular emergent

society, that "is about the return of religion" (p. 1). While defining this third movement, Hotham and Wexlar (2014) suggest it speaks to a return of a critical approach to education:

> Although in ways unfamiliar and anathema to the modern, industrial, de-socializing world of secular instrumentalism. At the same time, a religious turn is internally connected to the digital and ecological social movements, by providing them with some of the most intimate notions within their vocabulary of human change, social transformation and meaning. (p. 1)

The interconnection suggested by this comment speaks to the complicated nature of this issue and discussion, yet also impresses the importance of these ideas in relation to presenting a clear picture of their influence on education, as we attempt to navigate through these social changes. Taylor (2007) suggests this turn will lead to challenges to the mainstream dominance of secularization and Zizek and Milbank (2009) speak of a return of theological pursuit as "a quest for the truth in being in the world" (p. 13). Yet, as noted by Hotham and Wexlar (2014), these progressions and ideas are hotly debated and refuted by those that cannot see or acknowledge a potential end to the 'secular' age (p. 3). Adding another layer of complication is the entire discussion surrounding the geographical limitation of the relevance of the concept of 'post-secular'. "Secular modernity represents a Western phenomenon, and, by extension, the post-secular emergent society is endowed with the same geographic limitations" (Hotham & Wexlar, 2014, p. 4).

The overall result is one of enormous challenge, to address "the relation between religion and society, the secular and the sacred, faith and political action, and to engage and influence

accordingly new lines of work, theoretically, empirically and practically" (Hotham & Wexlar, 2014, p. 4). From the perspectives of Critical Theory and Social History, Hotham and Wexlar (2014) use the work of Pinar and Davis, to suggest questions of meaning and significance are not fated to be forever removed from education, nor should the concept of a liberal education be defined by its division between secular and religious, or spiritual, and that discussions moving forward must attempt to explore a more complex understanding of the interconnections between these ideas (Hotham & Wexlar, 2014, p. 5).

Huss (2014) explores the notion of spirituality from a late capitalist, postmodern culture. The argument presented suggests that the notions of spirituality can be described as a new cultural category that challenges both religious and secular perspectives as it represents a new middle ground.

While exploring the genealogy of spirituality, Huss (2014) suggests the term was originally connected to a more spiritual and religious Eastern perspective, contrasted against a secular and materialistic modern western perspective. "Spirituality was connected to the religious, metaphysical, moral, subjective, private, and experiential realms of life and juxtaposed to the physical, material, public, social, economic, and political arenas" (Huss, 2014, p. 49). However, Huss (2014) suggests there was a major discursive shift in the use of this term in the last decade. While it is a concept that continues to be hard to define, Huss (2014) cites several sources in suggesting common elements of its contemporary understanding. These include "inner awareness, and personal integration", "a journey which is intimately linked with the pursuit of personal growth and development" and an "intuitive, non-rational meditative side of ourselves, the side that strives for inner and outer connection and a sense of wholeness" (p. 49). Huss (2014) equates this transformation to the New Age movement, noting a general rejection of

the previous dualisms, God and nature and spirit and matter (p. 51). While this idea is in line with this paper's discussion on spirituality, Huss (2014) suggest there is a bigger idea at play here, arguing:

> The contemporary use of the concept 'spirituality' is a new discursive construct establishing current ways of classification and different modes of understanding the world and acting in it. This novel category shapes a variety of innovated institutions and cultural productions, by and large known as 'New Age'. (p. 51)

The evolution of this term has coincided with major economic, political and social change, like the movements suggested by Hotham and Wexlar (2014) above. The immediate result is that spirituality has become part of the late capitalist shift from the norms and values of previous generations toward a more individual and entrepreneurial culture, resulting in the commodification of New age practices, indicating the power of the neo-liberal market ideology over even cultural concepts (Huss, 2014, p. 54). This conjunction results in spirituality as potentially representing a direct challenge to previously embedded values and norms. The end result, from this perspective, would suggest that there is much overlap between contemporary spirituality and neo-liberal ideologies, resulting in some rather aggressive (and potentially understandable) criticism of modern spirituality for its "alleged superficiality, hedonism, and consumerism" (Huss, 2014, p. 57). In S*piritual Marketplace,* Roof (1999) sums it up this way: "Much of what passes as spirituality is as thin as chicken soup and as transparent as celestine profits" (Roof, 1999, p. 138).

While much of this debate and the history of the various philosophic perspectives and theories are well beyond the scope of this inquiry, the acknowledgement of these issues is essential to paint a relevant picture of the complexity and scope of the issues at play when the concept of spirituality is investigated in the context of our modern western society. However, these phenomena are just as relevant, if not even more so, when spirituality is applied to education within the modern western society. To this end, the issues discussed above in relation to spirituality, such as the notion of religiosity or commodification of spirituality, represent concerns that must be navigated by teachers and administrator, and even communities supporting public schools. These concerns may have enormous relevance in the direction taken as spirituality moves towards inclusion in public schools but pose even further complications due to the potentially idiosyncrasy in their solution, as they may be very much dependent upon community demographic, location and time. All of this only further thwarts the development of potential solutions or even possible next steps towards solutions of these challenges from the context of public education.

Chapter 5 – Spiritual Practices

Introduction

In the previous chapters, this thesis has outlined the rationale for the incorporation of spirituality within public education as a means to promoting much needed changes to sustainable behaviors. This argument was continued by discussing interpretations and conceptions of various notions of spiritualty as a means to better defining our understanding of what spirituality may be and also what it is not. Finally, this argument went on to discuss some problematic aspects of applying the concept of spiritualty within public education. This chapter looks to present two key ideas as a continuation of this line of reasoning.

Firstly, this chapter will present two practices through which spirituality may find valid and meaningful application within public education, while maintaining an awareness of the complexity and intricacies of the developed concept from Chapter 3. These practices include viewing a currently popular pedagogy, Inquiry Based Learning (IBL), through a spiritual lens and further developing the practice of mindfulness within the public-school classroom. Secondly, this chapter will briefly point out some of the ways in which these two practices may speak to the struggles and obstacles presented in Chapter 4.

Inquiry Based Learning

"Human beings are born curious. From birth we strive to make meaning of the world." (Watt & Colyer, 2014, p. 2)

More recently, Inquiry Based Learning (IBL), has become very popular in education, and in conjunction with Social Emotional Learning (SEL), has shown promise in not only improving

all of the data based assessments that our modern western education systems seem to demand, but also in re-generating the curiosity in students, bringing their desire for learning *back* to the classroom and supporting the development of many higher level thinking skills such as critical analysis and synthesis (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013; Murdoch, 2015; Watt & Colyer, 2014). Further, this pedagogical structure has also shown promise in developing many of the skills that modern workplaces continually stress as important, such as collaboration, creative thinking and communication, as well as the creative and critical use of technology (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013; Murdoch, 2015; Watt & Colyer, 2014). Perhaps most important, however, is that inquiry learning supports students' cross curricular connections, integrating multiple learning fields while focusing on real-world problems and meaningfully speaking to issues that students experience in the world around them, such as social injustices and ecological concerns.

In the context of this thesis, it is important to be clear about the meaning of IBL, as in the greater context of education. This pedagogy has seen myriad different structures and applications. Keeping in line with the definitions presented by the work of McTighe and Wiggins (2013), Murdoch (2015) and Watt and Colyer (2014), IBL represents a pedagogy that is structured around framing learning in context of essential questions, developed through a fostered natural curiosity and often encompassing large contexts that span multiple curricular fields and diverse aspects of human experience. IBL, in this context, develops an attitude of pure inquiry, built through the encouragement of a growth mindset, unafraid to seek deeply into the big questions in life, those that may be philosophical in nature. This form of IBL entices learners into liminal spaces and appreciates those areas of learning where one experiences cognitive dissonance, where learning depends on an attitude that is not afraid of change, but open to its possibility and the growth it will undoubtedly provide and nurture. This form of IBL understands

that this can be a scary place for learners as their conceptions that build their world view may be challenged and shaken but supports this journey as a means through which to truly make sense of the human experience. As a contrast, the form of IBL discussed here is not simply a regular daily challenge problem within the math classroom or a unit ending opportunity to reflect on a field trip to a museum, even though there may be educational value in those practices.

If one defines and practices IBL as suggested above, this analysis suggests there is a clear explanation for the success IBL has shown in the classroom. At its core, the process of inquiry is a spiritual process. To be clear, it is not the intent of this paper to spiritualize the process of IBL or attempt to synthesize it with any notion of spirituality previously developed. On the contrary, the reason this pedagogy has shown such potential success is because it is built around, founded upon, composed of and developed from within the concepts of spirituality presented here, namely awe, interconnection and growth.

From the very beginning, inquiry works to inspire awe in the learning process. The entire idea is one that looks to foster and build the natural curiosity and wonder that all human beings are born with, that innate need to make sense of the world we inhabit, and further as we develop, to better understand the body and soul we steer through life's experiences.

While inquiry starts from this very basic assumption that awe is essential in learning, and also a continued driving force behind the entire pedagogical structure, at the same time, IBL encourages (or perhaps demands) that students begin to adopt an integrated and connected vision of the world and understanding of existence. As inquiry looks to promote understanding and the seeking of solutions to meaningful and challenging questions, the interconnection of subjects and fields, the adoption of the total system perspective, comes to the forefront as key in generating meaningful solutions. At its very heart, inquiry works to develop a worldview that at

its centre acknowledges and thrives on the understanding of the vast interconnection of all things, species and environments, biotic and abiotic.

Finally, the process of inquiry requires next steps. The process finds completion (and begins anew) as students summarize and synthesize ideas, while at the same time, making connections to other areas of learning and suggesting next steps that they wish to further explore or act on. This is a validation of learning as a never-ending process that underlies the idea of the journey, of our fundamental human nature of seeking to learn, grow, develop and be more, in all aspects of our existence.

At times, educators are guilty of arguing that developments in education are cyclical or can be represented as a pendulum, swinging back over territory that has been covered before. It is not uncommon to hear an experienced teacher mention that "new" pedagogies being developed and discussed in the profession are simply old ideas with new names. While some, including myself, would suggest this is not true, as we are forever learning more about the human mind and the ways in which experiences impact learners, that discussion must wait for another time. Regardless, some justification for teachers taking this perspective may be due to a realization, even if only subconscious in nature, that the underlying components of pedagogies that are most effective appear to come back in varying ways time and again. It is these ideas of awe in life, of appreciating interconnection and of valuing a mindset of growth, that make these pedagogies meaningful vehicles for learning. It is these key spiritual pieces that underlie many of the most effective pedagogies in education. Indeed, this is the exact reason why they are successful in the first place.

To this end, while IBL is explored further here, it is important to note that this is just one practice or pedagogy that successfully combines these key pieces of spirituality in order to

present a meaningful way to educate children and youth. There are other pedagogies that have at their core similar ideas. Further, teachers can find incredible success in using varying components of such pedagogies specifically because they work with concepts focussed on developing awe, interconnection and the understanding of growth and the journey, of the need we have to become more. IBL is but one form, one style, one figurehead of a myriad, potentially limitless, combination of effective pedagogies that are based on fundamentally spiritual building blocks. These are the practices that need to be further developed in education, regardless of the names they have had in the past, the vehicles that are currently used to describe them, or the forms they may take in the future. It is the spiritual aspects that transcend, and underlie, all of it.

To reiterate, there is no need to *spiritualize* IBL. It is the very nature of this pedagogy that is spiritual, and that is why it is successful in the manner that it is. Like some other pedagogies that find meaningful success in education, beyond the simplicity of rote memorization or the bottom of Bloom's taxonomy, IBL, at its very core, is a spiritual practice. While there are many key components of inquiry, not all are discussed here. The following were chosen as they highlight the spiritual nature of this methodology of educational experience.

Inquiry and awe (To incite). At the inception of any inquiry-based unit, there is provocation. It comes in many forms and with many different names. It is often prompted by a guiding question that attempts to stretch the mind of the learner. Many books have been written on this idea, including McTighe and Wiggins's (2013) *Essential Questions,* where they note simply that these questions or prompts are "important for stimulating student thinking" (p. 4). Mackenzie (2016), in his work on IBL, would refer to these as provocations, the initiation of the inquiry process. Essential questions are described as important and timeless, elemental or

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foundational and vital for personal understanding. These provocations work to pull learners into a liminal space, intrigue them with the hint of the big ideas at play, entice wonder, encourage another look or a deeper scan. Palmer might suggest it is these types of questions that are worth wrapping one's life around. Some educators may refer to these questions as a hook or an activation, but in the context of IBL, these questions represent more, they dive deeper.

In spiritual terms, this provocation is the awe moment, it is the stimulus for whatever learning may come next, it is the prompt that provokes contemplation about the why's and the how's. This awe moment is the moment where our existence catches us by surprise, and we can relish in the moment of intrigue and wonder. It is a wave of exhilaration and appreciation of the awesome, of the bigger concepts at play, and it is the beginning of a desire to learn, to know and to experience more. It is awe and it is spiritual.

The awe experience may also be an emotional experience. Important problems, essential questions and big ideas, are often ones that can promote not only deep thinking, but also intense feeling. Discussing climate change, species extinction, social injustices or inequalities connects to the head, but also the heart. Emotion is closely tied to awe, and IBL facilitates and develops both understandings and their interconnection.

Inquiry and interconnection (to connect). Watt and Colyer (2014) suggest that the origins of IBL are found in constructivist and progressive educational philosophies. They cite the works of Dewey, Vygotsky, Freire and Gardner as being antecedents of inquiry (p. 4). If one considers some of the fundamental aspects of constructivism or progressive education, it becomes clear that they are rooted in concepts of interconnection.

One tenet of progressive education suggests learning is dependent on social interactions, as knowledge is built through these interactions. Constructivism suggests that humans create (or co-create) their realities through interactions and thinking about these interactions. "As a person matures, has new experiences, and engages in learning, (their) unique view of reality will expand, deepen and become more sophisticated" (Watt & Colyer, 2014, p. 4). It is clear, through the lens of both constructivism and progressive education, that an appreciation of interconnection and shared experience (the essence of interconnection) is central to growth and learning.

In reading about inquiry, the internal validity is striking. As it is a pedagogy built around interconnection and growth, even the notion of assessment within the framework presents as such. To being with, co-construction of criteria, a staple for many in relation to assessment practices included in IBL, functions to denote and define the interconnections of content across multiple fields as students build bridges spanning different arenas of knowledge. Triangulation is a method of assessment that finds value in diversity of assessment practices. Specifically, determining the extent of a students learning and growth is not limited to simple products, but is inclusive of conversations with students and also observations of students. In this way, even the assessment model promoted within inquiry is one based on interconnection. Those promoting IBL as a form of learning would suggest that the interconnection of these forms of assessment used in the process of triangulation provide the best means through which to determine the extent of learning and understanding that has been developed by the students.

McTighe and Wiggins (2013) further the understanding of interconnection as fundamental to IBL within their discussions surrounding inquiry initiation when they suggest that the best questions used to prompt inquiry involve ideas that can be transferred within and

across disciplines. Further dedication to the development of interconnected understandings of existence is evidenced again in IBL as students work to complete an inquiry cycle. During this process, students synthesize what they have learned in the past with new information developed from their investigations. A culmination of this synthesis activity comes when students communicate their new understandings in light of this synthesis. This is a powerful tool in the promotion of understanding the vast, interconnected systems in action on this planet.

Inquiry and the journey (to develop). Watt and Colyer (2014) suggest that in order for an inquiry to be successful, students (and teachers also), "must have dispositions and attitudes that allow them to be curious, skeptical, empathetic, collaborative an open to taking risks in their thinking" (p. 3). It is these very attitudes, highlighted here as components of inquiry, that allow human beings the ability to reflect on their own roles and journeys, critically and honestly, with a curiosity and skepticism, that can promote change, that can point them in new directions and suggest a path upon which we may grow as individuals. Without critical analysis and meaningful self-reflection, there can be no growth. These practices are fundamental to the "journey" to become more.

Further, it is the developing of curiosity, wonder and especially the courage to take risks (which is also a key in inquiry) that allows humans the ability to not just reflect on change, but to make it actionable. No journey can be undertaken until we are willing to take the steps towards the change we desire, and this takes courage.

Another important component of IBL is the promotion of metacognition. Thinking about thinking is one of the ten key points to inquiry suggested by Watt and Colyer (2014, p. 129). They suggest that when time spent worrying about content outweighs all else, deep and rich

thinking and learning are hindered. Students need time to spend on metacognition, reflecting on thinking and learning. This is key to growth and the journey. IBL promotes ownership of the process of self-reflection and "inner-work". Practicing this type of metacognition is a spiritual function, as defined in this thesis.

Upon consideration of the above discussion, it hopefully becomes evident that the power of the pedagogy of IBL is due to its spiritual nature. Mindfulness is another such practice that has recently become more prevalent in classrooms and it is discussed more fully in the next section.

Mindfulness in the Classroom

Similar to IBL, practices of mindfulness are currently finding their way into public school classrooms. This is in part due the dynamic position the practice of mindfulness currently fulfills as a result of some of the more recent research associated with mindfulness practices. Not only has recent research indicated that practicing mindfulness may act as a tool to reduce stress, support various mental health initiatives, and at the same time, promote greater success related to outcomes and achievement (Davidson et al., 2012), but it has also found a unique position by being viewed more and more through the lens of cognitive science (Roeser & Zelazo, 2012), lending greater acceptance and appreciation of the practices related to mindfulness in our data driven, mechanistic, and secular public schools. Perhaps this result stems from the idea that when taken from the perspective of a cognitive science, mindfulness can be effectively disengaged from the wisdom and spiritual traditions in which it was developed. Regardless, there is a very unique potential currently for mindful practices to bridge a transition for the

greater acceptance of these types of spiritual practice in public education. This argument is outlined in more detail below.

Rationale for mindfulness. Cohen (2015) suggests that if spiritual research is to be done "expertly", then the researchers will need to be deeply involved in their own inner work. I would suggest this is true for teachers and students both and represents a very challenging task as undertaking such personal kind of research is not accessible for many people involved in education. Bai et al. (2016) explain this struggle, noting "a person forms egoic structures that are in the service of living as well as possible within the context of circumstances that exist" (p. 81). Structures that may service meaningfully, including aspects of spirituality and further, promoting behaviors that address the environmental crisis, may not exist in the circumstances of the students and teachers we interact with every day. What then is a process through which we can begin to work deeply to create the structures needed within our own selves, while also promoting their creation within our students, peers and colleagues, the structures which are needed to overcome the obstacles above, allowing the inclusion of the important components of spirituality that may speak to our behaviors as humans and the environmental concerns that need to be addressed?

In his article, "Mindfulness in Education at the Intersection of Science, Religion and Healing", Ergas (2014) presents one idea that may speak to many, if not all, of the potential obstacles mentioned in the proceeding paragraph. It is worth noting that there are many projects in education that are making progress in speaking to the challenges above, and they do this in a myriad of ways, across varying fields. Even within the field of mindfulness, there is much work being done, in many different aspects. Of particular note within the framework of mindfulness as

presented by Ergas (2014), is a willingness to not only appreciate the complicated nature of the challenges presented above, specifically the post-secular nature we are currently navigating, but also the dynamic relationship between the role of science and spirituality in education, within this post-secular space.

In the introduction to this article, Ergas (2014) notes:

> This paper reflects critically on the prices and merits of mindfulness in education as a practice shaped by it becoming measurable. It locates these processes as depicting the post-secular age's blurring of boundaries between religiosity/secularity/education, subject/object and science/healing/education. (p. 58)

It could be suggested that it is exactly due to this careful consideration and navigation of the relevant concerns and the influences considered, that allows the practice of mindfulness to be the most relevant as a potential for speaking to the issues that need to be addressed. It is these same influences and their considerations however, which also raise concern about the effective application of mindfulness within education, without the loss of that essential component of mindfulness that has the potential to make the changes needed. The following paragraphs attempt to better outline these tensions.

Related to the previous conversation regarding the role of paradigms in instructing the construction of knowledge and the role of education, and further, incorporating the idea of the changes taking place within the concept of a post-secular age, we find the notion of a subjective turn, as suggested by Taylor (2006) and cited by Ergas (2014, p. 59). In this space, mindfulness

emerges as a practice which blends the boundaries between spirituality and science, and as such, finds itself as becoming relevant within public education in a significant way. Yet this relevance creates a tension of its own. Recalling that mindfulness developed from a practice "designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate capacity for a deeper awareness, concentration, and insight" (Hart, 2004, p. 28), and historically grounded in a Buddhist tradition, there is a process involved here that is uniquely subjective and internal to humanity, and functions very much against the rationalism and objectivity which is thoroughly woven within modern data-driven education, and modern western society as a whole. Yet as this field of mindfulness continues to find footing in neuroscience, psychology and education, it is becoming normalized as a science and further, altering the perception of its role and acceptance as a valid practice within the educative system to promote greater learning. Ergas (2014) suggests that this is due to the skillful way concepts of mindfulness were "introduced as a secular practice geared toward healing, which led to its acceptance by science" (p. 60), resulting in a fundamental change to what can be known in science, and as further noted by Ergas (2014), if you can "change science as the ruler of contemporary society's conception of knowledge . . . you change education" (p. 60).

The integration of mindfulness into the realm of science, and then further into education, follows a traceable path. It appeared first as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) promoted by Kabat-Zinn in the nineties to treat patients with chronic conditions. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) developed by Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002) within the field of psychotherapy followed shortly after. At the same time, mindfulness was becoming part of social-emotional-learning (SEL), emotional intelligence and positive psychology (Durak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) and holistic education (Miller, 2007),

among others. These include Collaborative for Academic Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL), MINDUP, and the work of Burnett and Cullen in developing a mindfulness-in-schools project (Ergas, 2014). Two studies have looked at a series of mindfulness-based educational interventions in the last decade, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) and Davidson et al. (2012), both concluding the potential of practices related to mindfulness to the benefit of education and students. Tracing this path begins to show the relatively recent movement of mindfulness-based practices finding their way into the realms of public education.

Yet there is another very interesting idea at play as these practices continue to find not only relevance, but scientific support, in education. As pointed out but Ergas (2014), but also in the reviews completed by Meiklejohn et al. (2012) and Davidson et al. (2012), there is a continued need to define not only what specific aspects of mindfulness are being measured, but also how these aspects are measured and what the further effect may be, for students and educators both, if these practices become drivers for personal change and deep introspection, if they begin to reveal the spiritual roots they were developed to illicit. Recall the blurring of the subject/object duality that can take place as one practices various aspects of mindfulness, as one looks inside and begins to attempt to identify and realize a potential separation between thoughts and thinker. Ergas (2014) describes this idea as the absolute internalization of the scientific process, to look internally at one's own consciousness (a subjective experience which neuroscience currently struggles to explain in real-time) in an unbiased and non-judgmental way, as an "appeal to the subject's quality of mindfulness as that application of an objective stance in the face of his own subjectivity" (Ergas, 2014, p. 64). There is a tension at play here, suggesting that due to the introspective and subjective nature of the inquiry of mindfulness, that the ruling epistemology of science may be on the verge of a reconceptualization.

As suggested by Ergas (2014), "it is by reconceptualizing epistemology that society is changed, as it embraces a new educational vision as well" (p. 63). While the underpinning for this reconceptualization may have existed for some time, as Palmer (1983), Huebner (1999), Pinar and Grumet (1976), Miller (1994), and others would note in an accounting of the history of ideas related to holistic education, it is a unique period of time and series of events that have connected these ideas, the acceptance of mindfulness as a scientific endeavor and the blurring of spiritual lines within a post-secular society. The result is potent, a potential to support a spiritual practice, legitimately conceptualized as contemplative injury, scientifically supported, with its application within the public education system encouraged and scaffolded. One can only imagine the changes to the priorities and practices of teachers and students, perhaps education as a whole, with such a reconceptualization. One may return again to the overarching concepts of awe, interconnection and the realization of a journey to becoming more and better in relation to the earth and each other.

Yet there is a risk. Just as MBSR and Headspace were about reducing stress and applying the benefits of spiritual practices and endeavors to a secular society, in our educational world of standardization and efficiency, of economics and consumerism, one must question motives. As is common in the arena of systems thinking, it is unforgiveable to not at least explore the potential undesired side effects or unanticipated results. Ergas (2014, p. 66) suggests the need to be wary. The scientific grounding of mindfulness serving a revival of education in knowing thyself (or non-self) more in line with Pinar and Grumet's (1976) vision, may indeed be one end. However, mindfulness, originally intended to in-form (or perhaps de-construct), may also be incorporated as a technology that makes students more receptive to information eventually serving the greater cause of higher achievements and bottom lines.

Ergas (2014) cites the work of both Rosch (2006) and Nelson (2012) to describe the idea that the more science looks to define and measure mindfulness, the further the concept of mindfulness as applied in education gets from the original state of awareness it was conceived to explore or develop. The path to instrumentalization of mindfulness may result in extensive changes to its meaning, practice, usefulness and benefits. "The *immeasurable* cannot become *measurable* without a price, perhaps a heavy one, with substantial educational implications" (Ergas, 2014, p. 67). The suggestion here is that there are two extremes through which mindfulness may find itself incorporated into public education. The first would involve mindfulness being fit into a system of achievement-based curricula, functioning as a controlled intervention to bring about a specific result, all in the function of increasing rates, scores and the mastery of outcomes. This would be, as described by Ergas (2014) as a more instrumentally scientific form of mindfulness and is evident currently in many instances of such applications.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, and more exciting and unlimiting in the context of this thesis, would be mindfulness applied as contemplative inquiry to such a deep and wide extent as to result in the undermining and questioning of the very idea of achievement and success. Perhaps one already sees this effect in the growing questioning educators have regarding assessment and the narrow construct of success as it is currently defined by education in many contexts. Here lays the potential to speak to many of the previous questions laid out in earlier chapters, regarding re-defining success and re-interpreting the meaning of living a good life, of reshaping what it means to become educated, to be on a journey of discovery.

It is the perspective of Ergas (2014) that mindfulness as a practice may actually unify both of these different perspectives. As science attempts to control the interventions of mindfulness, further exploring the meaning and practice of the process "science is being re-

enchanted through scientists engaged in mindfulness practice and through its application as a research methodology" (Ergas, 2014, p. 68). In this way, this unique post-secular tension, the balance between spiritual subjectivity and secular scientific objectivity, might just result in fundamental changes, not only in education, but to a re-enchantment of our deeply spiritual existence through education, as science is re-conceptualized, ultimately changing its role as defining what can be known, and how it can be known, in our societies.

Mindfulness may function in an almost subversive way in this case, as its spiritual nature functions to promote awe in existence, interconnection of all living things and their spaces, and an understanding of potential internal growth as an individual. As it is slowly gaining acceptance by the atomistic, accountability-driven mechanists in education as a means to increasing academic success, its continued practice cannot help but result in creating individuals that begin to questions some of the values that drive our current societies, as they begin to experience the growth that is unavoidable as one begins to practice mindfulness and meditation regularly. When these questions begin, there is the opportunity for the creation of a liminal space, wherein the obstacles that have been presented above may be circumvented or undone.

Addressing Obstacles and Issues

The previous section, on mindfulness in the classroom, began to speak to some of the obstacles and issues presented in Chapter 4. In this section I pick up this discussion in Chapter 4, this time drawing on the two examples of spiritual practices discussed in the current chapter to promote further thought and suggest areas of further inquiry moving forward. While the discussion surrounding these obstacles and their relation to spirituality as defined in this thesis provides opportunity for extensive analysis and further research, the intent here is only to briefly

outline some means through which the spiritual pedagogies presented in this chapter may speak to addressing these obstacles or struggles.

Choices to be made regarding spirituality. Chapter 4 discussed as one of the challenges to including spirituality into public education the question of how to define spirituality. If one looks to using spiritual pedagogies presented in this current chapter in public education, the underlying components of spirituality introduced in Chapter 3 –awe, interconnection and personal growth –are less of an issue, and thus the introduction of spirituality as defined in this thesis becomes less of an issue. The spiritual pedagogies introduced in this current chapter allow each student to fit their own world view into place, while at the same time, fostering the exploration of big ideas without needing to clarify one tradition or perspective that must be adhered to, while maintaining the importance of the underlying concepts.

Invalidation of the subject. Invalidation of subjective perspective was also a concern presented in Chapter 4. Inquiry and mindfulness are both highly subjective practices. While these practices have the ability to work towards fostering interconnection and awe, they both potentially begin and end with personal insight and reflection of subjective experience. While neither practice speaks directly to the larger systemic issue or paradigm that currently undermines the value of subjective reasoning and understanding as a means by which to grow and learn, the practices require engagement in the act itself. Subjectivity is valid and valued in both practices and this in turn works to undermine, or to some extent resist, the invalidation of the subject which is so common in modern western culture and education.

Problematic paradigms. As discussed at length in Chapter 4, there are various obstacles to the inclusion of spirituality in education presented by the paradigms currently in place in our mechanistic, objective western world culture. However, the fact that a discussion surrounding the importance of spirituality in public education is relevant speaks to the potential for change.

In particular, it is worth revisiting the idea that dismantling of paradigms begins with research or investigation into issues that paradigms struggle to speak to or address internally. The premise of this thesis, the concerns with environmental degradation and social malaise, or student disconnect and the search for meaning and interconnection, these are the concerns that cannot be addressed with our current paradigm. The concept of spirituality and the research surrounding it is the work that has the potential to shift the current paradigms or topple them completely. Practices associated with the development of this spirituality, accessed and participated in by the youth of this time period, can only expedite this process. The spiritual practices mentioned in this chapter represent the front line of this work.

Conclusion

In their book *Understanding by Design,* McTighe and Wiggins (2013) suggest that transfer and meaning making are two pieces to education that appear to be taking a back seat to coverage. Interestingly, experience suggests that teachers' and administrators' actions, for the most part, continue to be in line with this larger system of education. One interpretation could be that the institution of education is resistant to change and while subtle in its forms of maintaining the status quo, highly effective none the less, despite even its own often posited goals of public education. Still, teachers cannot be fatalistic. Largely, teachers are free to operate as they will in

their classes. Perhaps it is time to become more assertive in making change. A spiritual curriculum, one inclusive of awe moments, appreciating interconnected systems thinking and promoting self-reflection and personal growth, these are the goals that need to be a focus. IBL and Mindfulness are practices that can provide this focus, as they are inherently spiritual pedagogies.

Chapter 6 – Looking Back: A Change of Perspective and Practice

Introduction

      While there are many personal insights and learnings that have occurred in the last two years while completing the research and writing of this thesis, there are some that may potentially be beneficial in supporting the experiences and growth of others who are attempting to navigate similar ideas or contexts. Conversely, some of these insights may just work to shed further light on this topic in general. As such, in the following paragraphs, some of the more personally meaningful insights are shared. They have been organized into three sections: professional reflections, personal reflections, and areas for further research and next steps.

Professional Reflections

      It seems to be that the field of education currently has a dependence on objective, positivist data used extensively in order to assess and evaluate all relevant activity or information, including students, teachers, schools and even divisional policy. This can at times present as antithetical to many of the acknowledged theories in education (e.g., constructivism, SEL) and also many of the professed goals in education such as supporting holistic understandings, inquiry into life's big questions or inclusivity of various world views in relation to spirituality or sustainability.

      In response to this positivistic dependence and through the work of this thesis, it appears that there needs to be a stronger push from teachers and administrators to discuss concerns regarding this form of objective analysis as the dominant lens of evaluation and a further introduction of opportunity to present other means through which to support growth and

development in education, such as the spiritual components discussed in this thesis. It has been my personal experience that when these ideas are shared through discussion and collaboration in classrooms, staffrooms or larger divisional contexts, there is often agreement and support. At times, it almost seems as if individuals have similar frustration and feelings, but struggle with giving voice to their ideas or concerns, or do not have a familiarity with the relevant educational philosophy or associated vocabulary to put words to their concerns.

It has been these conversations and collaborations through which I have come to realize that the work done during this thesis has resulted in extensive personal growth regarding my preparedness to engage in these conversations and debates with others. As well, I have found that at times I am able to provide context or a beginning for others so that they are encouraged to engage in heir own personal inquires into some of these bigger issues in education. Further, this preparedness has extended to other arenas of my life and there is a growing feeling that my interactions with others may regularly be supporting the development of ideas related to holistic learning and spiritual aspects of education. I have found this exciting and it has generated a sense of personal momentum and drive.

Another personal learning has consisted of a change in my perception of my role as an educator. In particular, I have found that I am much less constrained by the curriculum, even at the high school science level. Student engagement and meaning making has increased as I began to promote cross curricular inquiry-based units, focused more on big ideas and essential questions. These have included spiritual components such as attempting to describe better ways to *walk* on earth, defining and describing the *good life* in our current western societies and challenging students to search for a higher calling in relation to human existence on Earth.

In conjunction with the change in my perception of my role as an educator, I also find I am much more inclined to evaluate new ideas and reflect on conversations surrounding various forms of innovation in education in light of the ability of the practice or pedagogy to incorporate spiritual perspectives, such as awe, interconnection and personal growth.

The last professional reflection worth sharing here is interesting in that it seems to overlap with a personal perspective, which should not come as a surprise as these kinds of big ideas clearly span the entirety of the human experience, resulting in the blurring of lines between what may qualify as professional versus personal. While I consider this next reflection from a professional perspective, it is very much relevant to my personal life as well. After undertaking this research, I find I am much more committed and invested in developing relationships and also more aware of the extent of their significance in my own professional growth. Further, I feel there is a greater potential depth to these relationships and that my own spiritual and personal well-being is connected to this development. It seems this is a feature of time spent reflecting on the depth of interconnection of all things. It may be that this knowledge is true for others, even if they are not currently aware of it, and that further encourages my work in this area.

This spiritual and personal well-being develops through the brief moment to moment encounters made through the numerous personal interactions made every day, but also from the learning made through the development of each unique relationship and its associated experiences. This includes the peers and colleagues at work but even more so my students and possibly most of all my friends and family. It is possible that these feelings associated to the importance of relationships come to all people, simply as a side effect of age, lived experience and reflection, but I strongly feel that these changes are connected deeply to the wok I have done in the last two years in relation to this thesis.

Personal Reflections

Another interesting point that I have noticed, as I reflect on the experience of my master's program in its entirety, is the difference between what I would constitute as professional experiences versus personal experiences. Almost without exception, my professional experiences have been positive. While there have been moments of disagreement with individuals regarding shared learnings or varying perspectives, these have been fewer than anticipated and almost never resulted in serious conflict. Rather, these moments of disagreement have most often resulted in amicable professional dialogue or at worst, a willingness to disagree. This is not to say that I have not experienced any conflict professionally in the last few years, but not directly related to this thesis work. On the other hand, my personal experiences relating to the work of this thesis, while in some contexts being very positive, have also been very trying at times and in some moments, almost overwhelming.

I would strongly hesitate to suggest that I have gained any spiritual insight, although I would be lying to say that there has not been growth in this area. Some of those closest to me have stated that they have noticed I have become more introspective and reflective and I think these are deeply connected to spiritual growth. It might be more accurate to say that my world view has shifted to become more open and inclusive of a wider range of spiritual perspectives and philosophies. In retrospect, this is definitely indicative of growth and I have found many ideas that I had not explored previous to this work becoming part of conversations, discussions and writings. It is clear that I have been pushed during this work, that it has expanded my world view, and that it is quite likely this positive growth, now started, will continue into the future.

It appears to me that the integration of these ideas into my personal life have also promoted changes in those who have been in close proximity to me during this journey. It seems that as my outlook and world view has shifted, some of those around me have journeyed further down their own roads in relation to these ideas. This includes students and staff but also family and personal friends. I would suggest that all around, this result has been positive and somewhat unexpected.

However, there have also been many struggles in the last few years. These have included a frustration with the progression of ideas related to my thesis and an inability, still to this date, to intellectually access some of the philosophies that intrigue me and perhaps are capable of speaking to still further growth. I have also struggled to effectively balance thesis related workloads with professional and family commitments, and this has impacted my personal sustainability and wellness, but also that of my family. At times, I have struggled with feeling like an imposter, unequipped to contribute academically to this field. Yet, it seems that in my discussions with others, and further readings related to these concerns, none of these particular struggles are unique to my experience. Further, I have felt that many of these issues have found some resolution as my work progressed and while that does not make them less relevant, I might describe these issues collectively as some of the less difficult to navigate.

There are other struggles that remain larger and have presented as likely beyond my ability to speak to or navigate effectively. Two concerns in particular I find that I continually run up against. As such, it seems that these areas must therefore also be discussed as potentials for next steps. This is where I feel more work needs to be done, and while I believe these issues can be overcome. Currently I am unsure of the steps that need to be followed to bring resolution to these issues.

Moving Forward

As discussed previously in this thesis, it seems the paradigm within which educators work is one that is heavily influenced by the positivist perspective. Education is currently a field overly dependent upon data-driven pedagogies and quantitatively measurable outcomes. In and of itself, this is not inherently problematic, and in many instances, this may be beneficial with regards to reporting on student success and identifying next steps for growth of students, classrooms, school and even divisions.

This positivist dependence, however, becomes problematic when it is the only valued measure of learning and growth, as suggested in Chapter 4. Our current professional dependence on empirical data may however contradict much of what we know about learning and growth, if one considers the beliefs in education associated with constructivism or the importance of social emotional learning. This over dependence on empirical data is definitely at odds with the tenets of this thesis and while some of my work has been to highlight these more spiritual perspectives throughout my interactions with students and colleagues, I remain a willing participant in so many aspects of the perpetuation of this status quo in education simply by continuing my role in its existence. Frequently I am overwhelmed at the level of hypocrisy within which I engage daily.

While this feeling of hypocrisy was partly the impetus for the philosophical nature of this thesis, as a stand against the positivist and atomistic only perspectives of understanding our world, I feel as if I am no closer to making meaningful change than I was when this work began. I am enough of a realist to admit that the fight I suggest I am waging is not one that can be described in terms of winning or losing, but rather in terms of small shifts and empowered

voices a little at a time, that does little to minimize the impact of the contradiction of action versus belief that I must navigate daily. This struggle remains very large and I know that it is also relevant to others in the field. As such, a further exploration of this challenge and its effect on passionate educators willing to challenge the status quo may be an area of further research that needs to be explored.

The second large concern I suggest runs very much in conjunction with the first. The positivist dependence that I would suggest is hindering movement towards more spiritual-based practices and pedagogies is an entrenched structure. While one can easily find discussions in literature promoting holistic perspectives and spiritual inclusion in public schools dating back to the fifties and sixties, it sometimes appears that there has not been any significant change in this direction.

It is true that there are areas of potential. There has been traction gained in the acceptance of Indigenous perspectives and world views in public education in Canada. Mindfulness in education is an area of study that is growing. Place-based and land-based education programs continue to be developed in various divisions and regions. These practices, and others like them, present beacons of change in the educative landscape. Yet, this type of work cannot continue indefinitely. Perhaps now, more than ever before, there is the acknowledgment and the agreement that there is an impending deadline and it is now being counted likely in decades. Still, we are working in a system where there are structures in place that were developed over a century ago. Educational change is slow, potentially dangerously so. The entrenched structures that inhibit concepts like the spiritual pedagogies presented in this thesis must be soon overcome. Methods through which to increase the speed of this change seem to be an incredibly important topic of study moving forward.

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