

MINDFULNESS AS PRACTICE:
SHIFTS IN TEACHER AWARENESS AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry explores stories of a principal and two teachers in a rural setting who have had diverse experiences with the contemplative practice of mindfulness. The three participants – Russell, a beginning teacher, Willa, a wellness coordinator, and Patti, a principal – gathered with the researcher to convey their individual and collective experiences. My research wonder primarily focused on the following questions: How does the experience of mindfulness practice shift teacher identity and awareness, and time educators spend with children and youth? As educators, how can the practice of mindfulness expand our experience of listening, loving kindness, and compassion within educational spaces?

Narrative accounts of the research participants were collected during individual and group semi-structured interviews ranging from thirty minutes to one hour. The narrative accounts were inquired into through the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants' stories offer insight into the possibility that mindfulness practice impacts teacher identity and awareness, and how these guided their presence in their educational community.

Key words: mindfulness, narrative inquiry, contemplative education, mindful pedagogy, compassionate community

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INTRODUCTION

Following the tradition of narrative inquiry, multiple chapters of this document open with a narrative beginning of my experiences within educational spaces. I examine these experiences within the context of understanding mindfulness from a personal and professional perspective, and further bring this examination into the narrative accounts of the research participants. Conceptual relevancies and theoretical justifications are explored throughout the chapters of this thesis.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider supporting literature and research methodology used in this study and outlines critical narrative concepts. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the experiences of the research participants and draw out narrative threads from their stories. These two chapters were written as stand-alone and publishable papers intended for submission to scholarly journals. Chapter 6 offers a summative reflection of my experiences and new understandings over time and returns to critical wonders of this research.

CHAPTER ONE.
NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS: LOOKING BACK TO SEE FORWARD

My Narrative Beginnings

Vignette 1 ~ Gathering Strength

A colleague had just shared news with me about the tragic event in a child's life that I worked with every day. I was shocked and saddened. My eyes welled with tears and my heart felt heavy. I gathered myself and I went to my class. I looked around the room with this new awareness into this child's story. I felt a heavy dose of shame and self-doubt creep into my thoughts. Had I used a harsh tone with him lately? Did I challenge him when he walked in late as he often did? Did I even have a chance to talk to him that morning? How was I going to talk to him about it?

I felt awkward and fumbled. As soon as I saw him I felt warmth and gentleness for his difficult journey. He was smiling at some happenings in the class and was involved with the other students. He presented himself with massive courage, interacting with friends by smiling and laughing. I had to stop myself from staring, but I wondered about vulnerability and strength all at once. I felt an intense awareness at my heart centre that there were so many stories I didn't know about living in the space of our classroom. My possible ignorance felt disappointing. My eyes moved like a slow motion movie reeling around the room spotlighting each face of each child...and what's her story? And what's his story? And so on. I was present in that moment...but questioned where I was the majority of the time.

Change happens in a slow fashion over time or it can happen in the burst of a moment leaving us grappling with wonders and new tensions. Retelling this story of my awake moment around a young boy's tragedy, gives me the gift of understanding the

embodied feelings of disappointment in myself as a teacher. This awake moment led me into a deeper knowing of myself. My story tells of the moment I realized I was not fully engaged. I questioned where my mind was so much of the time that I spent with the children. The stresses and demands on a classroom educator are extensive: curriculum outcomes, meeting outcomes, diverse and difficult children's lives, pressure from parents, pressure from school systems. My mind was pulled and pushed in a multitude of directions. I definitely did not feel that I was there wholeheartedly or in the fullest way possible. Since then, I have made commitments to a deeper understanding of the lives of children and youth, and inadvertently, all my relations. I wanted to change because something did not feel quite right, and I felt disconnected. Zaleski and Kaufman (1998) shared that, "being with others reveals the truth about ourselves" (p 91).

The truth was, I had inner work to do.

My heart was opening and I was flailing with my own limitations to truly hold space for the trauma of this child's experience. In the background of this situation, I had been also dealing with some personal health issues for which the contemplative practices of yoga and mindfulness were supporting my well-being. Over time, my personal experiences informed me that through the practices of breath awareness, mindful movement, and present moment awareness, I felt peaceful. This story highlighted the beginnings of my journey of consciously developing my whole-hearted presence with children.

Living and learning with children in a holistic manner became the focus of my learning journey. Years before writing this thesis, a ten-day silent meditation in India was one of my first experiences in which I noticed a deep shift in my awareness and my

ability to notice what is happening in the present moment. Even earlier in my explorations, I heard the word mindfulness for the first time during my undergraduate studies in a university course called 'Introduction to Buddhism'. Subsequently, I began to study and practice yoga. I discovered the Indian system of yoga to be complex, multifaceted, and expansive. I began to understand the vastness of the system, which guided me towards a sitting meditation practice. Dedicating time and effort to the various aspects of this holistic system, on a regular and consistent basis, resulted in a deepened awareness of my body, mind, and spirit. My personal home practices have evolved to include a daily yoga practice with my conscious breath as guide, followed by a meditation. I have been inspired towards a steady and easeful practice in which my breath leads my movement. I regularly bring mindful intentions into my relationships and day-to-day interactions by noticing my openness and non-judgment, my attention in the present moment, my reactions, and my ability to respond. On this learning journey, I have been studying both yoga and mindfulness with teachers in local and other communities. I am currently engaged in a mindfulness development and training course and access my teacher through online presence, personal meetings, and phone calls.

Over time, I grew curious about yoga and mindfulness in relation to each other. During my years of classroom teaching, I had opportunities to be present in audiences learning with Jon-Kabat Zinn, a proponent of mindfulness in education, and the Dalai Lama, at an education conference. I began to offer aspects of breath awareness, slowed movement, and the act of noticing, with children by introducing these into my classrooms. I began to seek out experiences that would inform how to bring contemplative practices to young people in an embodied, holistic manner. I sought out an

organization called Mindful Schools based out of the San Francisco, Bay Area. The principal of my school at the time had shared about the work of this organization. I began to realize that there was much work being done with mindfulness in education. I recall telling my principal, “Why would I keep these peaceful and powerful practices to myself?” I considered how we might bridge contemplative practices into educational spaces in a meaningful, sensitive way. I completed the Mindful Schools ‘Fundamentals Online Training’, over an eight-week period, and ‘Mindfulness Curriculum Training’, which was a weekend in Los Angeles, California. Over time, I would also complete two trainings in youth focused yoga with two separate organizations. My offerings in schools consisted of being in a classroom for half an hour, with the teacher and children, twice a week for eight weeks. I invited children into experiences of the body and mind, which moved us to notice through our senses and understand the idea of relationship with each other. I offered brain education and we explored possibilities of moving with our breath. Many aspects of mindfulness were introduced and storytelling was used for enjoyment and conversation. Over the eight weeks and sixteen interactions with a particular class, I built relationship between the children and myself. Some teachers inquired into mindfulness further by asking for resources and expressed that they appreciated seeing how this work unfolded in the classroom.

My ongoing study of mindfulness has allowed me to sit with different teachers along the way and experience glimpses of embodiment of presence. In the book, *Composing Lives in Transition*, Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) suggested that lives are relational and composed as a process of change; involving the “temporal unfolding of their lives in different places and in different relationships” (p. 48). I see the importance

of each of these as I look back on my own stories of becoming who I am as an educator at this moment. I feel blessed at this point in my life to pause and retell some of these stories because doing so has led me to understand myself in a new way. Clandinin (2013) shared that, “each story of experience opens into new stories to be lived and told, always with the possibility of retelling and reliving” (p.203).

Retelling my stories has evoked an opening at my heart center. Retelling my stories has nurtured me to center in my own peace and helped me to understand myself in a new way in relation to others. It is an inner response connecting and bridging to all my relations. Telling my stories allows for a lived experience, and the storytelling is, all at once, physical, emotional, spiritual, and communal. My journey seems to continue to reach towards wholeness.

Vignette 2 ~ Awakening

I spent three years teaching multiple week mindfulness sessions in an Indigenous language learning immersion program during my early time in Saskatchewan. The principal welcomed me and had unwavering belief in the benefits of offering regular mindfulness sessions to a majority of the school’s children to heighten community connection. That year, the teachers and youth, the heart of the school, explored various aspects of mindfulness. Sometimes I observed excitement in the children and sometimes I observed indifference, maybe even boredom. Often the children in the halls would say hello, “Hey Mindfulness Lady!” and I never quite knew on any given day what the dynamic would be. There was always a welcoming atmosphere for the experiences we were having together.

At the end of my first year, on a June morning, I visited the school to offer my

wishes for a great summer ahead. In the front lobby I had a brief conversation with a young grade one child:

“Hi Mrs. Kavia, are you coming to my class today?”, she asked.

I said, “Not today, but I am here to wish you a great summer! Are you still practicing mindfulness sometimes?”

“Yah!”, she exclaimed, “every night when I have my panic attacks!”

I recall pausing at this point, and asked, “I didn’t know you had panic attacks every night? Does your teacher?”

“Yah, I just use my mindfulness breath and it helps me calm down”, she responded.

The bell rang and she left.

I stood there for a while breathing this new information in. I was so thankful she had shared with me.

A new window opened into the experience of youth. I felt compassion for this young, young girl. I reflected on the weight of her experience having to deal with panic attacks every single day. The gift of this young girl’s sharing allowed me to look through her window of experience to see the impact that was possible on a moment of liberation from the suffering of her panic attacks. I learned that the girl felt empowered in and of herself to do something about her panic attacks. I spoke with her teacher and shared what I had learned. I knew I would be back at the school in the following school year and felt a sense of grounding in the meaning and purpose of the work I was attempting to do. Thank goodness she shared with me that day.

I recall so many moments of self-doubt and vulnerability along the way. I

questioned myself and my work: What am I doing? Who cares? Is anyone getting anything out of the practices and time I am with them? I had identified with being a classroom teacher for so long that working with children in this way, a different way, made me feel less valued at times because it was not directly a part of the mandated curriculum. This young girl's story helped me to anchor into why I was doing the work. I was thankful she told her story because I often wondered how the practices affected young lives, especially in a system that values the outer, external journey much more than the inner one. I was changing because of her comment and I needed to continue to learn more myself. I was mindful of her words and noticing myself changing in a connected manner. Sieber (2015) shared Thich Nhat Hanh's notion of 'inter-being', which "maintains that through these interconnections, if one devotes oneself to mindfulness, one can awaken and understand the *interbeing* between all things, and then one can begin to look outward to evaluate systems and institutions that create suffering and create peace" (p.4). I realized there was a great need for this work *within* our systems and institutions of education.

Vignette 3 ~ Being is Teaching

Ringling the singing bowl, at the beginning of every session, was a way to come together and focus by paying attention to the beginning and ending of the sound. It was a collective experience that allowed us to notice by our sense of hearing. This day I happened to look over at the young first-year teacher. He was tucked into the very corner of the front of the room. I did not regularly look at him during practice, as I tended to usually focus on the children. His face was calm and he seemed to let out a sigh of relief.

At the end of the class I shared my observation with the young teacher and discovered that the practices of mindfulness that had been unfolding over the last few weeks were impacting him in a calming and grounding manner. He shared that learning about and practicing mindfulness was helping him and that he really needed it. He said it was very helpful to see someone in action in this way with the children. He said it was helping the way he was being with the children in the classroom too.

I recall the experience of this conversation. I felt attuned to this young teacher while he was telling me his thoughts and feelings. His telling educated me. Dewey (1938) stated, “experience is educative, or promotes growth, only when it continues to move us forward on the ‘experiential continuum’” (p. 28). His telling made me reconnect to my own past experiences. I also knew the overwhelming feeling of first year teaching. In my first and early years of teaching, the complexities, demands, and energy outputs often left me exhausted at the end of days. I remember a group of us young teachers would gather and talk about how painfully things were going and how sometimes we just wanted to curl into fetal position and feel supported. We called it “fetal position club”. The interaction with this first-year teacher educated my understanding of teacher anxiety. Along with this first-year teacher, I had other experienced teachers come to me and tell me that they had a hard time staying on top of their own difficulties with anxieties, let alone supporting their students who experienced tremendous anxiety. My heart went out to these teachers. They were the front-liners who worked day in and day out, gathering themselves every evening, to start again, just like I did those first years. My compassion came from my own experiences situated in the classroom. Being back in some of these teachers’ classrooms multiple times with the mindfulness work, I observed that the

teachers had personal shifts in their awareness and empowerment. Embodied strength and embodied resiliency are descriptions that come to mind when I think of these teachers. Looking around these educational spaces I began to understand that the mindfulness and breath awareness practices were supporting shifts of awareness in the teachers, and I felt closely attuned to their experiences.

The insightful quote, “the gift of inquiring into the past is that you can see it with new eyes” (Shaun Murphy, personal communication, October 20, 2015), made me reflect on my own early years with a compassionate eye. The process of looking back has been a gift within my experience. I strongly agree with Clandinin’s (2013) statement, “we must stay wide awake to be open to what is possible as well as to what becomes visible in the stories of experience” (p. 206-207). Through the contemplative practice of mindfulness, I believe I have gained tools to teach from my authenticity and in relational presence. It took me many years, but now I see the incidences from my early years as marking my future self. I realize my exploration of my own identity and awareness as a teacher has led me to research the embracing of contemplative practices in education.

The Research Puzzle

By retelling my own and the stories of these teachers, I have shed light on and looked closely at the details of the time, people and relationships involved. The retelling has allowed me to understand my inner self in a clear way and has highlighted that I am in a process of change...constantly.

My research puzzle creates one focus with subsidiary wonders: How does the experience of mindfulness practice shift teacher identity and awareness, and furthermore, promote compassionate educational communities? My secondary wonders include:

- What is the quality of the time educators spend with children and youth?
- As educators, how can the practice of mindfulness expand our experience of listening, loving kindness and compassion within educational spaces?

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

A Consideration of the Literature: Mindfulness in Education

Contemplative practices within education systems throughout the world have been increasingly explored and sought after as a way to explore personal and communal peace. The contemplative practice of mindfulness has distinct potential, when embodied by practitioner teachers, to bring one into a holistic awareness. Many scholars in the field of education are encouraging a paradigm shift reaching towards clarity of awareness and insight in teachers and learners (Bai, Scott & Donald, 2009; London, 2013; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). There are ever-growing demands and stresses experienced by teachers, learners, and all involved in our educational spaces. These demands and stresses, both internal and external, are catalysts for exploring mindful practices and furthermore, engaging this practice to promote compassionate educational communities.

An educator's embodied peace nurtures the roots of relationship, care, and compassion as foundations for education. Nurturing the ability for inner awareness as personal experience and the ability for relational awareness as community development (Cohen, Porath & Bai, 2010; Seidel, 2006) is essential for a mindful pedagogy. The expanding literature on the contemplative practice of mindfulness and its importance for inner and outer awareness highlights that many scholars have found this connection valuable in educational research. Mindful awareness is a way of being present and grows as an outcome of the process of incorporating mindfulness practices, with care, wisdom, and love, into our daily lives (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; McClain, Ylimaki & Ford, 2010; Seidel, 2006). Paradigm shifts are occurring and moving towards including contemplative practices in education (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Lin & Oxford, 2013;

Yeager & Howle, 2013). A critical dimension of life is awareness and its potential for change and growth (Cohen, et al., 2010). This review of literature explores the research ideas that bring clarity to what it means to authentically shift towards a mindful, embodied and holistic way of being, and furthermore, what it means to the aspect of community in education.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is paying attention, purposefully, with care and respect, non-judgmentally, and open-heartedly to what is happening around us (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; McClain et al., 2010; Schoeberlain & Sheth, 2009). Zenner et al. (2014) shared that mindfulness is derived from “eastern traditions and Buddhist psychology” (p. 1). Boccio (2004) highlighted that the word mindfulness, in Eastern traditional languages means “remembering” (p. 57). He further adds, “when we remember, we pay attention to what is happening” (p. 57). Kabat- Zinn (2005) shed light on the wise practices of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, which included “wise...view, wise thinking, wise speech, wise action, wise livelihood, wise effort, wise mindfulness, and wise concentration” (p. 138). He also added that mindfulness is the practice that unifies and informs all the others (p. 138). Bai et al. (2009) suggested that mindfulness is a practice that can “enhance and support self-knowledge” and “self-exploration” (p. 332). There are benefits and responsibilities of looking closely at what our minds are doing in order to understand how to shift from being mindless, lacking presence, and being caught in the past or future, to being mindful (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness builds the capacity to foster presence in life experiences. In education, a certain sense of peace can be experienced when one decides to be present in moments of

teaching (Seidel, 2006), in a thoughtful and mindful way, expanding outwards in a sacred manner of loving kindness to youth and children (Alderfer, 2015; Seidel, 2006). An individual's mindfulness practice leads them to insights, and it often gives them a larger, broader sense of awareness of what is beyond the moment-to-moment experience.

Ergas (2014) offered a valuable perspective on the intersections of science, religion, and healing as they pertain to mindfulness in education. Ergas (2014) shared about the “historical grounding of ‘mindfulness’ within its Buddhist origins” (p. 59) and the “contemporary embrace” (p. 67) of mindfulness by science, as well as, education. A substantial paradigmatic shift within the scientific research world came when research tests were done that demonstrated “a program of mindfulness practice yields positive effects on the brain and the immune function” (Ergas, 2014, p. 62).

Mindfulness programs in schools have been introduced over the last several years, both for adults and for children. Historically, the work being done with mindfulness in health care settings became an inspiration for bringing mindfulness into educational spaces. About 30 years ago, Jon Kabat-Zinn identified that a mindfulness practice would be beneficial in hospital settings. He was “a molecular biologist...well established in Buddhist teachings and the practice of Zen meditation” (Ergas, 2014, p. 60). Zenner et al. (2014) offered a detailed description of the work in the hospital that Kabat-Zinn began to offer:

John Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness as a resource into clinical research and practice through the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR). The MBSR program consists of 8 weekly sessions of 2 ½ h, and a day of mindfulness. Mindfulness is practiced formally in sitting meditation,

by simple yoga movements, and in the body-scan, which is a gradual sweeping of attention through the body. Mindfulness is also cultivated in daily activities such as eating, and by using it as a resource in emotionally challenging situations or in dealing with physical pain. The recommended daily home practice lasts approximately 45 min, and includes formal and informal exercises. Moreover, the program includes psycho-education, and attitudes such as not judging, a beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, letting go, and patience are encompassed. (p. 1)

Meiklejohn et al. (2012) shared that “within the past 10 to 15 years, a number of mindfulness-based curricula for children, teens, and teachers have been developed and implemented around the world” and many K-12 programs have been “influenced predominantly or in part by the mindfulness-based stress reduction program (p. 7). The following programs are offered: Inner Kids Program, Inner Resilience Program (IRP), Learning to BREATHE, Mindful Schools, MindUP, Still Quiet Place, Stressed Teens, Wellness Works in Schools (trademark), Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) and Sfat Hakeshev (The Mindfulness Language) (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 9-11). These programs reported students having decreased anxiety and stress, emotional regulation, and improvements in attention and mood (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 2). The following were the mindfulness-based training programs for teachers: Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), and Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques in Education (SMART) (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 4).

In higher education we see a keen interest in mindfulness on campuses across North America and beyond, for students and employees, in undergraduate and graduate courses. Massari (2019) shared his article on the website of the Harvard Divinity School about the University of Southern California's Dean of Religious Studies. It is about the Dean's attempts to meet the mental health crisis with mindfulness.

The following are higher education centers and networks with established programs in mindfulness and contemplative studies within Canada alone:

- University of Toronto: The Transformative Learning Centre
- University of Toronto: Applied Mindfulness Meditation
- Victoria University in University of Toronto: Diploma in Buddhist Mindfulness and Mental Health
- The Centre for Mindfulness Studies, Toronto
- Simon Fraser University, The Master of Education (M. Ed.) in Contemplative Inquiry and Approaches in Education
- University of Calgary - Master of Education: Leading with Heart
- University of British Columbia - Okanagan Campus: Centre for Mindful Engagement and Smart Education Program for Educators
- University of Ottawa: Contemplative Studies and Well-being Option
- Royal Roads University: Integrated Mindfulness Certificate

Researchers, studying mindfulness in education, caution us to discern why these practices are sought after in educational spaces. There is a growing trend of educators wanting to have the students in their schools experience some mindfulness training, without a significant and often basic understanding of what mindfulness is. Ergas (2014)

encouraged a close and critical understanding of how the evolution of mindfulness in education has stemmed from “scientific findings” (p. 66) and shared that,

the compartmentalization of mindfulness to fit science’s ability to measure, accompanied by the thirst of educational policy-makers for standards and achievements, could not but affect the object measured along the way. (p. 67)

Hyland (2017) warned against “reductionist, commodified forms of mindfulness practice” (p. 335) and encouraged practitioners to be wary of thinking of mindfulness as a program for efficiency (p. 336). Treleaven (2018) highlighted that in “mainstream consumer culture ... [mindfulness is] being marketed as a quick-fix solution to stress” (p. 25). Treleaven brought forth a critical understanding of trauma-sensitive mindfulness practices and shared the following guiding question within his work, which offers a crucial perspective for mindful educators: “Given the ubiquity of trauma, how could mindfulness practitioners ensure they were offering practices in an effective, informed, trauma-sensitive way?” (p. xxii). Treleaven further encouraged identifying “trauma professionals” (p. 79) available in local communities and considering “psychoeducation – a process of providing information and support” (p. 80) to understand what is happening in the brain and body. There are many complex factors to consider when thinking about mindfulness in education. It is of great importance for educators to consider their own depth of development and understanding of the practice of mindfulness to inform the introduction of these practices to children. Ergas (2015) shared,

Students that are skillfully instructed in the practice of mindfulness as part of their school day (even when instrumentally construed), are receiving deep teachings, some of which can be elaborated as follows: (a) attending the

present-moment inner experience is an educationally worthwhile activity, (b) our inner-world is a meaningful arena, (c) meaning might exist *here and now* and not only in the future in which a certain educational aim might be achieved. (p. 204)

Mindful awareness situates itself within the individual and is transformational as this awareness moves outside oneself reaching towards the external world and all people and places within it (Byrnes, 2012). A combination of inner experience with outward learning (Grace, 2011; Lin, 2013; Miller, 2000) forms and shapes both teacher and learner identity. The harmony of inner experience with outer awareness of our daily lives leads to a sense of connection and well-being that can be holistic, and that may also “reduce the propensity for inner and outer conflict, depression, unworthiness, and self-destructive actions” (Yeager & Howle, 2013, p. 127).

Kabat-Zinn (2005) highlighted:

Generosity, trustworthiness, kindness, empathy, compassion, gratitude, joy in the good fortune of others, inclusiveness, acceptance and equanimity are qualities of mind and heart that further the possibilities of well-being and clarity within oneself, to say nothing of the beneficial effects they have in the world. They form the foundation for an ethical and moral life. (p. 103)

Educators practicing relational mindfulness, which fosters connection to others, allow a space for openness, acceptance, and receptivity when situations become emotionally charged (Burrows, 2011).

Inner Work for Well-being

A commitment to inner work to support self-realization and well-being of educators, and future educators, may benefit educational landscapes. Cohen, et al. (2010) suggested that, “inner work is the practice of recognizing the personal and transpersonal roots of the human dimension” (p. 7). Scholars in the field of education recognize the importance of embodying self-cultivation and honoring contemplative teaching, both of which allow the teacher to experience directly and know intimately the value of honoring inner states (Bai, Cohen, & Scott, 2013; Brown, 1998). At a time when contemplative practices are not broadly or politically encouraged, we can be open to the depth, grace, and courage these practices might offer teachers (Seidel, 2006). Teachers might look closely at how they *live* a mindfulness curriculum in a holistic way, developing their own social and emotional well-being (Kessler, 2001; Rechtschaffen, 2016). The more we become familiar and grounded within ourselves and aware of our identity, the greater integrity we have as teachers (Byrnes, 2012; Palmer, 1998).

Reflecting on teacher identity as changing in nature allows us to consider who we are and who we are becoming on a moment-to-moment basis. Wang (2017) explored the Buddhist concept of ‘no self’ in the following passage:

‘I am’ in this moment, which becomes ‘I was’ in the following moment. The consciousness of ‘I’ is thus illusory; it is not something we can retain. The no-self approximates a spiritual level of selflessness, reminding us that humans should be free of the attitude of egotism. (p. 555)

Our changing ideas, biases, truths, and experiences as educators, influence each moment we spend in a relationship with the other. We are encouraged to continually

reflect on the idea that our identity as teachers is becoming new all the time as we relate within our communities and spaces. These practices of inner work can be seen as a focus of educators, on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level, rather than a distraction from their professional work (Cohen, et al., 2010). Cohen et al. (2010) highlighted an understanding of teacher presence to mean “the ability to see, feel, know, and notice present experience [which] enhances the potential for a strong, felt connection between educator and learners” (p. 5). Building community requires both renewal and fostering of our capacities to reach towards others within our teaching and learning circles.

Cultivation of Reconnected Community

Now more than ever there is a need to bring reconnection within community to the centre of practices in education. Bai (2001) went as far as to say humanity faces a widely acknowledged crisis, which is hard to act upon, and this crisis relates to the aspect of community within education. An underlying feeling of disconnection predominates our society, our institutions, and our systems of education and health. Gathering spaces in education are often devoid of deep belonging and support. Traditionally and currently, the focus on the rational and disconnected mind exists in our education system (Bai & Cohen, 2007; Culham, 2013) and there is a lack of attention paid to the spirit or inner development of students (Bai & Cohen, 2007; Miller, 2000). Traditional education is dualistic in nature (Seidel, 2014; Bai et al., 2009; Ergas, 2014), and this dualism, spanning kindergarten to higher education, is predominantly ingrained in our society. Uhl and Stuchul (2011) shared that, “contemporary schools are ever more narrowly geared toward shaping the intellect alone, with social and emotional learning relegated to being lower-tier goals” (p. 17). We need to be careful not to reduce education to

mechanics like tests, products, and results (Cohen et al., 2010; Wildcat, 2001) and we are encouraged to move away from a curriculum based in Cartesian philosophy, where mind/body dualism exists as disembodied pedagogy (Ergas, 2014; Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, & Liaghatdar, 2012). We are alerted that we see ourselves as separate and apart from nature and that there is a predominance of separation, disconnection, and disembodied curriculum within our educational system (Seidel, 2006; Ergas, 2014). Wong (2013) shared that, “with very little time to stop, slow down, and take a step back, we are disconnected from the wholeness of ourselves and others” (p. 283). Choosing what we want to cultivate in educational spaces is a step towards fostering connectedness.

There is great potential for educational spaces to provide cultivation of wholeness, within teaching and learning, by attending to the aspects of body, heart, mind, and spirit as they are connected to knowledge (Bai & Cohen, 2007; Byrnes, 2012; Lawrence, 2012). An existing movement in thought, where the cultivation of the whole person should be the focus of education, is beginning to create a needed shift of direction (Bai & Cohen, 2007). Mindfulness, including loving kindness and compassion building, are needed in our teaching and learning spaces (Alderfer, 2015; Seidel, 2006) to foster connection. If educators collectively seek to practice embodiment, then contemplative practices such as mindfulness can facilitate healthy behavior and brain development, both of which are valuable in the lives of children in the short term and the long term (Shapiro, et al., 2015). Grounding into who we are, encouraged by Palmer (1998), and embodying the practices of care and kindness into our moments, allows us to form a foundation for healthy relationships within educational communities. Uhl and Stuchul (2011) also suggested that we shift our understanding from that of “*separation consciousness* to

relational consciousness”(p. 4-5). In the context of relationship, we become aware of our interactions, including reactions and responses, with others (Boccio, 2004; Tucker, 2000). Practicing mindfulness allows for us to carefully engage with others. In educational spaces, relationship and community can be enhanced by the practice of loving kindness, which places our loving attention on another being for whom we wish peace, joy and well-being (Zajonc, 2006). In working towards richness in our relationships within our classroom and community, contemplative practices matter and can lead to building compassion as a foundation for creating a space for belonging and togetherness. The means of contemplative practices and the deep manner of care demonstrated by teachers could contribute to a healthy relationship and sense of connection with others (Cohen et al., 2010; Schoeberlain & Sheth, 2009; Seidel, 2006). Byrnes (2012) shared the idea that a teacher with a “contemplative orientation” (p. 23) teaches with “compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness” (p. 23). As one grows in their mindful awareness and compassionate actions, we may more easily see the beneficial expressions of generosity and carefulness in the educator and student relationship (McClain et al., 2010). Barbezat and Bush (2014) suggested, in regards to higher education, the integration of contemplative practices may enrich the relationships of students “with themselves, each other, and the world” (p. 39). Exceptional educators demonstrate that authentic care is established by facilitating meaningful connections, both at personal and curricular levels (Cohen et al., 2010). The art of weaving together the curricular threads, with a compassionate intention in mind, can be life affirming to teachers and learners. This sort of intention can also play a great role in addressing the well-being of learners in both a mental and social capacity. Bai (2001) supported the idea that mindfulness assists us in

remembering that we are essentially not separate from the world, and encourages us to attend to our moment-to-moment living in relationship. This remembering heightens our social connection and compassion, both of which are highlighted by Seppala, Rossomando, and Doty (2013), as important predictors of health and wellbeing. Mindful educators, influence the quality of time that they spend with learners and grow a capacity to offer experiences infused with listening, loving kindness and compassion, thereby, nurturing compassionate communities. The practice of mindfulness, when taken up by the educator in a meaningful and sensitive way, can foster nurturing of compassionate connection. Development of “*compassionate practice*” (Taggart, 2016, p. 176) in teacher professional development, teacher education programs, and educational communities is imperative for renewing foundations for well-being in education.

Mindfulness and Implications for Well-being

The contemplative practice of mindfulness has been studied from various vantage points and many potential benefits have been documented. Researchers have found evidence of impact on educators, both on personal and professional levels, from the standpoints of neuroscience, medicine, and psychology (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Salmon, Lush, Jablonski, and Sephton (2008) shared the many health benefits of mindfulness extensively discussing the psychological benefits of these practices. According to Shute and Slee (2016) mental health and well-being initiatives are not possible in schools without teacher commitment. A person’s awareness and perception of their own stress is changed when a person is connected (Seppala, Rossomondo, & Doty, 2013). Listening ability and relational ability, along with reflection on inner and outer experiences, are valuable in connected educational spaces

(Cohen et al., 2010). Openness to new possibilities of what educational spaces offer and who educators are within those spaces can direct the future of fostering mental well-being within schools. In a growing culture of anxiety and stress in schools, educators are encouraged to reflect on the following questions: What role does prevention of mental illness play in education? What does prevention mean on a larger scale? (Shute & Slee, 2016). Shapiro et al. (2015) concluded that future research on contemplative practices in childhood education may have “significant potential for children’s social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being, both for short and long term” (p. 26). In her study on relational mindfulness, Burrows (2011) highlighted the advantage of having a guide, who is practiced at mindfulness meditation and embodies the essence of the practice, within the learning community.

Final thoughts Related to the Literature

Educators who are awake and accept the reality of how things are in education, yet still endeavor to pursue a vision of community, belonging, and connectedness (Cohen et al., 2010) will lead us into a paradigm of education for human well-being. When we have looked closely at our life experiences and taken time to understand ourselves, we are better able to provide opportunities for self-understanding for others. We need to consider the benefits of mindfulness to the educator, student, and educator-student relationship. We also need to consider the complexities of the practice of mindfulness in education as to do with the intersections of historical and cultural background, trauma-sensitivity, and science. We need to consider how these practices shift teachers’ identity and awareness. At this time in education, we must attend to the potential that this practice has to cultivate compassionate communities. The literature affirms my research

wonder, which I include again: How does the experience of mindfulness practices shift teacher identity and inner awareness and promote compassionate educational communities?

CHAPTER THREE.
NARRATIVE INQUIRY METHODOLOGY: EXPERIENTIAL AND RELATIONAL
FOUNDATIONS

Narrative inquiry is an intricate and comprehensive research methodology, which involves a commitment to human connection. Narrative inquiry, as a methodology for researching human beings, allows a researcher to attempt to understand the stories and experiences of others. Conditions are created for participants and researcher to engage in the practice of inquiring into stories based on experience. Narrative inquiry is a rich process of researching into the lives of human beings and explores a deep sense of interrelatedness and connectedness. Wheatley (2002), shared the poem, Indra's Net, from the Rig Veda, as described by Anne Adams. It is a reminder of the significance of our relations:

Indra's Net

There is an endless net of threads throughout
the universe...

At every crossing of the threads there is a
an individual.

And every individual is a crystal bead.

And every crystal bead reflects

not only the light from every

other crystal in the net

but also every other reflection

throughout the entire universe (p. 120-121)

Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) shared that, “narrative inquiry is how we understand human experience” (p. 584). The experiential and relational foundation of my research puzzle led me to choose narrative inquiry as a research methodology. This research methodology inspired the intention and awareness of telling and listening at its centre. My research puzzle wondered about how mindfulness practices shift teachers’ identity and inner awareness, and furthermore how aspects of the educational community are affected. This section shares the intricacies of narrative inquiry, considers narrative inquiry from an ontological and epistemological foundation, and shares why I have chosen narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

What is Narrative Inquiry?

Understanding Experience

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) shared, in rich detail, the following support for the use of narrative inquiry as a research methodology:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 477)

Narrative inquiry involves sensitivity to multiple intersections and dimensions of experience. A significant starting point to understanding narrative inquiry as a research methodology is the consideration that experience is at the centre of this

practice and is expansive in nature. The image of a widening, expanding circle comes to mind throughout the inquiry, reaching before the inquiry and beyond the inquiry. Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) suggested that narrative inquiry allows for inquiry into the lived experience of participants, and may also be attentive to “social, cultural, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives” (p. 45) in their particular situations. Awareness of immediate and intimate experience is explored along with how the experience extends into one’s environment, relationships, and spaces.

Dewey (1938) stated, “experience is educative, or promotes growth, only when it continues to move us forward on the ‘experiential continuum’” (p. 28). The narrative inquirer attends with care to the details of the present moment experiences of participants and fosters an understanding of “full meaning of each present experience” (p. 49). Within this narrative research work particular attention is given to self and other observation of experience and how it unfolds. Dewey further suggested that our new “knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (p. 44). Narrative inquirers see experience as always unfolding and that it is “lived in the midst” (Caine et al., 2013, p. 575) without a distinct beginning or end, in various social context, and in place. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2010) shared that, “as narrative inquirers, our lived and told stories are always in relation to or with those of our participants” (p. 82). The three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place are reflected in the experience, interaction, and continuity of a situation (Caine et al., 2013).

Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

The three dimensions or commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place, are described in Connelly and Clandinin (2006) as simultaneously explored. All three commonplaces are of equal importance in a narrative inquiry, and all heighten our understanding of each participant in a whole and expansive manner.

Temporality

Temporality has to do with the notion of time. With regards to ‘temporality’ we are, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggested, trying to “give a temporal picture of each in transition” (p. 480), meaning researcher inquiries will acknowledge that participants’ lives are in the process of change. We must ensure that we are attempting to understand each participant from a wide lens taking into account their history and their future, and how they may change and shift. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that to do “research into an experience — is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and ask questions pointing each way” (p. 50). The four ways they speak of are the individual’s past and future, and inward and outward awareness, of their life experience. Clandinin (2013) suggested that, “each story of experience opens into new stories to be lived and told, always with the possibility of retelling and reliving” (p.203). We are prompted to consider experience as circular, rounded, and expansive rather than linear.

Sociality

Sociality has to do with relationship. Clandinin et al. (2013) mentioned that, “relationships among narrative inquirers and participants are at the heart of narrative inquiry” (p. 49). The ‘sociality’ dimension places importance on personal conditions (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). In regards to sociality we also attend to the relationship between the

inquirer and the participant. This important relationship may form the foundation of the inquiry through collaboration, openness and trust.

Place

Place is the third commonplace and has to do with location and where experience is situated. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) highlighted place to mean, “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480-481). Often there will be more than one place where experiences occur and our experiences are connected to the stories of that place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 4).

I understand people, time, and places to be woven into my body. I have noticed the impact of my experiences, past and present, in place, and in relation to others. Experiences I have had in the past seem to inform the expression of my new unfolding experiences. For example, when I am walking in the trees my breath becomes more at ease. I have noticed a response in my body to the environment and often find myself later experiencing a sense of ease in an alternate environment just by bringing my attention to my body. Michell (2005) shared the Woodlands Cree worldview to believe that there is “no separation between humans and land” (p. 40/41) and “we are a part of nature and nature is a part of us” (p. 37). I also often find myself affected by the presence of others. I have noticed my embodiment or expression to be reflective of someone I have shared experience or am in relation with. Caine et al. (2013) suggested that these three commonplaces of our life stories are understood within the larger “cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives” (p. 577). The work of narrative inquiry is grounded in connection and reflection of researchers and participants.

Researchers in this process are considerate of their impact and continuously consider justification of this process at a variety of intersections.

Justifications for the Research

In considering educational research and the audience of this narrative inquiry, three justifications required examination to clarify the purpose of my research.

Personal, practical and social justifications are meaningfully explored to answer the questions of “So what” and “Who cares?” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 175) which are important to the researcher, participants, and the greater educational landscape.

Personal Justification

In regards to the personal justification considering my research puzzle, I identified with a holistic foundation for education reaching for balance between inner and outer explorations of being. My tension expressed itself as fragmentation and separateness of experience in educational relationships due to lack of teacher personal development and inner awareness practices. In looking at my own stories, fragmentation and separateness did not support my growth as a learner or an educator. The tools of mindfulness and breath awareness, in my own experience, have been grounding and supportive.

Cultivating compassionate inquiry into the lives of others has become a part of my way of life. I recognized that the seeds of deficiency I felt as a teacher, when a learner was affected intimately with familial suicide, grew into an empowering learning journey. I have been better able to affirm and engage in compassionate action because of personal mindfulness practices. These practices in turn have shaped and nurtured a contemplative pedagogy within the educational spaces that I find myself a part of. In my journey I have been reaching towards wholeness. For me a sense of living in wholeness and returning

again and again to moments is where a sense of peace and well-being can be felt (Alderfer, 2015; Byrnes, 2012).

Practical Justification

In addressing practical justifications, mindful awareness can enhance relationships and a strong sense of community in educational settings. The practice of mindfulness begins with noticing our connections to one another. McClain et al. (2010) suggested compassion arises through the expression of generosity, “a deep wish for others to be free from suffering” (p. 312), and carefulness, “responsive stability” (p. 313) in the educator and learner relationship. Carlsson-Paige (2001) reminded us that, “the need for schools to become communities that embrace the wholeness of the human experience is greater now than ever before” (p. 24). Bruce (2008) suggested that narrative inquiry is a “creative and holistic research method” (p. 325) and that can “liberate us by opening up the multiple dimensions of human beings and our experiences as places to be honed for spiritual depth and insight” (p. 326).

Somewhere between the daily experiences of my own early years of teaching, my colleagues, a group of masterful educators, supported my exploration of my sacred inner landscapes. In recollection, I understand that particular time as the beginning of my advocating for the inner life of children. Palmer (1998) stated that, “the kind of teaching that transforms people does not happen if the student’s inward teacher is ignored. The second truth is even more daunting: we can speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves” (p. 31). This notion of inward teacher shifted my ideas about sociality, and linked my personal authenticity and development to that of those in my sphere of influence, whether they are adults or youth.

Social Justification

Self-awareness practices embodied by educational administrators and teachers in schools can have a beneficial affect on the children they are in relationship with. Building a language and practice of mindfulness for an educational community offers the opportunity for a deeper level of connection, understanding, and being with the other. Noddings (2012) strongly encouraged creating a climate “in which caring relations can flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers” (p. 777). There is expanding evidence showing that mindfulness, amongst other contemplative practices, can “facilitate the development of mindful awareness and compassion in adults” (Roeser & Eccles, 2015, p. 1). Teacher identity and teacher personal development are both at the center of the justification of this work. Connelly and Clandinin (1994) believed, “that if we want to understand stability and change in the schools, if we want to improve education, we need to understand and support teacher development” (p. 147). The social justifications of this inquiry have to do with the relational aspect of the teacher and learner experience. Kyte (2016) explored mindfulness practices with pre-service and practicing teachers with the intention of supporting teachers to sustain a sense of “self in relation to their lived experience” (p. 1145) and with a focus on well-being. Kyte discussed “new pedagogies that are contributing to the transformation of teachers, students, and education” (p. 1143). Educators, making sense of their existence and embodying the inner awareness that mindfulness can foster, will be better attuned and beneficial in the lives of those around them. Byrnes (2012) shared that “teachers’ transformative experiences have the potential to develop and enhance their ability to teach with compassion, integrity and mindful awareness” (p. 25).

The questions of ‘so what’ and ‘who cares’ are addressed when we consider the relational impact that educators make when they are being mindful during their experiences.

Theoretical Justifications - Ontological and Relational Responsibilities in the Research

Experience

Narrative inquiry engages deeply in experiential relationship and is grounded in an ontological commitment, and also a relational commitment (Caine et al., 2013). Based on Dewey’s (1938) idea of continuity, epistemological roots of this method are experiential, relational, and reach towards wholeness. Clandinin et al. (2013) suggested that lives are composed as a process of change; involving the “temporal unfolding of their lives in different places and in different relationships” (p. 48). An unfolding narrative inquiry, involves lives lived which are “composed and re-composed in relation with others who are also living storied lives” (Caine et al., 2013, p. 576) and also makes ethical obligations central to the work. Attention to ethical matters must be given on a moment-to-moment basis within the entirety of a narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated that “ethical considerations permeate narrative inquiries from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined, as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts” (p. 483). Through a practice of negotiating with participants about how to share narrative accounts, we honor a “commitment to a form of togetherness in research that seeks to explore how we are living in the midst of our stories” (Caine et al., 2013, p. 576). Caine et al. (2013) further proposed an “attentiveness and wakefulness” (p. 581), when listening and

understanding life stories.

Listening

Clandinin et.al (2013), suggested that lives are composed as a process of change; involving the “temporal unfolding of their lives in different places and in different relationships” (p. 48). I have observed shifts of change, within myself, that have taken place as a result of my efforts to embody the practices of being mindful, living by the principles of mindfulness and mindful yoga and becoming intimate with my breath. These shifts have enriched my moments of presence in educational landscapes with children, youth, colleagues and environments. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) clearly supported the notion of listening in the following passage:

By listening to participant stories of their experience of teaching and learning, we hope to write narratives of what it means to educate and be educated.

These inquiries need to be soft, or perhaps *gentle* is a better term. What is at stake is the creation of situations of trust in which the storytelling urge, so much a part of the best parts of our social life, finds expression. (p. 12)

The Woodland Cree believe that “the value of kindness is the foundation for all relationships with oneself and others” (Michell, 2005, p.41). Relationships build over time and take effort. Caine et al. (2013) shared that, “understanding life stories and stories to live by requires an attentiveness and wakefulness within the relationships we enter as narrative inquirers” (p. 581). I strongly agree with Clandinin’s (2013) statement that, “we must stay wide awake to be open to what is possible as well as to what becomes visible in the stories of experience” (206-7). Huebner (1996) suggested that, “caring for a whole person is talking about and caring for that person’s present, past, and future” (p.

270). Telling and retelling of stories fosters a sense of mindfulness or paying attention to the moments of the story in order to have new understandings. Clandinin's (2013) statement above reminds us to consider our own practices of mindfulness in relation. Burrows (2011) shared relational mindfulness as supportive within educational spaces to deepen listening, and furthermore to create a "calming, and non-judgmental context" (p. 25).

Inquiring Into Stories

The process of narrative inquiry into my past storied experiences, my narrative beginnings, led me to be grounded in my belief that kindness and compassion are foundational in education. Inquiring into my stories has been worthwhile to my personal and educational growth, and might I say it has been essential. As I embarked on the work of research, I was reminded by Caine et al. (2013) that, "the researcher's presence and investment is an important feature of narrative inquiry research" (p. 577). My intentional and personal practice of mindfulness on a daily basis allowed me to be aware of my ability to be present in moment-to-moment engagement with others. Kabat-Zinn (2005), stated that, "mindfulness can be thought of as an openhearted, non-judgmental, present-moment awareness, the direct, non-conceptual knowing of experience as it unfolds, in its arising, in its momentary lingering, and in its passing away" (p. 128).

Clandinin et al. (2010) addressed tensions in the midst of experience and sharing of stories within an inquiry. These tensions have to do with both the researcher and participant as the inquiry affects and changes them both (Clandinin, et al., 2013). Becoming aware of one's moment-to-moment presence and breath patterns, is a possibility within a practice of mindfulness. Dreidger-Enns said, "the breath helps us

stay with the tensions (of our stories)” (personal communication, day unknown, 2015).
The breath allows us to anchor in a time of chaos and confusion.

The Method...The Doing

Beginning The Research

Clandinin et al. (2010) described “professional-knowledge landscapes” (p. 81), as a metaphor for “thinking about the spaces, places and temporality of school contexts” (p. 81). The narrative inquirer and the participants negotiate a place to begin. It is within these contexts that the relations unfold and negotiations take place between inquirer and participant, considering field texts, interim texts and final research texts (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

Field Texts

Clandinin and Huber (2010), described the process of narrative inquiry as a “recursive process among being in the field, composing field texts, drafting and sharing interim research texts and composing research texts” (p. 10). The negotiating of the field texts took place alongside the participants, forming the research texts shaped the participant and inquirer’s journey. Clandinin and Huber also suggested that, “ongoing negotiation with participants allows narrative inquirers to create research texts that both critically and deeply represent the narrative inquirers’ and participants’ experiences” (p. 13). Field notes were kept by the inquirer, regarding thoughts and feelings during interviews and informal meetings, and became a part of data analysis. It is important to recall Caine et al’s. (2013) words that, “as narrative inquirers, we stay as close to people’s experiences as we can” (p. 578). This process of research, much like the process of mindfulness, recognized that the purpose of such study is to attempt to understand

experiences without an end in mind. Field texts “support complex meaning making of researchers” and “represent the experiences as lived and told in that moment and place and as validated by the participants” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 601). Researcher skill and experience with momentary presence, in the work of narrative inquiry, is of central importance.

Research Design

This research study focused on the narratives of one administrator and two teachers in a school setting in order to understand their knowledge and experience of mindfulness and what role this experience played in their relationships, and perhaps understanding of teaching and learning. The school setting was an educational space in which the whole staff had had opportunities to become familiar with mindfulness. I found this school through my supervisor Shaun who had been conducting his research work in this setting. Shaun had told me that the principal had been developing her understanding of mindfulness and supporting mindfulness experiences for children and adults in the school. He felt the principal would be interested in my research work and we planned an initial meeting. The principal had a couple of teachers in mind for the study. I was introduced to a teacher that was in his third year of teaching and the wellness coordinator. It was a small community school in which lots of larger community events took place. A nearby city, only twenty minutes away, offers various amenities not found in small rural towns. The principal spoke of the school community fondly and told of her experience shifting how the school looked over time. She painted the outside of the school to make it more welcoming and made aesthetic changes inside. Most of all she wanted the young people who walked through the doors to feel welcome

and connected. The staff was friendly and there were many programs that involved meeting diverse needs of the school population such as recycling, breakfast club, and music lessons. The staff and students all had varying experience with mindfulness from personal interest, whole school assemblies, sessions in classrooms, and gratitude meetings (instead of staff meetings).

The participants were at varying points in their educational journeys with varying degrees of school or classroom experience. The purpose of this investigation was to learn from the stories of the participants and how their previous and possible new experiences with mindfulness were influenced. In this regard ethical responsibilities to the research relationship were placed at the centre of the work. I was mindful of negotiating with participants where they felt was the best place to have conversations and interactions. In beginning work with participants, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested that, “negotiating entry is commonly seen as an ethical matter framed in terms of principles that establish responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners” (p.3). All involved decide how to begin and set ethical boundaries together. In this work data collection and data analysis need to be done in a careful way and inquirers must ‘deepen’ their appreciation for what it means to live and inquire into the life of another in an ethical manner (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483).

Field Text Collection and Analysis

I began this research with an interview of each participant. Researcher and participants negotiated two more subsequent interviews, discussing appropriate time and place, for a total of three interviews and five visits over the course of a few months. The interview process, central to the inquiry, allowed a base for a relationship to flourish

between inquirer and participant. The flow of the conversation and communication between the two is highly important in this method. I gathered my data by transcriptions of interviews and informal conversations. Some time for classroom observation and presence was also negotiated within the school visits. The school board was contacted and granted permission to undergo this research study with participants and possible researcher presence with children in the school setting.

Conclusion

My commitment to the honoring of experience as teacher, and relationship as foundation for learning within educational spaces, is grown out of my experiences with youth and teachers over the last twenty years. Literature and research has been reviewed to identify current knowledge and findings related to this narrative inquiry. My own mindfulness practice and experience with bringing mindfulness into educational spaces, as highlighted in Chapter 1, also informed this study. Narrative inquiry is an ongoing “reflexive and reflective methodology” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 171). Rigorous attention was given to the details and subtleties of this unfolding narrative inquiry. Zajonc’s (2013) idea of “*complete attention*” (p. 93) came to mind when considering narrative inquiry as a research methodology. The method of narrative inquiry allowed practice in the mindful awareness of the lives of the participants. My research puzzle wondered about the personal stories of educators going from a knowledge base of mindfulness practices to an embodied personal practice and how shifts in their experience as educators might have unfolded.

Transitioning to Chapter 4

The previous chapters offered insight into my exploration of personal, theoretical, social, and methodological justification. Aspects of narrative inquiry have been investigated in order to understand and honor experience as teacher without an end in mind. In the process of the research with participants the method of narrative inquiry became somewhat of a practice of mindful awareness about their storied experiences. The following chapter explores the experiences of Russell, a beginning teacher, and Willa, a wellness educator, as they came into mindfulness. Patti's experience of being a principal and leader is extensively shared in chapter five of this thesis. Her story is told separately in order to understand her distinctive experience of mindfulness in leadership within a learning community. We explore how their unique experiences of mindfulness are woven into the fabric of their school. The following chapter has been submitted for publication review to the *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* with Shaun Murphy as co-author.

CHAPTER FOUR.
COMING INTO MINDFULNESS

Vignette ~ A Warm Welcome

The soft and playful flowers on the wall welcomed me in to the front doors of the school. Not sure what to expect, I felt compelled to move slowly into the small circular entrance where I see three words on a plant pot:

grateful, thankful, blessed

My head turned, and what I saw next was a beautiful visual canvas sharing an artful definition of the word 'family',

family : people who share a common start, and grow to share a common heart.

I instantly shared my feeling with Shaun, my co-researcher; a feeling of warmth one often feels when they are home. I even said it already reminded me of the sanctuary of the schools I had once worked in with kindred spirit educators in the distant past. My heart space felt open so quickly in this new space and I remember saying "My people are here!"

A few moments later, down the hall, on the way to the gym, the principal smiled and said to one of the children, "This is my new friend Sonal," I felt welcomed.

At the gym, we met a young man who regularly practiced mindful yoga with the children. There was giggling and smiles and high fives as the kids walked in and found their space. The process of arriving in the gym seemed soft and joyful. The first to come patiently waited as the last ones trickled in. The principal welcomed all adults and children with her smile and found her seat also on the floor with the children. I remember smiling at this unfolding process.

The mindfulness teacher rang the bell, invited us to close our eyes and take a deep breath. I witnessed a slight raise in the chest of many children around me as their lungs expanded and then the deep let down of the chest and shoulders. I remember feeling my own shoulders relax and shift down away from my ears, as the children relaxed. A collective sigh could be heard and I remember feeling a sense of peace as my breath became conscious.

It was clear, the intention was to make children and community members feel welcome. It occurred to us that the symbol of a flower invites young people to come in and bloom. Even strangers like us, upon entering the school know that there is something

kind here, something seemingly soft and nourishing. The ease we felt coming into this place was unusual. Seeing the words ‘thankful, grateful, blessed’ alongside a definition of ‘family’ offered the sense that connectedness was important here.

Sonal was careful and cautious as she and Shaun spent time in the front entrance. This was a mindful way to enter, whether into a building or into an experience with another person. As we moved into an unknown environment we observed the language of space, the power of words, and the actions of others to make sense of that which we once did not know. Inside this rural school, in which this narrative inquiry unfolded, we instantaneously felt welcomed and at home. As visitors, any caution and care quickly turned into curiosity and intrigue. Sonal realized she moved slowly and carefully, when she moved from outside/outer to inside/inner spaces. The power of language all over the walls and the behavior of the principal, secretary, staff, and children all set an inclusive tone for the visit.

The mindfulness experience in the gym, involving the whole school, had us in the most intimate of explorations breathing life force slowly in and out of our bodies in a kind and gentle way. A gathering this big, and in this way, is a significant happening, especially in this mindful way of learning to breathe together. Iyengar (1999) stated that, Pranayama, a breathing practice, “is a conscious prolongation of inhalation, retention and exhalation” (p.10) and that “the practice of Pranayama develops a steady mind, strong will-power and sound judgment” (p. 10). Sitting and breathing brought us all together in a moment of time. Hanh (2015) suggested, “when we breathe mindfully, we reclaim our territory of body and mind and we encounter life in the present moment” (p. 17). Sonal’s first impression and observation of this school was certainly impacted by the commitment

of the leadership and staff to development of the whole lives of the children. Their actions were reaching towards wellness for themselves and the children.

In her own teaching and learning journey, Sonal had come into mindfulness years before while teaching at an elementary school in an urban centre. She had been exploring breath awareness and yoga in her personal life, when the principal at her school sent out a short clip about mindfulness in schools to all of the teachers. The principal had been developing an understanding of how to nurture teachers to experience such practices for themselves and, furthermore, to understand how children's well-being might be enhanced. At that time, in her work, Sonal was considering how to nourish the inner awareness of children because she realized that outer awareness was predominantly encouraged. Sonal realized that teachers often lack the ability, time, experience, and education to honor children's experience in a holistic manner. She began to learn what mindfulness was and why it mattered in education.

What is Mindfulness?

As she developed an understanding of mindfulness, Sonal came to increase her own practice of bringing her attention into the present moment. Kabat-Zinn (2005) shared that mindfulness can be thought of as, "an openhearted, non-judgmental, present-moment awareness, the direct, non-conceptual knowing of experience as it unfolds, in its arising, in its momentary lingering, and in its passing away" (p. 128). Barbezat and Bush (2014) suggested that "mindfulness is being aware in the present moment, not judging but accepting things as they are" (p. 98). Over time, Sonal realized she felt more present and attuned to others and her environment. She also felt more connected to her breath. Sonal felt the quality of her personal and professional relationships became significantly

more meaningful. The following quote by Kabat-Zinn (2013) highlights the true essence of mindfulness:

When we speak of mindfulness, it is important to keep in mind that we equally mean heartfulness. In fact, in Asian languages, the word for “mind” and the word for “heart” are usually the same. So if you are not hearing or feeling the word heartfulness when you encounter or use the word mindfulness, you are in all likelihood missing its essence. (p. xxxv)

Murphy-Shigetmatsu (2018) suggested that a mainstream image of mindfulness is “that it means being self-centered, yet we can better reframe our inner work as a collective, communal, and connected way of being” (p. 13). The harmony of inner experience with outer awareness leads to a sense of wellbeing that can be holistic, preventative, integrative, and compassionate (Yeager & Howle, 2013). We realized our research school had undergone changes over time and they were trying to prevent children, teachers, staff, and people in the community from feeling disconnected. They had been building a language of mindfulness based on the experience and understanding of the principal and wellness educator, and felt kindness and compassion was central to their community building. In our multiple visits to this school we witnessed and became familiar with the diverse layers of experience and intentions of the research participants and how they came into mindfulness.

Here We Are...In This Place

Sonal came to understand that this small rural school, G. F. Meyer Elementary¹ two hours away from a major city centre, was home to leadership and a group of educators

¹ All names of places and people are pseudonyms

who based their learning and teaching in the practice of mindfulness. By the end of the first day of Sonal's initial visit, she had had conversations with three primary research participants. Although the encounters were brief that first day, Sonal recognized the diversity of experience with mindfulness that the three participants possessed. The place reflected a quality of interrelatedness of a thoughtful group of people. The principal (Patti), the wellness educator (Willa), and a young teacher (Russell), were the primary research participants, who shared their unique story of coming into mindfulness. This narrative inquiry wondered about the experiences of these educators and inquired into how each of them came into this practice and way of being. Further this inquiry sought to understand how these experiences shaped those around them and the school environment. Additionally, conversations with other staff members formed a fuller picture of how changes took place at this school over time.

G. F. Meyer Elementary School is a home for 199 kindergarten to grade 6 children and 26 staff. There are 15 teachers who teach in 11 classrooms. It is a small community based school with a strong sense of inclusion, connectedness, and relationship building. The children at the school enjoy a wide diversity of experiences as a result of the generous vision of a leadership and staff who aim to make wellbeing a part of their careful work. Sonal smiled much of the time as she observed, interacted, and took part in the happenings of the day.

Understanding Beginnings

As Sonal spent more time with the research participants, Patti, Willa, and Russell, it was clear that significant, thoughtful attention was being placed in the environment, the learners, and teachers. It became evident that a commitment was made to learning about

mindfulness and to engaging in practices of mindfulness. A language and dialogue around mindfulness had been built over time with teachers, administrative staff, caretakers, and the larger community. All members of this community engaged and stepped into the process as they felt comfortable.

Patti, the principal, seemed especially gifted in the art of creating a safe and comfortable space for explorations for the educators, staff, and children in the school. She was strong, energetic, and loving. In a first interview regarding mindfulness, she exclaimed that she could see the possibilities of mindfulness and a mindful way of being in her personal and professional life and we spoke of unconditional love in leadership. Patti's message to her staff, and especially the young teachers, was "that I will love you no matter what, and I know there is going to be hard days, whatever I can do to help, I will help. I tell them it will all work out" (Patti, March 9, 2018). Her vision grew and expanded from inside out, and she definitely wanted her 'family' at the school to feel supported by her. We found out that over time the school came to flow more easily at a relational, pedagogical, and communal level as mindfulness was explored over a timeframe of multiple years. Personal and professional explorations of our research participants affected the happenings in the day-to-day lives of adults and children at the school. Our research interests in these personal and professional shifts were guided by narrative inquiry research.

The Narrative Inquiry Method

This research was designed to gather the storied experiences of teachers and an administrator who came into mindfulness on a personal or professional landscape. Narrative inquiry, the research methodology used within this study, is, as suggested by

Connelly and Clandinin (2006), “the study of experience as story” (p. 477). The stories of the research participants as told through interviews and dialogue provided a base for understanding the experience of the participants and the school community from the ‘three commonplaces of narrative inquiry – temporality, sociality, and place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). These three commonplaces allow an understanding of each participant in a holistic and expansive manner. Temporality, having to do with the notion of time, allows the researcher to understand participants’ lives as in a process of change, and flowing between past, future, inward, and outward, “simultaneously in these four ways” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Sociality, having to do with relationship, attends to the personal and social situations of both the participant and researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Lastly, place has to do with the location in which the experiences occurred. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) viewed place as storied and “having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions” (p. 2). Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) shared that narrative inquiry allows for inquiry into the lived experiences of participants, and may also be attentive to “social, cultural, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives” (p. 45). Finally, in a narrative inquiry, we try to understand significant personal, practical, and social justification (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). We, as researchers, engage in the questions “So what” and “Who cares?” in order to understand why this particular narrative inquiry research can be significant on a wider societal level (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Sonal’s original research puzzle questioned: How does the experience of mindfulness practices shift teacher identity and inner awareness and promote compassionate educational communities? She was interested in the quality of time spent

with children and youth, and the relational aspects of listening, loving kindness, and compassion within that time. The three commonplaces of time, sociality, and place unfolded within our inquiry in which the participants told their stories during five visits over five months. In listening to the stories of the participants these questions developed our understanding of their experiences as related to our research puzzle: How did Russell, Willa, and Patti come into mindfulness? How did they come into new understandings and ways of being? What was it about them that was making relationships flow and bloom at the school?

In their personal lives or within the school landscape Russell, Willa, and Patti had come into an understanding or experience of mindfulness in their own way and at significantly different times or circumstances in their professional lives. Each participant storied their experience, and within those stories an understanding of the tensions that affected their identity and awareness became clear. Clandinin, et al. (2010) suggested these are the stories of “who they are and who they are becoming as they interact with children” (p. 82) and shared that they came “to see tension as a central component in understanding the experience of people in relationship” (p. 88). In hearing the stories of the participants, similar and variant threads of the participants’ experiences of coming into mindfulness emerged, as did the tensions each felt with their new and growing knowledge, a blend of the personal and the professional. This combination of the personal and practical is understood by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) as personal practical knowledge which is described in the following manner:

[It is a] term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal

practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (p. 25)

The participants told of impacts on their lives personally and professionally and it became apparent that their "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25) had changed the landscape of their school. The unique tensions that were present in each participants' journey of coming into mindfulness were catalysts for shifts in identity, knowledge, and awareness. These tensions encountered by each participant were important in how their personal practical knowledge unfolded. In telling their stories, considerations of sociality, temporality, and place are given attention (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), as are the tensions they experienced.

Russell

Russell, a young beginning teacher, was hired the day he finished his practicum in Eastern Canada. When asked about his introduction to mindfulness he said it was the principal that introduced it to him one August afternoon when they met in person for the first time. He had not heard of mindfulness before he came into his work as a beginning teacher.

It was his third year of being a classroom teacher at the time of our first interview. At Russell's first interview we asked him what his understanding of mindfulness was and he responded that he would now describe it as, "in the most basic terms and like I said this is constantly changing for me, just being in the present moment and being aware"

(Russell, March 9, 2018). As we interacted with Russell it was apparent that he was deepening his knowledge and experience of mindfulness practices with support. We observed that Russell was open, eager to share, and thoughtful while sharing his experiences about how he came to know about mindfulness, new understandings of curriculum, and his own shifts, as he moved through his first years of teaching.

Understanding Mindfulness as Unspoken Curriculum

We recognized a tension of teaching mindfulness in relation to mandated subject matter. Early that first year while going through his timetable, Russell noticed a block for mindfulness time. He engaged in a conversation with his principal inquiring into what mindfulness was and why they included this practice in their school day. Driven by provincial government mandated curriculum, Russell had many questions.

Russell shared that during his early teaching days his time was “purely allotted to curriculum” (Russell, April 19, 2018). He would teach right up until the bell and felt he had to use all of the time to teach the mandated curriculum. Russell found the concept of mindfulness abstract, which posed a tension around teaching it to students. He expressed his nervousness about that and shared that he, “didn’t have any idea what it was, and it was really abstract” (Russell, March 9, 2018) to him. It was beneficial for him to have the wellness educator, Willa, come into his class to teach these sessions. Russell was reflective after these sessions in which the wellness coordinator worked with the children. He was developing his ideas of how these practices might be valuable to children:

If we can slowly introduce this to kids it will be so important in understanding their emotions or feelings, kindergarten all the way to grade 6 here, and they can slowly pick up the pieces. It’s going to be so important to

them...being in the present moment, it could be huge for them, especially with all these problems going on right now, I think with bullying or mental illness, or whatever right? (Russell, April 19, 2018)

Russell understood why the principal, coordinator, and other staff were working towards a language of mindfulness at the school. He shared, “and that was my thing because I was driven by the curriculum and I still am driven by the curriculum, but there are things that are more important to teach than the curriculum at times” (Russell, March 9, 2018). Russell’s idea of curriculum was evolving over time. He said, “for me mindfulness has shifted the life of an educator big time” (Russell, March 9, 2018) and that it “slowly started to evolve into what it means to me” (Russell, March 9, 2018). Russell had shared that he saw his relationships in the classroom and in his personal life change over time. There were both small ways and big ways that shifts had happened for him. In the classroom it was in the way he felt more relaxed about what he felt should be happening and allowing things to unfold as they did. He was clear that he had noticed the way that he responded to others was evolving in his classroom and even in his personal life with his family.

Understanding how to best bring curriculum to life in the classroom is a challenge and journey for any new teacher. Russell’s idea of what to teach and what not to teach was changing. He shared “there were more important things to teach than the curriculum at times” (March 9, 2018). The *more* he was referring to has been highlighted by theorists as “implicit” or “hidden curriculum” (Inlay, 2016, p. 24), “*inner curriculum*” (Ergas, 2018, p. 78), and “curriculum-as-lived-experience” (Aoki, 1986). Inlay (2016) stated “every school has an implicit curriculum of messages sent by every structure and

process, and by every person in the school's environment" (p. 24). When a school or educator also takes time with an inward focused curriculum it can privilege what Owen-Smith (2017) described as "*connected knowing, interiority, and engagement with the self and others*" (p. 25). In this new time of coming into and making meaning out of mindfulness practices, classroom management, and making connections within curriculum, there was a period of becoming for Russell. He was becoming familiar with a wider, more expansive life curriculum. He was also becoming less driven by provincially mandated curriculum, and was noticing growth in his own capacity to be empathetic and compassionate.

Slow Evolution - Shifting into Compassion and Empathy

Russell's ideas of what a classroom and a school should be began to change over time. He experienced tensions around what a traditional classroom or school should look like. When asked the question: "What if you didn't find mindfulness?", Russell answered:

Well I certainly know, the type of teacher I would be, I would be a very, for lack of better words, a traditional teacher. You know we would be sitting in our desks, there would not be tons of collaboration, there would not be flexible seating, it would be sit down, be quiet you have a job to do. (Russell, March 9, 2018)

Russell felt he was developing a greater relational capacity to empathize and care for the children because of his mindfulness experiences.

He shared,

[a] shift has happened, by being mindful, and being aware and empathizing and caring...three years ago, I would have said the most important part of teaching is connecting with the curriculum...and that shifted for me and I honestly believe it is because the building I am in. I'm not saying teaching curriculum is not important, but I think giving students what they need is sometimes more important. (Russell, March 9, 2018)

Burrows (2011) stated “relational mindfulness can help educators to address the management, teaching, and emotional challenges of classroom and school environments more successfully” (p. 24). Kyte’s (2016) suggested “with teachers gaining inner strength, they become more present and responsive to their students’ needs, thus becoming more effective teachers, role models, and guides to healthy behaviors” (p. 1147). What we learned from Russell, is that mindfulness is a way of attending to the child. The other things are extras and not the focus of Russell’s work with mindfulness. Through his words we came to understand that this work helped him pay attention to their lives, and curriculum then became something more than a sole focus on subject matter.

Russell grew through the challenge of questioning the un-traditional mindfulness blocks; he continued to participate in the mindfulness sessions that were offered to his class; and he began to take part in staff professional development, some of which involved mindfulness sitting practice and a weekly staff gathering for gratitude practice. In the following passage Russell remarks on the support he received from the principal:

Then it slowly started to evolve into what it means to me. As (the principal) gave us PD or we practiced with our kids, it’s something that is ever changing

for me. Something that has actually become very important in my classroom actually, which I would have never said three years ago. (Russell, March 9, 2018)

Russell shared about shifts he noticed in himself as time went by. He noticed how others worked with mindfulness practices and saw that the school had become a place of compassion. Bai and Cohen (2007) highlighted that educators “teach others by being an authentic and living embodiment of what they deem to be valuable and potentially meaningful to learners (p. 52). Inlay (2016) shared that “the affective and overt behaviors of individuals within the school’s culture, convey messages of the implicit or hidden curriculum of a school that subtly but powerfully influence the school’s culture” (p. 23). As a researcher attentive to the impact of the introduction of mindfulness on a beginning teacher in a school, wonders arose for Sonal: What if Russell had been introduced to mindfulness practices during the course of his higher education experience in university? What if he had the opportunity to explore and embody a practice before he began teaching? Russell was just one participant that shifted the essence and fabric of the school. He acknowledged his experience was affected by another research participant, Willa, the wellness coordinator, who role modeled mindfulness experiences with the children in his classes.

Willa

Willa holds the wellness coordinator role at the school and collaborates with the teachers and leadership to integrate possibilities for wellness experiences for children and adults. Of the three research participants, Willa has been at the school the longest and works closely with Patti, the principal, in building the culture of the school. Her position

arose historically out of a need that the local school board deemed important. Wellness coordinator positions were created for many schools within that division. In Willa's ten years she has been able to observe changes in her role and the school, in her words, "evolve over time" (Willa, March 9, 2018). There were times when she was unsure of what this role should look like.

Willa began a personal contemplative meditation practice nine years prior to our conversations with her. A mindfulness practice had benefitted her personal life in diverse ways and she recognized possible benefits to young people. She explained that to her mindfulness was like "a process and journey for oneself in kind of being gentle with yourself everyday" (March 9, 2018). A tension in Willa's story involved her questioning *how* she could meaningfully bridge her personal learning of mindfulness and meditation into her professional offerings. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) "developed the notions of personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscape, both narrative educational concepts, as a way of understanding teacher knowledge" (p. 3). Willa shared, "for me it's so intertwined, I can't just talk in a school sense, because they intertwine" (Willa, March 9, 2018). She was expressing that her ways of being in personal contexts and professional contexts were weaving into each other. Willa was questioning how what she knew [her mindfulness practices and learning] informed her teaching practices and her identity as a teacher. In the following interview excerpt, when asked what the value of the practice was for her, she tells us that her practices of mindfulness are connected to her identity:

I guess because I feel like if I don't practice my life is going to get out of control! [laughs]. So maybe it is not a hard question, it's a simple answer. I

don't think I can rate it, or put it on a scale because it has just become who I am. I can't even say that I have, its just a part of me. (Willa, March 9, 2018)

Willa is situated in a supporting and impactful role and her relationships with teachers and children have changed over time. Clandinin et al. (2013) suggested that lives are composed as a process of change; involving the “temporal unfolding of their lives in different places and in different relationships” (p. 48). Willa expressed that her relationships, with regards to herself and others, had shifted as a result of coming into mindfulness. Although she does not recall the moment she was introduced to mindfulness, she shared, “I have seen a big shift...that my role has shifted” (Willa, March 9, 2018). Goldman-Schuyler et al. (2017) stated, “a radical shift is needed for most people to develop a conscious, sustained effort toward being mindful in the context of work” (p. 87). Willa shared that a significant personal shift happened in her experience of taking a Mindful Schools course online. She began identifying herself within the school as someone who could share some of the practices. Willa was developing a ‘story to live by’ in the context of her school (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). A story to live by refers to identity and is “given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). When asked, “What if you didn't find mindfulness?”, Willa shared:

I would be, you know, constantly searching for something, and with this practice I don't feel like I'm searching for anything in this job, I feel like I really feel like mindfulness is such a base foundation. (Willa, March 9, 2018)

Willa was finding purpose in the practices of mindfulness to inform her time with children. Byrnes (2012) stated “teachers’ transformative experiences have the

potential to develop and enhance their ability to teach with compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness (p. 25). Willa was developing her understanding of how mindfulness could be a base foundation from which to engage and she highlighted deep listening as beneficial to her teaching journey.

Deep Listening...Receptivity

Willa's significant shift in deep listening strengthened her attunement to others. Siegel (2017) shared "interpersonal attunement is the focusing of kind attention on the internal subjective experience of another" (p. 227) and further shared "two differentiated individuals to become linked in that moment as a *we*" (p. 228). Willa was deepening her connection to others and her moment-to-moment awareness was her practice. Barbezat and Bush (2014) stated, "deep listening is a way of hearing in which we are fully present with what is happening in the moment without trying to control it or judge it (p. 137). Willa said, [mindfulness] offers her the tools to "be responding instead of reacting" (Willa, March 19, 2018) within her personal and school relationships. She further told that being responsive versus reactive "was like a practice to me, a practice of deepening my listening practice." (Willa, March 9, 2018). She felt adults and children would benefit as she herself had benefitted from a mindfulness practice that gave her tools and strategies that were empowering for her to listen well within her life relationships. Willa's personal practice consisted of practicing meditation both by herself and in community (she lived in a neighboring city) and to continue to explore being open and present in her daily interactions. Willa said that over time she has noticed her ability to respond versus react had grown. She and the principal of the school were exploring mindfulness through personal experience and practice, books, and each other. There was

no local community group offering a gathering to practice mindfulness meditation. She identified this deep listening as something that contributed to her receptiveness in her school relationships. Hruska (2008) described being receptive as entailing “being still, open, looking, listening, perceiving, and waiting” (p. 32). Development of receptivity, which is a slow process, often involves a deep listening when reflecting both outwardly and inwardly. Willa recognized receptivity as important for both adults and children in the culture of the school.

Inner Voice in Education

Willa described her intentions to hold space so that children can have time for quiet reflection. She saw herself as a means to which some of the children would have “a chance to listen to their inner voice” (Willa, April 19, 2018). Willa’s story involved the tension of something missing in our educational spaces. She alludes to the sense that our inner voices are not attended to, acknowledged, or given space. She shared that “mindfulness practice gives answers or ease maybe to the internal dialogue or the internal struggles” (Willa, April 19, 2018). Byrnes (2012) reminded us “contemplative education begins with the most intimate relationship possible—relationship with oneself” (p. 36) with a movement “both outward into the world and inward into one’s own mind, body and heart” (p. 37).

Willa shared the following, “We are always telling kids to go find an adult, and talk about things, and that is a great strategy, but, I really feel like kids need to start spending time with themselves, reflecting and listening to that inner voice that I feel we don’t talk about in education” (Willa, Mar 9, 2018). She further stated, “For me the inner voice is like a true direction you need to follow, so and like that’s just my own personal

experience that I reflect on, I think...reflect that on to our students”(Willa, April 19, 2018).

Willa was attending to her own inner voice by being receptive and deepening her listening abilities. We observed that she was reaching towards whole experiences for the young and trying to create space within the context of her professional offerings. Willa was engaging in her own personal and professional development by honoring the ontological question: why is contemplative pedagogy important for holistic education? Willa recognized, from her own experience, the importance of “teaching kids more about themselves as a whole” (Willa, May, 16, 2018) and being a facilitator for experiences to unfold for young people which encourage “social and emotional needs” (Willa, April 19, 2018) and well-being. The harmony of inner experience with outer awareness leads to a sense of well-being that can be holistic, preventative, integrative, and compassionate (Yeager & Howle, 2013). Willa shared her understanding that children and others want to be around “somebody who is calm and somebody who is not going to react to what’s being said in that moment and that builds that trust” (Willa, April 19, 2016). Her intuition and intent was strong in her explorations with mindfulness practices and her impact on the development of these practices within the culture of the school.

Profundity of the Gift of Compassionate Presence

We realized what these research participants had come into by expanding their experience of mindfulness. It was *presence*. The participants themselves did not use the word *presence* to describe their experiential evolution. Rather, these words came to us as we stepped back to consider common threads in their stories and experiences. Compassion and receptivity were common threads. This presence we speak of here was

the expression of the unique effect of mindfulness practices that each had experienced over time.

Merriam-Webster's (2011) Canadian dictionary defines presence as: the fact or condition of being in a certain place. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggested "matters of professional identity are intimately interwoven with spatial and temporal borders on the professional knowledge landscape" (p. 112). We realized the research participants had both spoken about the spaces of their classrooms and the unfolding of their awareness over time. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) defined this 'presence in teaching' as "a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step" (p. 265). Boccio (2004) described mindfulness as a "*lived* understanding" (20) and goes on to share that compassion is cultivated so that there is no sense of separation" (p. 20). Teachers in this compassionate presence would see themselves in others and recognize their connectedness to others. The experience of coming into mindfulness occurred for both of these participants after they began their practical knowledge building in the classroom and school. They were both given the space and time to attend to the nuances of cultivating compassion, receptivity, and presence into the school culture.

Conclusion

This small rural school has become a positive centerpiece of the community as a result of experiential shifts. The participants have grown and developed in ways that contributed to a common language or foundation of mindfulness. It was beneficial to

have the opportunity to engage with both a seasoned teacher practitioner and a beginning teacher. It is worthwhile to continue investigating our wonders: What if beginning teachers were introduced to mindfulness practices during the course of their higher education experience in university in a safe and supported way? What if they had the opportunity to explore and embody a practice before they began teaching? University and college teacher education classes, which include an understanding and practice of mindfulness, would allow for a platform for insight and growth *before* young teachers figure out “a way of relating that requires time, attention and care” (Schneider & Keenan, 2015, p. 12). The shifting identities of these teacher participants over time create the possibility that mindfulness practices can have an impact, not only on the lives of children and adults, but also on the culture of a school.

Transitioning to Chapter 5

The previous chapter explored how experience with mindfulness practice had an impact on the lives of Russell, Willa and Patti. We investigated the benefits and tensions of these participants and how experience and understanding of mindfulness began to inform time spent with children.

The following chapter highlights the experience of the principal, Patti, who shares that mindfulness has affected change in both her personal and professional landscapes. We discovered how Patti imagined a mindful pedagogy based on presence and connectivity. This paper may be submitted for publication at a later date.

CHAPTER FIVE.

AN UNFOLDING OF MINDFULNESS IN LEADERSHIP

Vignette ~ YAY! You're Here

I came around a corner and saw the large frame mounted on the wall with the above words. I stood there silently in thought at the power of the message and how it reached out to me...no pictures, just words. I took out my phone and took a picture knowing I would want to come back to this gem. Somehow I felt relief at being here. It struck me that whoever placed these words wanted any reader to feel a sense of joy, a sense of welcome, and a sense of belonging to this place. I wondered about the leadership who encouraged this playful reach out to all who passed 'here'.

The message on the wall created an invitation to be present in a moment of joy and connectivity for the reader or passerby. The message was mindfully placed. In recollection of this moment what stands out is the relief I felt from this simple message. Investigating this sense of “relief” I realized this message made me feel at ease, in a joyful and playful way. Lugones (1987) shared “one may be at ease because one has a history with others that is shared, especially daily history” (p. 12). I appreciated this provocation offering the potential for any person to share in a daily history together in this space. The message symbolized a value for relations and relationship. The message was physically located at a place where all students would see, all adults in the building would have the opportunity to read. I later found out it was the principal of the school, Patti², who had placed it.

² All names of places and people are pseudonyms

The message on the wall disrupted my experience of leadership in education in my young formative years as a child. In my own experience of learning and growing through public system schools in western Canada, leadership symbolized the ideals of authority, control, hierarchy, disconnection, and power. I was invisible to the powers that be and I certainly did not feel a sense of belonging in a ‘community’ of learners. It was not until years later that I found moments of joy and connectivity, teaching and leading in my own classrooms where I intuitively knew what I wanted to nurture in a learning community, both in my classroom and the greater school community. It was this sort of ease and joy in relationship and experiences that Patti seemed to be cultivating at her school. As I sat with Patti over several months, her story unfolded about her experiences learning about mindfulness practices, making meaning for herself, and strengthening connectivity and compassion within her school community. Patti seemed to have fierce and energetic qualities that were actually fostering love and kindness as the central purpose of living together in the school. She was “compose(ing) different stories” (Leggo, 2012, p. 12) through the lens of mindfulness of what a school might be as a foundation for presence in relationship; a unique story that seems essential to reach into what truly matters in the lives of children and adults in education. In her leadership role, Patti has dared to re-imagine her commitment and responsibility to a community of learners while unfolding qualities of an awake and mindful leader who tends to the “body-mind-heart-spirit” (Cohen & Bai, 2007, p. 5).

The School Looks Like the Principal - Patti

This small rural school, G. F. Meyer Elementary³, that was the destination of my visits over several months, became more and more a place that I grew intrigued by. I was curious about this place, two hours away from a major city centre, which was exploring mindfulness as a community of teachers and learners. Within the workings of this chapter I predominantly focus on the interview conversations with the principal, Patti.

However, a group conversation with two other research participants, Russell (a beginning teacher) and Willa (a wellness educator) offered significant insights into the development of the culture of mindfulness at the school.

G. F. Meyer Elementary School is a home for 199 kindergarten to grade 6 children and 26 staff. There are 15 teachers who teach in 11 classrooms. It is a small community based school with a strong sense of belonging, connectedness, and relationship building. There is an intentional openness into the greater community of parents and residents that the school staff members wish to have harmonious relations with.

During our first interview conversation, I came to know the same sense of openness as a quality that Patti both possessed and infused into her leadership at the school. She had been the principal at G.F. Meyer for five years, and it was her first time being in this role. It is within her transitional time from inexperienced to experienced principal that we learn that the ‘harmonious relations’ at many intersections took time, patience, and sometimes courage. Tensions often express themselves in the trials and

³ All names of places and people are pseudonyms

tribulations of liberating into something new, facilitating change at personal and collective levels for humans. Within the first couple of years in this role, Patti inquired into and began personal explorations of mindfulness to support the instability of being a new principal. Patti's learning and experience with mindfulness deepened her resiliency and centeredness as a leader in the school. In her telling of her experience of mindfulness she shared, "I don't think I would have made it without mindfulness" (Patti, March 9, 2018).

Kabat-Zinn (2005) shared that mindfulness can be thought of as, "an openhearted, non-judgmental, present-moment awareness, the direct, non-conceptual knowing of experience as it unfolds, in its arising, in its momentary lingering, and in its passing away" (p. 128). The practice of coming back into momentary awareness in a nonjudgmental way proved to be powerful for Patti to stay steady in her everyday challenges. Patti described her coming to this new place as a conscientious transition clearly stating, "I am always careful" (Patti, March 9, 2018). She realized that her ways of working were different than the "mindset of the former principal" (Patti, March 9, 2018) and she shared that "it was really a tough first year" (Patti, March 9, 2018). McClain et al. (2010) shared that "wisdom-centered carefulness is cultivated through intention" (p. 313). Patti's intentions in leadership came through the interview process as she shared her stories revealing her experiences and knowledge.

Early on, Patti listened to the whispers telling her to start with 'place'. One of her first tensions was a feeling of disconnection to her new physical spaces of 'office' and 'school'. She felt the tension of the business like, top down, hierarchical nature of the 'principal's office' and was trying to navigate a space that was welcoming. Patti

remembered back to when she came for her interview reflecting on the main entrance sign, and voiced “isn’t it a shame, (it’s) like a jail or hospital” (Patti, March 9, 2018). She knew she would feel more at ease with her surroundings being an extension and expression of who she was. She was a scrap booker and she began a practice of ‘scrapbooking the school’. She shared when she “moved here the first thing I did was paint the walls and so I had a space and I made it (her office) look like me, and I scrap booked it” (Patti, March 9, 2018). Patti had a sense that her well-being in transition would require her to acknowledge her “inner terrain” (Palmer, 1998, p. 5) which was inspired by the power of words. Palmer (1998) stated, “the more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching—and living—becomes” (p. 5). Working in an endearing way, Patti used the power of words to reflect what she believed in and added thoughtful texture to her office and the walls of the school. Cohen et al. (2010) stated “authenticity, the expression of true feelings, is a substantial and valuable pedagogical practice” (p. 8) and further shared that such truth can be “liberating” (p. 8). Powerful words were sprinkled through the building as a direct message of what was valued by Patti. Patti was standing up, both carefully and mindfully, and “speaking [her] spirit” (Meyer, 2003, p. 255) through the words that would become her story of change in this place.

Why the Narrative Inquiry Method

Change comes over time and with it there are always stories to tell. Narrative inquiry was the choice of methodology for this research study to allow for insight into the depths of experience and narratives of the research participants, on personal and relational levels. The inquiry was interested in the story of participants, and in the

learning between participants in the school community. Siegel (2017) shared “these deep lessons of the primacy and social nature of narratives affirmed that some profoundly important source of meaning in our lives – the stories that bind us to each other, help us to make sense of experience, and enable us to learn from each other” (p. 29). Murphy-Shigematsu (2018) suggested that “heartful communities are grounded in storytelling” (p.19) and that “although the focus appears to be on self, mindfulness can in fact be more than an individual activity with personal benefits, by enhancing attention to others and strengthening awareness of connectedness to all beings” (p. 44). Mindfulness also offers an understanding of connected experience as changing and which “unfolds, in its arising, in its momentary lingering, and in its passing away” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 128).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated “narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (p. 477). Patti’s story was told through interviews and dialogue. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) highlighted that as we study experience we consider the “simultaneous exploration” of the following three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place (p. 479). While working with Patti, it was important to consider events in her life as “in temporal transition”(p. 479), because her life shifted and changed everyday, and those shifts and changes were connected to a complexity of factors, including what happened a year before, a day before or a moment before. Sociality has to do with balancing consideration of the personal and social conditions of the participant and researcher, and attempting to have an understanding of a greater picture (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 480). Lastly, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) shared place as meaning “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). As the researcher, I have

developed my understanding of personal, practical, and social justifications (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) while studying how mindfulness practices shift teacher identity and inner awareness, and how these might promote compassion and connectivity in educational communities. Patti's leadership, intertwined with mindfulness practices, unfolded a story that developed our understanding of her "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1), which attends to knowledge "in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1). Patti came to appreciate mindfulness practices in the midst of diverse tensions involved with becoming a principal. She stated, "I think I would have gone back to being a (previous position), because I don't think the job is for me unless it looks like this. I couldn't do it unless it looks like this, I couldn't do it unless it is for mindfulness" (Patti, March 9, 2018). Patti's personal practical knowledge changed over time and her stories considered seeds of intentionality towards mindfulness experiences for herself, children, and staff of the school. Patti's experience informed her knowledge and understanding about the possibilities of mindfulness in education, and particularly for G.F. Meyer school. Meyer (2003) stated "if knowledge is power, then understanding is liberation (p. 249). Experiencing a depth of practice of mindfulness made possible a sense of liberation from old ways of thinking about leadership and school culture for Patti.

Centering in Presence – It's a Practice

New in her leadership role, Patti had ideas and new ways of considering what it meant to be a leader, learner, and teacher in community. She needed to respond to what was happening at the time she arrived and be sensitive to the place, sociality, and

temporality of the school. Tensions arose for her on a personal, collective, and systemic level.

Patti knew her own growth involved developing a sense of felt presence as she put energy into the relationships that she was building with her staff. Engaging in mindfulness practice became her ‘how’ as she developed this presence and her listening abilities. In the practice of mindfulness “with the moment held there is a pause, an opening, a chance for deeper listening” (Donsky, 2015, p. 188). Patti shared about her self-awareness and her ability to breathe and listen through daily interactions in the following passage:

being calm enough and aware enough of my own thoughts and own feelings and acknowledging them and then letting them be and then letting them go. To me that’s the mindfulness that I can have, without judgment of myself and judgment of people around me whether they agreed or didn’t agree. (For example) I had to acknowledge that R (young boy) was going to be the little boy he was going to be, and acknowledge that that’s just how it is going to be and letting go and sometimes the letting go is hard, then I know I just have to breathe and be calm and say it’s okay (Patti, March 9, 2018).

Seidel (2006) shared that bringing mindfulness “to the moment of teaching is to be able to respond to what is really going on, to life as it presents itself, with all of its surprises from moment to moment” (p. 1907). Patti started her days by setting up a few simple practices for herself, which involved mindfully and regularly entering the space of the school in the mornings, to ground herself. She placed objects that she could see and touch upon entry to be a reminder to bring her awareness into the present moment.

Jardine (2018) suggested “there is something important to be said for practicing while we can, and not waiting for events that might just overwhelm” (p.1). Patti’s practices gave her a feeling of “ontological security” (Cohen & Bai, 2015, p. 62) as she entered into her relations, with both children and adults, feeling centered through her day. She shared about her mindful practices,

It totally helped me at the time I needed it. I can see my whole life I probably could have used it a little bit more, and then it all kind of happened at the same time. The things I was searching helping myself get through this transition, and these kids and this place was turning into a place that felt good. (Patti, March 9, 2018)

Patti’s personal experience in reaching for mindfulness began with her own self-care and well-being, although it was amidst the difficulties and tensions of new relationship building with the staff at the school. Early on as principal she realized and understood that some of the ways in which teachers were working with children did not align with her pedagogical constructs. Cherkowski et al. (2018) shared “mindful alignment is an ongoing inquiry practice of paying deep attention to self in relation to others and to the world” (p. 16). Patti noticed that some of the practices of fostering growth in children were not of a thoughtful and compassionate nature and felt she needed to support new ways of being in relation to children. She shared that she could see, that “people didn’t buy in and thought I wasn’t doing the right things, but I stuck to my guns and found the people in the building that did” (Patti, March 9, 2018). She decided to offer experiences that might bring the staff collective into new understandings around the exploration of mindfulness in their school, and possibly be seen as someone who could

hold space for their unfolding tensions that they may have.

Patti shared,

I'm trying to build that culture in the school and I'm trying to live it out that's showing the teachers the same kind of compassion, the caring, the way that I wanting to be connected to them the way I want to be connected to the kids too (Patti, April 19, 2018).

The foundation from which Patti's leadership flourished and bloomed was a seed of honoring her own growth and shift in what she thought possible for a school culture. Cherkowski and Walker (2014) suggested that "shifting how we think, imagine, feel and talk about communities in schools may shift how we perceive and experience the learning and growth that goes on within them" (p. 205). Patti was paying attention to her commitment to relationship at the school.

Patti shared,

I am trying to be mindful of the decisions that I make and the way that I try to run the school, like do my job, so try to be very thoughtful about my leadership and the style and the culture that I am trying to create here and I feel like mindfulness has helped me understand that role a bit, or do it with that intentionality of mindfulness....I think mindful leadership is just effective leadership, heartfelt, leadership with heart (Patti, April 19, 2018).

Murphy-Shigematsu (2018) described heartfulness as "a way of being in mindfulness, in compassion, and in responsibility" (p. 14) and furthermore, that which "emphasizes purpose through connecting to something larger than the individual self" (p. 16). Patti's sharing led me to consider what it means for a leader to develop their compassion.

Cohen and Bai (2015) offered the term “*compassion-ability*” (p. 59) and suggested that it “is an on-going process of personal reflection highlighted by the practice of mindful attention” (p. 59). In this regard, compassion would seem essential for connectivity.

The following passage on Buddhist perspective offers clarity in the connection between compassion, receptivity, and presence:

For this reason, essential to the cultivation of compassion is the Buddhist ‘mindfulness’ (*sati*) practice that extends and augments the capacity to be receptive and attentive to the reality before you. Mindfulness practice, also known as Vipassana (insight) meditation, is a capacity-building practice where the ability to be fully present to and be with an experience exactly as it is developed. (Cohen & Bai, 2015, p. 58)

Patti’s notion of what a leader could cultivate was changing and shifting as a result of her experience. She was open to new possibilities that perhaps other school leaders around her might not have considered. She realized this was a distinctive way of leading, but was aware she felt a tension of lacking confidence in sharing with the larger community. She questioned whether other system school leaders would acknowledge the importance of mindfulness in education.

Unfolding Courage with Mindfulness as Foundation

Patti’s intention to nourish a culture of mindfulness in her school community was validated by our research process together. She was able to articulate what kind of leader she inspired towards and what was important to her leadership. She shared, “I’m trying to live it out (school culture) that’s showing teachers the same kind of compassion, the caring, the way that I want to be connected to them” (Patti, April 19, 2018). She had

been cultivating present-moment awareness and attending to self-care in her colleagues. Patti felt tension and doubted herself because mindfulness practices were not widely used by her leadership peers and other system leaders. Patti and Willa both had expressed the tension that these practices sat lower on a hierarchy of value by a school system or its leaders. She shared that until this point she had been quiet and did not feel comfortable sharing with the greater educational community about the beneficial transformations, directly related to mindfulness, which had gone on at the school. She shared that she, was just really glad that this worked out and that you (the researcher) could come, I feel like this kind of school, or what we do here, I am always either trying to keep it quiet or what we do here, I always feel like we are going to get called out on what we are doing here (Patti, April 19, 2018).

Patti stated that she was glad that I had come, and the research at her school was interested in the practice of mindfulness and how it might affect school staff and leadership. I noticed similar feelings with the school Wellness Coordinator, Willa.

Willa had personal experiences with meditation and mindfulness outside of the school for several years prior to Patti joining the school. She explained that after taking a Mindful Schools distance course she had a lot of ‘aha’ moments, especially in regards to her own listening in the moment and what could be possible in her work in the classrooms. Willa particularly felt that children and adults both could take more time to reflect and listen to the “inner voice that I feel like we don’t talk about in education” (Willa, March 9, 2018). She shared, “I have seen a huge shift in the way I interact with students...before I knew mindfulness, I always wanted to fix kids and fix the problem” (Willa, March 9, 2018). Willa was aware of her developing ability to let things be and

noticed shifts within herself. Willa noticed, as a result of her own mindful practice, she was much more aware of her relationships and her purpose in her work. She stated,

When you are just more self aware, then relationships and interactions flow and things are not so judgy or difficult, you are just more concerned about yourself and doing the best you can do and not worried about what should be happening or how things should look or how things should be done (Willa, May 16, 2018).

Willa was creating new realities and ways of being within education. She was finding her way to bring meaning to popular curriculum resources of mindfulness, like the Mind Up program and Mindful schools, and adding her own experiential wisdom. For Willa and Patti this was not another ‘program’ for teachers to follow. They contended with the tension of seeking something holistic and meaningful, and built on the insight and reality of their experiential knowledge, rather than contrived and shallow. Presence and embodiment are closely connected when a teacher’s listening and presence is not an abstraction, but a part of the person (Irwin & Miller, 2016, p. 96). Bai et al. (2013) suggested this embodiment “has everything to do with being fully present to reality, and *being one with reality*” (p. 18).

When Patti arrived it took some time for the two of them to realize what they could cultivate together at the school. They both experienced doubt and went through experiences of letting go of fear to stand behind the belief that particular mindfulness practices could heighten well-being. Seidel (2006) shed light on this sense of distrusting ourselves as teachers, “our own embodied and experiential wisdom is disregarded” (p. 1902). Willa shared “when you let go of it being wrong or not okay, when you let go of

that fear then it feels good and you kind of bloom from there you know” (Willa, May 16, 2018). Grant (2017) highlighted “the value of teachers who are receptive to the idea of being offered opportunities to train in mindfulness programs and being encouraged to practice it in their personal and professional lives” (p. 152). Patti and Willa gained confidence together to begin to allocate curriculum time to mindfulness practices. They each sought learning and experiences of mindfulness practice on a personal level and these flowed into their professional lives at the school. Their learning experiences were primarily on-line training and personal study. It would be beneficial to have opportunities to practice with a teacher in close by urban centers or if a mindfulness trained instructor came out to the school to work with teachers.

Ergas (2015) shared,

allocating curricular time to activities that ask students to note their breathing, thoughts, sensations – their inner workings and the *here-ness and now-ness of their existence* – we are transforming the social understanding of ‘education’ and the ‘educated person’. (p. 218)

The realities unfolded into by each of these participants led them to develop their listening ability, receptivity, and presence for the benefit of the whole. It had become a practice of a way of being in the school for them and informed pedagogy.

Leadership for a Pedagogy of Connectivity

Patti’s pedagogical stance imagined teacher and child well-being rooted in connectivity. Early in the research process Patti shared that she, “wanted people to be cared about and that they are loved and I feel that that is my first role” (Patti, April 19, 2018). Patti shared her realization that in order to be a leader others have to be willing to

follow. She stated, “I think you (they) are going to be more willing to follow if we have a connection and the connection is based on heart and based on caring and love” (Patti, April 19, 2018). Cohen and Bai (2015) suggested “our job is to find the way to inter-subjective connection, and utilize this very process to facilitate the person coming back into a conscious connection with herself and with others” (p. 54). Schneider and Keenan (2015) asked the question: “How do we expect students to be compassionate, courageous individuals capable of developing deep and meaningful relationships, if we are not modeling this for them?”(p. 4). A significant practice that Patti began with the teachers was a gratitude practice together once a week. Patti had a personal practice of gratitude. She shared, “the one thing I think, maybe the only thing I would add, and it connects to practice, one of the ways that, as I was learning more about mindfulness and self-care for myself, one of the things I tried to do and started to do every day was a gratitude” (Patti, March 9, 2018). Over time Patti felt the power of this practice of gratitude and decided that she wanted to meet weekly with teachers in a meaningful way. Patti replaced the typical staff meeting with ‘Cheers Thursdays’ (Patti, March 9, 2018). In the library they would meet to hear each other’s stories of gratitude. She also checked in with each teacher at the start of the week with the understanding that face-to-face connection would build relationship. White and Kern (2018) noted that leaders “also need to take care of their wellbeing in order to adequately enable wellbeing in those they lead” (p. 11). Patti not only imagined a mindful pedagogy for the teachers, she was trying to lead in a way that was based in presence and connectivity.

Conclusion

Patti’s care for her people pushes us to see leadership beyond human resources,

curriculum outcomes, and efficiency models in education. Patti and Willa both came into mindfulness practices for self-care and centering and I believe it was this mutual understanding and “relational trust” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 46) that strengthened their growing vision of fostering a deeper understanding and common language of mindfulness at the school. Leggo (2012) shared, “as educators, we need to communicate, respond to, evaluate, and transform our stories by infusing our pedagogy with heart, humility, health, and hope” (p. 9). Patti’s vulnerability as a first time principal led her to gather the benefits of mindfulness for herself, her colleagues, and the children of the school community. Her resilience as a leader has grown over time and she is seemingly more “comfortable with discomfort” (Donsky, 2015, p.186).

CHAPTER SIX.
CONCLUSION:
BEING IN RELATIONAL PRESENCE IN EDUCATION

Vignette ~ Belonging

I was gifted with seeing a kind, dear friend, whom I consider a mentor in my life. Being in his presence again, I noticed I felt at ease, with expansiveness at the heart center. The excitement he showed at the surprise visit was deeply welcoming! Time seemed to slow down as we talked of my first years of teaching nurtured by my colleagues, professors, and supervisors and how those very people still lived in my work today. I remember feeling this community, my relations in education, influenced my evolution and growth. I realized what was distinct about this circle; it was their mindful ways and attention to the depth of the human condition; it was the way they held the ordinary sacred, and provoked others to deeply engage and inquire into the relationships with themselves, others, and the Earth. As I thought about each of these people, a commonality amongst them was they seemed open and awake to the significance of life.

The surprise visit led to an outdoor gathering in the trees of some of those very relations who had lovingly guided me in my first years teaching. I felt compelled to give each of them a small lapis lazuli stone as a gesture of my gratitude for their gifts of presence, not only in those first years, but symbolically, for many years to come. I had always felt heard and seen by them. I felt acknowledged and worthy, no matter my lack of experience. The Latin term 'tessera hospitalis' came up in conversation around each of us possessing a stone. I did not comprehend its full meaning at all, but I remember making mental note and thinking I would look into it deeper.

One professor asked me how I was getting along in the work of my daily life. I shared with him how the practice of mindfulness, amongst other contemplative practices, had shifted my awareness and my relationship to myself and others in a beneficial way. I shared that my journey had led me to being called to share these practices with young folks in a meaningful way. I told him I struggled sometimes because many in education did not see the worthiness of these practices for generating connection, attunement, awareness, and compassion. He asked me to come to the beautiful space of his library office. When I mentioned my personal grief during the last year, in which there were tragedies of loss of young lives within my teaching circles, I felt heaviness in my heart and a lump in my throat. I could barely get the words out. Suicide was a crisis in my community as was youth violence. He stopped and simply listened. He then spoke of the Buddhist concept of impermanence and the impermanence of suffering itself. It was a profound moment for me as I processed the gift of that reminder. As our time came to end, we joined the rest of the group.

I came away from the gathering with a feeling of knowing that I belonged, even though I had not physically sat in this circle for many years. I was not lost with the passing of time. As I was leaving that day I felt gratitude and awe on three accounts: the people, the place, and the gift of time. I also remember feeling a sense of wishing for youth. I wished that they may also know they belong in their learning communities, that they feel expansiveness at the heart center within them, and that there is a longing for them when they are not present.

Each of us longs to belong. We want to be a part of something. The stones represented my longing to be a part of this circle or community. Each of us needs the

time of the other. Not just biding time or productive time, but a time in which, as Seigel (2017) shared “there is a possibility that there is nothing to time but now, and this moment [is] a moment of meeting, a moment of integration” (p. 220). I am sure over the years my friend and professor both have held space for many young people in the spirit of this slowed time, connection, and integration. This group of people, with whom I worked, valued the time they spent with young people and made them feel welcome. They led year-long deep-seated inquiries with children with the wisdom of gaining insight into what it means to be human. They inspired me, a young first year teacher, to gently and thoughtfully consider what I valued in education. That first year of teaching my big umbrella idea was ‘Interconnectedness’ and I learned how I might weave this idea into both explorations in curriculum areas and interrelationships. This was a collective of humans that were teaching by the very way they were being and making space for what they felt truly mattered for young people. They were the ones who welcomed me and gave me a strong sense of belonging in their circle.

Investigating into the mentioned ‘*tessera hospitalis*’ left me reeling in contemplation of what it means to be a part of a whole, and furthermore, it led me to more wondering about compassionate educational community. Gadamer (1998) shared the following passage, which brings clarity to this term:

When a symbol is used as a sign of recognition between separated friends or the scattered [...] community to show that they belong together, such a symbol undoubtedly functions as a sign. But it is more than a sign. It not only points to the fact that people belong together, but demonstrates and visibly presents that fact. The “*tessera hospitalis*” is a relic of past life, and

its existence attests to what it indicates: it makes the past itself present again and causes it to be recognized as valid. (p. 153)

This understanding of ‘tessera hospitalis’ brings a distinct perspective into the experience of youth and children in schools. Just as I felt the longing for the whole, I believe so do young people. Every day youth want to matter, be worthy, and be validated within their educational communities. It is the adults who can offer their presence wholeheartedly for a felt sense of connection, attunement, understanding, and growth. A practice of mindfulness encourages us to investigate how we are showing up for youth moment-by-moment, and what the essence is of the place that we gather with them. In this practice we live together in a relational way.

The Process of Change

My learning journey has reached long into the past and has me perceive the future in new ways. On my first meeting with Shaun, my supervisor, I openly asked him: What if I have nothing new to say? He led me to understand that in this work we stand on the shoulders of researchers who have explored what they feel matters at the heart of education and learn from them. This heightened viewpoint allows us to see things new. I realize how many shoulders, including Shaun’s, I have had the privilege of standing on. I could never have foreseen the changes I experienced, and the new understandings that I would come to, during these four years undergoing graduate studies.

Clandinin et.al (2013) suggested that lives are composed as a process of change; involving the “temporal unfolding of their lives in different places and in different relationships” (p. 48). During the writing of these last chapters, I learned of the loss of a young elementary girl who took her own life. During the unfolding of this four-year

graduate study there have been multiple youth suicides that I have come to know about ranging from elementary to post-secondary education. My mindfulness practice has been a tool to recognize my grief, to acknowledge it, to investigate it, and to realize it has an essence of impermanence to it. My grief over time has propelled me to deeply reflect on what matters most in education: *the children who we are here to serve*. Now is the time to slow things down within our systems and reconsider how we hold space for mental health and well-being at system levels. Shahjahan (2015) questioned “*How can we re-imagine learning, teaching, and a curriculum in light of slowing down?*” (p. 495-6). A friend of mine recently travelled to various communities around the western provinces listening to the voice of youth. He and his colleagues, concerned with youth engagement, were getting to have conversations and hold space for their voices on the topic of feeling safe in their communities. It was startling when my friend told me that these youth were expressing that they felt the *least* safe in schools and hospitals.

Now is the time to listen to youth and have the courage to recognize where change can happen in education. Now is the time to embody connectivity, receptivity, and presence, in order to foster a sense of belonging and lead the next generation to turn to one another.

Mindfulness: Shaping this School’s Culture

Belonging, for both adults and children, seemed to be at the heart of some of the issues facing the research school community in which this inquiry took place. The research participants within this study all had unique experiences of how mindfulness influenced their growth and identity. The welcoming quality of mindfulness at this particular school flowed between the participants, the children, the staff, and the physical

space. Each participant expressed their commitment to nurture their attunement to others and become more receptive for the benefit of the community as a whole. The participants acknowledged and valued the importance of embodiment of mindfulness within their work with children, but also shared the tensions that challenged their journeys. McClain et al. (2010) shared “it is important to note that wisdom often grows out of struggle, dissatisfaction and discomfort, ours and others, and is not handed to us; rather, it comes through reflection and patience” (p. 312). The breadth of experience of the research participants reflected beginning years of teaching, seasoned teaching, and blooming leadership. Tensions arose when each introduced mindfulness into their personal and professional inquiries and tried to make meaning of being in “openhearted, non-judgmental, present-moment awareness” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 128). Each participant had their own perception of what it meant to practice mindfulness and each were introspective along the way as their experiences unfolded.

Russell, in his first years of teaching, having not even heard the word mindfulness, experienced the tension of keeping a fine balance between making sense of mandated curriculum and mindfulness as an unspoken curriculum (as discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, p. 52). In his reflective journey he has shared that he feels he needs to learn more about mindfulness, however, recognizes his quality of compassion towards others has strengthened. Willa, the wellness coordinator, felt tension in her journey of realizing how to extend her personal practice of mindfulness to reach into her professional offerings to the young people with which she worked. She worked through the challenges of offering mindfulness practices and building a language of mindfulness at the school in classrooms over time. She was aware of the limitations of mindfulness as

a “quick fix, a band-aid or panacea for all the current ills and anguish of contemporary life” (Hyland, 2016, p. 111) or for mindfulness to be seen as a program. Willa has grown by strengthening her position and voice, over time, by sharing her belief that an authentic practice of mindfulness is worthwhile in the lives of educators and children in schools. Patti, felt the tension one might feel in a new leadership role and new learning community. When she came to the school she realized some things needed to be done differently. Her reach for the practices of mindfulness came on a personal level first, and expanded into the relations of her new professional family. Patti’s greatest efforts began as she wove aspects of mindfulness into her vision for her learning community. As tensions arose – as they do when encouraging change - she counted on her newly found mindfulness practices of breath awareness, present moment being, and her gratitude practice. Patti’s qualities of optimism, open heartedness, radiance, joy, and compassion led her to authentically affect change in the culture of the school and larger community. She faced the discomfort of bringing something new to teachers and noticed over time the ways in which small shifts and changes were leading to a culture of connection and belonging.

Mindful Pedagogy – So We Are Not Lost

In a circular way, a mindfulness practice may lead to mindful pedagogy, and mindful pedagogy may lead to a continuing practice of mindful living in relation. This way of teaching allows us to be here and now. It allows us to connect and fosters kinship. This circular work can lead to fuller presence of educators to create communities that foster listening, loving kindness, and compassion. The role of teachers and the role of schools has changed. We no longer need educators to transmit

information and focus on academic goals, at the expense of self-awareness and inner knowing. We need balance in curriculum.

Breathing change into our old ways means identifying and allowing space for practices for increased emotional, spiritual, mental and physical well-being. Bai et. al (2009) stated,

if this civilization is to thrive, it needs to move into an education that prioritizes embodied, sensuous, aesthetic, intuitive, and relational ways of knowing and being, thereby fundamentally validating beingness, not the products and performance, of human beings. (p. 332)

My revelation, on a personal level, is that my open hearted presence in the lives of young people, can be life affirming day-to-day, moment-to-moment. I believe educators can radiate their care and presence, with practice, as they address what seems to be a crisis of belonging and connection amongst our youth. Reorganizing for a curriculum that addresses what matters most, at this time, is essential. Creating possibilities for pedagogy that is mindful, in Kindergarten to higher education classrooms, seems our responsibility at a school, systemic, and political level so young people do not feel lost. More research needs to be done to strengthen our understanding of shifts that happen for educators practicing mindfulness, and the effects in their school communities. Investigations and wonders of a re-construction of education (Ergas, 2015) continue my learning journey around relational, compassionate, and mindful education.

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