Compassion in Schools:
Life Stories of Four Holistic Educators

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

In this study the author investigates the nature of compassion, ways of developing compassion within ourselves, and ways of bringing compassion into schools. The author sees an imbalance and disconnection in the current Ontario public school system, between education of the mind (to have) and education of the heart (to be). This is demonstrated in the heightening violence in schools, because violence in schools means that students do not feel connected to and are not happy in their schools.

To accomplish this purpose, the author explores the different ways we can connect—within ourselves, with classroom subjects, with students in the school, and with the community at large—through life stories of four holistic educators, including herself. Three have taught in Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools, which all foster compassion not only through empathy, caring, and love, but also through emotional and moral components of heart education, such as intuition, creativity, imagination, joy (Miller, 2006), and moral education (Noddings, 1992). The enquiry uses qualitative research and narrative method that includes portraiture and arts-based enquiry.

The findings in the participants’ narratives reveal that compassion comprises spirituality, empathy, and caring. We can develop compassion through contemplation in an awareness of
interconnection between the I and the Other. In conclusion, we can foster compassion in schools if we use holistic education’s basic principles of balance, inclusion, and connection (Miller, 1981, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2010), and if we bring in different ways of fostering compassion that the author has explored through four holistic teachers’ narratives in this study. By nurturing and connecting to students’ hearts, rather than forcing knowledge into their heads, it is possible to create schools where students are happy and feel connected to their learning.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation was made possible thanks to many people who have been positively involved in my writing through their love, wisdom, guidance, and caring:

I thank my family for their everlasting love and support. Without them, I could not have come this far. Thank you, Andrew and Michael, for always being there for me.

I thank Professor Jack Miller for the opportunity to study under his supervision and guidance at OISE/UT. Thank you for your clarity and simplicity that have guided me throughout my studies as your PhD student. Your word, ‘perseverance’ was always on my mind during my thesis journey. Thank you for your wisdom.

I thank Professor Grace Feuerverger for her kind words and encouragement in my Proposal. When I felt discouraged and overwhelmed, I would reread her encouraging words which gave me strength. Thank you for believing in me.

I thank Professor Rina Cohen for her warm and kind presence. Her ‘presence’ taught me to treat others as you would want them to treat you. Thank you for your kindness and caring.

I thank all my participants for sharing their time and their invaluable teaching experiences.
Dedication

To Isabelle and Elliot
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former [education of the intellect] alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart.
—Mahatma Gandhi, All Men Are Brothers

Emergence of This Research

As I write this, I am deeply saddened by the suffering of tens of thousands of Haitians, caused by an enormous earthquake, and I pray that their suffering will be quickly lessened. In my sadness, I stare at the big tree outside my window and a poem I composed a few years ago, “Meaning of My Life,” appears in front of me:

What is the meaning of my life?
Reading, reflection . . .
Reading, reflection . . .
Suddenly, I think I found it: God’s smile on my heart.

As an educator with almost three decades of experience teaching in the Ontario public school system, one of my great concerns is the heightening degree of violence in our schools today, such as the 2009 stabbing incident at a Mississauga high school (Wilkes, 2009). Recent research done at the University of Michigan shows that today’s college students are 40 percent less empathetic than students were 20 years ago (Bielski, 2010). James Garbarino (as cited in Aronson, 2001), who has done a special study of adolescent violence, concluded that “Adolescents turn to violence when they are subjected to peer competition, bullying, and rejection, particularly in large, impersonal [emphasis added] high schools” (p. 83).

What if we were to create a more personal school environment, where students—especially those in preschool or primary grades—felt included, connected, and cared for? What if we were to instil a caring and compassionate world view in students when they are young? Would this make any difference in decreasing school violence?

Reflecting upon my many years’ teaching experience in Ontario, I believe the root of violence in our schools lies in an imbalance and disconnection of mind and heart. Even though character education displays can now be seen on school walls in the York Region District School Board, for example, education of the heart—including caring and compassion—is lacking in Ontario today. The current Ontario school curriculum focuses heavily on developing the mind while
shying away from what is happening in the heart, which some have said is “the point of contact with God” (Sellers, 1962). A 21st-century education that included education in compassion would foster students’ spiritual growth, and would move education from mind-centred ways of “having” towards more soulful, holistic ways of “being.” Such an education would focus on nurturing the heart through basic principles of “balance, inclusion, and connection” (Miller, 2007, p. 6; elaborated on in “Basic Principles of Holistic Education” in Chapter 2).

Introducing compassion into schools could make a big difference in decreasing violence in our schools, for the more we develop compassion, the more genuinely ethical our conduct will be (Dalai Lama, 1999b, p. 74). When we bring caring and love into classrooms, we help students feel heart-to-heart connection—compassion—in a safe environment. When I look back on my own school years, I realize it was really the caring and loving teachers who made a positive difference within me, not the authoritarian teachers who mechanically transmitted their knowledge without much heart. As a young child, I could tell which teachers cared about their students and which teachers did not, because I always felt a deep connection to those who poured their hearts and passion into their teaching. And in return, I would pour my heart into their subjects and work hard, because I felt validated, important, and most of all, happy in their classes. This mutual connection between the genuinely caring teachers and me gave me much joy and opened the doors to great learning, and I do not recall any of my classmates causing behavioural problems in class with these teachers.

“Children (and adults too) learn best when they are happy” (Noddings, 2003, p. 2). Now, as an educator, reflecting upon my teaching years in Ontario, I realize I found happiness and meaning when I gave my heart and authenticity (who I am) into my teaching, like the teachers who had inspired me. I was caring and respectful, and did my best to ensure that everyone felt included. My enthusiastic, happy students became deeply engaged in their learning, and got involved in volunteer school activities or projects. I did not encounter any problems with discipline, because they were all busy with their work. When the first bell rang in the morning, my students would come in quietly and go right away to their unfinished activities or projects from the previous day. A good routine was already established in class, so that my students knew exactly what to do and what was expected of them. Often times, they would ask me if they could stay at recess, because they wanted to finish their work. And primary school teachers know how much their young students love to go out at recess!
Several different scenarios pass through my mind. In one, I see an elementary school teacher in a school hallway who quickly passes by a student whose face is covered with blood, as if she didn’t see him. It is lunchtime, and the student must have been hurt playing outside. I see the student heading towards the office and I wonder why the teacher does not stop to help him. Does she say she is in a rush to make copies for her afternoon classes? Now, in another scene, I see a junior-grade classroom and hear a teacher screaming her lungs out. What is happening in that classroom? How are her students feeling right now? Does the teacher say one of her students is misbehaving? Is this why she is screaming? Another scenario that emerges in front of me is a staff meeting in which a teacher raises her concern about the school selling potato chips and chocolate bars at lunchtime to students. But nobody backs her up and there is complete silence in the room. Then the principal continues on with her meeting agenda, as if she did not hear what the teacher just said.

Caring and compassion nowadays are lacking in health care also. I had an experience with an impersonal nurse when I got seriously ill a few years ago. Early one morning, my nose started to bleed profusely. It would not stop and eventually I had to call an ambulance, which took me to the hospital near my house, where I ended up staying a few days. In my room, I was under the care of a cold, mechanical nurse who flatly said No to every question posed by my family members. Under her care, I felt thrown into a corner, like a thing that did not matter.

Dr. Donald M. Berwick (2010), in his Yale medical school graduation address, referred to an email he had received the previous December from a lady called Jackie:

Jackie had a husband who was a psychiatrist for 39 years. Her husband was admitted to a hospital in Pennsylvania after developing a cerebral bleed with a hypertensive crisis. The issue in Jackie’s email is that she was denied access to her husband staying at the hospital except for very strict visiting, four times a day for 30 minutes, and that her husband was hospitalized behind a locked door. Jackie said she and her husband were rarely separated except for work and her husband wanted Jackie to be present in the ICU (intensive care unit). Her husband challenged the nurse and MD saying, “She is not a visitor; she is my wife.” But it made no difference. Jackie’s husband was in the ICU for eight days out of his 16 days alive, and there were a lot of missed opportunities for them. Jackie continued in her email: “I am advocating to the hospital administration that visiting hours have to be open especially for spouses . . . I do not feel that his care was individualized to meet his needs; he wanted me there more than I was allowed. I feel it was a very cruel thing that was done to us.” (pp. 2–3)

Dr. Berwick expressed wanting to bring humanity into health care. He stressed that, instead of strictly adhering to “It is our policy” or “It is against our rule,” doctors in white coats should be
something more than doctors; they should also be healers without white coats, who would recover, embrace, and treasure the awareness of their and their patients’ shared, frail humanity. They needed to be healers who acknowledged the dignity in each and every soul and did not tower over their patients. In the sacred presence of those for whom they cared, and in a world of fear and fragmentation that has never needed healing more, they needed to join those they served.

To become caring and compassionate individuals, we need to go inside, to where we can be in touch with our soul and the sacred. When we seek outside of ourselves for meaning and happiness, for example through materialism and consumerism, we can end up leading a fragmented, isolated life. Gandhi (1958) said, “Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication but in the deliberate and voluntary restriction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service [of humanity]” (p. 108). Steiner (1923/1988) said, “Materialism has the least understanding of matter, because it cannot see the spirit working through matter” (p. 48). By seeking meaning and happiness within ourselves, through contemplative practices, we can connect to the Self (God, or the Buddha nature within) which is the source of love (Atkinson, 2000; Gandhi, 1958) and compassion (Dalai Lama, 2001). Through such practices, we can learn to experience a state of nonduality—that is, an awareness of the interconnectedness, interrelationship, and interdependence between I and Other—from which loving, compassionate thoughts for self and others can develop. Through understanding born of reflection, and a tranquil mind, we can build a spiritual base, and not be overwhelmed by the lure of technology or by the madness of possession, but instead have the right balance, which can keep us from opening the door to greed (Dalai Lama, 1996).

To bring compassion into our schools, we first have to become educators who teach from our hearts (Dalai Lama, 2001; Miller, 2000; Palmer, 2007), because caring and compassionate thoughts are precursors of caring and compassionate deeds (Dalai Lama, 2001; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2001). In this compassionate approach, we would see ourselves in our students’ actions, and vice versa; and thus together we could create a school where freedom, compassion, and respect might rule, instead of violence. In such a school, educators would attempt to nurture wise and compassionate individuals who lead their lives as whole people, connected to their intellect, emotions, body, and spirit (Miller, 2006).
Because the focus of my study is compassion in schools, I situate myself within a holistic curriculum of body, mind, and spirit. The purpose of my study is to investigate various ways of nourishing compassion in our schools. To accomplish my purpose, I will explore the different ways we can connect—within ourselves, with classroom subjects, with students in the school, and with the community at large. I have pursued my investigation through life stories of four holistic educators. Three have taught in Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools, which all foster compassion not only through empathy, caring, and love, but also through emotional and moral components of heart education, such as intuition, creativity, imagination, joy (Miller, 2006), and moral education (Noddings, 1992). I have included myself as the fourth educator; I have taught in the Ontario public school system.

**Research Questions**

To address the research enquiry, I established three main questions:

1. What is the nature of compassion?
2. How can we develop compassion in ourselves?
3. How do we foster compassion in schools?

The first question focused on exploring the nature of compassion through examining the research participants’ past encounters with compassion in childhood or adulthood.

The second question explored the research participants’ contemplative practices of connecting to the source of compassion and love (i.e., Self or God). It explored their inner world, in which the small-S self cultivates a relationship with the capital-S Self, through contemplation. In the process, the self comes to realize the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all sentient beings, which in turn can result in an experience of nonduality between the I and the Other.

The third question explored various specific ways of fostering compassion practised in the research participants’ Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools. As a holistic educator and a research participant, I explored how I found happiness and meaning in reflecting upon my teaching experiences in the public school system in Ontario and my experiences as a graduate student in holistic education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Particularly, I looked at how contemplation is nurtured at the Buddhist school, how moral education is taught at the Waldorf school, and how love of the environment is
taught at the Montessori school. As a research participant, I explored how I nourished compassion by bringing my authenticity and passion into my class.

With my research findings, I hope to contribute to the education of the heart, which is lacking in our current Ontario school curriculum, and assisting interested educators, administrators, and parents in bringing caring and compassion into their schools and their homes.

**Brief Outline of the Rest of the Chapters**

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on compassion education. I start with a definition of compassion, which involves empathy and caring, and follow with a fragment of my partial autobiography, which reveals a glimpse of the nature of compassion. The chapter comprises three sections: In the first, I investigate how holistic education lays a core foundation for compassion education through its focus on spirituality; its basic principles of balance, inclusion, and connection; and its curriculum focus on whole-child education of body, mind, and spirit. The second section is subdivided into three: In the first subsection, I look at how compassion education is profoundly linked to holistic education; in the second, I investigate how compassion is nourished in current classrooms and schools; and in the third, I explore ways of cultivating compassion through contemplation, caring, and service learning. In the third section of the chapter 2, I look at how various ways of compassion education are fostered in Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools.

In Chapter 3, I explore the methodology and methods I have used for my study. I show how they are appropriate to answer my enquiry questions, and how I will use them. The chapter comprises seven sections: In the first section, I explain why I have chosen qualitative research as my research methodology. In the second, I explain why the narrative research method suits my study best, and explore three forms of narrative that I employ: narrative, portraiture, and arts-based enquiry. In the third, I examine my research participants’ background as holistic educators and how their teaching experiences are appropriate to my study. The fourth section discusses data collection and its procedure. The fifth section explores data analysis and its practice. The sixth section discusses the significance of my research. The last section examines the limitations of my research.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 cover narratives of my three research participants who are presently teaching or have taught more than five years as holistic educators in a Buddhist, Waldorf, or
Montessori school. The structure of each narrative was established based on the sequence of my research questions and is divided into three sections: What is the nature of compassion? How can we develop compassion in ourselves? How do we foster compassion in schools?

Chapter 7 contains my partial autobiography as an experienced teacher from the public school system in Ontario and as a holistic student at OISE/UT. The narrative answers the same research questions posed to my research participants in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 and is also divided into three sections.

Chapter 8 examines emergent themes and findings from my study and Chapter 9 discusses the conclusion and implications of the study.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature on holistic education; compassion in holistic education; and compassion in three holistic schools: Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori.

In the first section, I discuss how holistic education, as discussed in the literature, lays the core foundation for educating children in compassion through its basic principles of balance, inclusion, and connection and its focus on whole-child education (mind, body, and spirit). In the second section, I look at how spirituality and educating in compassion are related in holistic education: how educators nourish compassion by bringing spirituality and the heart into their classrooms, and how holistic guidelines help cultivate compassion. In the third section, I explore the distinct approaches of fostering compassion in three different holistic schools: Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori. In particular, I look at how contemplation at the Buddhist school fosters compassion, how moral education at the Waldorf school nourishes compassion, and how nurturing love in the Montessori school environment is a method for teaching compassion.

I begin by exploring the definition of compassion, so the reader can be familiar with my concept of it. I follow this with a fragment from my autobiographical narrative, revealing a glimpse into how I came to know compassion in my childhood.

Definition of Compassion

The word *compassion* (from the Latin *com*, meaning *with*, and *passio*, meaning *suffering*), signifies “to suffer with” or “to bear with.” Compassion makes the heart move at the pain of others, and is accompanied by a desire to help those who are suffering. Many agree on its definition. According to the Dalai Lama (2001),

> Genuine compassion is based on a clear acceptance or recognition that others, like oneself, want happiness and have the right to overcome suffering. On that basis one develops some kind of concern about the welfare of others, irrespective of one’s attitude to oneself. That is compassion. By nature, especially as a human being, my interests are not independent of others. My happiness depends on others’ happiness. (pp. 62–66)

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2000) defined compassion as “a mind that is motivated by cherishing other living beings and wishes to release them from suffering” (p. 110). Thomas Merton (as quoted in Fox, 1990) said, “The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the
interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another” (p. iii). Miller (2006) defined compassion as

. . . involving a stronger sense of identification with others. Compassion is rooted in seeing that we are all deeply interconnected. . . . Through this sense of interconnection we realize that other beings like ourselves want genuine happiness and relief from suffering. (p. 60)

Empathy and compassion are intimately connected (Miller, 2006). Empathy means “putting yourself in the shoes of another person to feel with that person, to gain an awareness and understanding of what that person must be feeling, and to identify your own feelings accurately and respond appropriately” (Aronson, 2001, p. 112). According to Im (2010), we can develop empathy through nondual ways of knowing—such as contemplation—that allow us to come to be aware of what other people and other beings are experiencing: “In this state of mind, we inevitably share other people’s or other beings’ status of emotion as if they were our own” (p. 13). She further stated that, according to many scholars (Azar, 1997; Feuerverger, 2007; Hart, 2004; Hoffman, 1990), “empathy is one of the fundamental elements for developing humans’ moral attitudes towards others and developing characteristics such as authentic caring and compassion” (Im, 2010, p. 13).

Is compassion different from love? Miller (2006) used love to signify compassion, motherly love for the child, and Christ’s universal love (p. 61). However, while “love allows a person to see the true angelic nature of another person and focuses on one person, compassion is a more universal sentiment that is not exclusive to one person” (Miller, 2000, p. 35). Love can also be universal. Dalai Lama (2001) used love and compassion in this way, such as when he described “a practical way of directing love and compassion for all sentient beings” (p. 58). Ralph Waldo Emerson (Atkinson, 2000) employed love to signify love for nature, friends, the arts, a god, and God. Gandhi (1958) espoused ahimsa (nonviolence) as the law of love, the largest love, and the greatest charity (pp. 181, 93). He said he had an “insatiable love of mankind” (Gandhi, 1958, p. 4) and a task that was as “a lover and promoter of peace” (p. 98). In Jung (1958), love is used to indicate “Christian love of your neighbour” (p. 102) and in Assagioli (1965), love begins with those close to one, expands to an increasing number of human beings in ever-widening circles, and upwards, towards God or the Supreme (p. 275). Merton (1987) implied love as the love of God in Christianity.
Empathy is also closely linked to caring (Miller, 2006). Heidegger (as cited in Gelven, 1970) identified the ability to care as a fundamental aspect of the human condition, characterized as Dasein, his term that means a Being-ahead-of-itself and a Being-ahead-of-itself-in-a-world in a nonself relationship with other entities (pp. 121–122). Thus, care means

... to be ahead of oneself already involved with entities within the world. Care (Sorge) can be subdivided into caring about and caring for: I care about automobiles, door handles, knives and forks, but I care for my brother, my friend, and other people. (Heidegger, as cited in Gelven, 1970, p. 122)

Heidegger said that care is primordial; it cannot be reduced to such phenomena as willing, wishing, urging, and so on, as they are already based in care (Heidegger, as cited in Gelven, 1970, p. 123). Nel Noddings (1984), whose thoughts were influenced by Heidegger’s being-in-the-world and Buber’s I-Thou and I-It relationships (p. 4), identified caring as

... a displacement of interest from one’s own reality (the one-caring) to the reality of the other (the cared-for) during which one must see the other’s reality as a possibility for one’s own. This possibility arouses feeling and desire to reduce the suffering of others... as my very individuality is defined in a set of relations. (pp. 14, 51)

In summary, compassion is based on the recognition that others, like oneself, want happiness and have the right to overcome suffering. When we witness suffering in others, we become empathetic (compassionate) towards them and develop a caring feeling and a desire to help alleviate their suffering.

**My First Encounter With Compassion**

I have always been deeply affected by the human suffering caused by poverty and injustice. My father’s spirituality and compassionate deeds greatly influenced me, so that for as long as I can remember, spirituality and compassion have been a big part of my life. As a child I remember going to my father’s study to watch him pray. Jean-François Millet’s (1814–1875) painting, The Angelus (1857–1859), was hanging on the wall right above his head. My father’s study evoked two elements for me: spirituality and beauty.

*I am in my bedroom, staring at the painting, Millet’s “The Angelus.” It is a print I purchased at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, quite a long time ago. In the painting, a farmer couple bow down their heads in prayer, as the church bells ring the evening Angelus. Twilight is on the horizon and the painting’s hues are dark. In the painting, I see my father praying in his study...*

*My father’s face is lit by candlelight. The room is dark and I can see only half of his face and the painting above his head. I see his lips moving; the words are incomprehensible. On the altar there is a bowl of water and a metal ashtray in which*
incense is burning. I could always tell if he was in his study by the smell of incense coming through the door.

What I admired most about my father was his compassion and good deeds. I remember him bringing home poor people, street people. He gave them food and clothing, and I also remember sometimes seeing him giving them rice. He said we had to be compassionate towards poor people, just as the Buddha had been. He was kind to those who were unfortunate and had problems, all of whom he helped with time and money. Listening to the conversations between my father and these people, I knew he was helping them.

When I was young, my father used to take me to a Buddhist temple he had helped to build. Inside, I remember hearing the regular rhythm of the wooden gong being beaten by a monk in grey robes, and seeing many colourful paintings of gods on the walls and the ceiling. Some had bulging eyes and a scary look; some were brandishing a sword. Other gods, draped in beautiful clothes, looked gentler. All were surrounded by lotus flowers, and all seemed to be floating in clouds. In the centre, there was a big golden statue of Buddha, with a faint smile and half-closed eyes. He was sitting in a lotus position with his fingers touching. An altar was in front of him, on which tiny sticks of incense were burning. The soothing sounds of the wooden gong, the exotic smell of the incense, and the kind face of Buddha created a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere for me. Now I see my father bowing many times in front of Buddha’s statue, and myself watching. After the service, we would be served a delicious vegetarian meal.

Looking back, I believe my father’s compassion and good deeds were a great influence on how my own interest in compassion was formed. The beautiful painting in my father’s study, the gong sounds, incense smell, and vivid paintings in the Buddhist temple remain as sources of my spirituality and aspiration for beauty.

**Holistic Education**

_They (Zen masters) saw nature in its total interrelatedness, and saw that every creature and every experience is in accord with the Tao of nature just as it is._

—Ray Grigg, *The Tao of Zen*

In this section, I examine how holistic education lays a core foundation for education in compassion, through its focus on spirituality and on relationships based on principles of balance, inclusion, and connection. Through its focus on whole-child education of body, mind, and spirit (Miller, 2010), perhaps the compassion that holistic education brings can help heal our currently fragmented state of education.
Definitions

First I will define my terms.

**Spirituality.** Spirituality can be defined as “a sense of the awe and reverence for life that arises from our relatedness to something both wonderful and mysterious” (Miller, 2007, p. 4). To Ron Miller (1990), “spirituality is the belief that our lives have a meaning and purpose greater than the mechanistic laws described by science, and greater than the consciousness of any one culture” (p. 154). “Spirituality arises from love of and intimacy with the sacred while fundamentalism arises from fear of and possession by the sacred” (Tacey, 2004, p.11) and “spiritual exercises such as prayer, meditation, and contemplation are needed to pry us away from ordinary desires and connect us with a deeper will and purpose” (p. 52).

Spirituality comprises three key concepts: spirit (capital-S Self), from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning *breath*; soul (animating energy); and ego (small-S self). According to Miller (2000), “Soul connects our ego and spirit. While ego is our separate sense of self, spirit is the divine essence within. . . . Through spirit, we experience unity with the divine” (pp. 24–26); “the soul seeks love” (p. 26), and “gives meaning and direction to our lives” (p. 9).

According to Carl Gustav Jung (as cited in Campbell, 1971), “the ego is subordinate to the self and is related to it like a part to the whole” (p. 142). The ego contains a moral problem that Jung called the “shadow” (Campbell, 1971, p. 145), while the soul is linked to the “collective unconscious” (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 35), which is formed by instincts and archetypes together (Jung, as discussed in Campbell, 1971, p. 52). “Archetypes are patterns of instinctual behaviour” (Jung, as quoted in Campbell, 1971, p. 61). The spirit is related to Assagioli’s (1965) transpersonal Self, which connects the psyche and the universal (Miller, 2007). Assagioli’s (1965) oval diagram of the psyche describes three regions: Lower Unconscious, Middle Unconscious, and Higher Unconscious (or Superconscious). He held the transpersonal Self as the higher self, situating it in the top or Higher Unconscious region. He said that we receive our higher intuitions, inspirations, and urges to humanitarian and heroic action from this region. This same region is also the source of higher feelings, such as altruistic love, and states of contemplation and illumination (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 17–18).

**Perennial philosophy.** For Miller (2007), “Aldous Huxley’s . . . concept of *perennial philosophy* provides the philosophic underpinnings of the holistic curriculum” (p. 16). Huxley (1945) wrote:
The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfill certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. (p. viii)

“The principal themes [of perennial philosophy] are the oneness and unity of all life; the all-pervasiveness of ultimate Reality or the Absolute; the multi-dimensionality or hierarchical character of existence” (Lemkow, 1990, p. 23). “In the perennialist view, Spirit is the primary ontological and epistemological foundation of the cosmos” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 75). In the East, perennial philosophy can be found in the wisdom of spiritual teachings of the Upanishads, Taoism, and Buddhism; in the West, its roots can be traced to Plotinus (the founder of neo-Platonism) and Augustine.

Augustine took God’s divine nature to be supreme; nothing was higher or better. Not only was God supreme, but God was also the highest good. And as God was placed above all other things, therefore, everyone sought happiness in the highest good (Stump & Kretzmann, 2001, p. 79). As his thoughts matured, Augustine came to understand God as “being” (esse), “true being” (vere esse), “that which is” (id quod est), and “what truly is” (id quod vere est; Stump & Kretzmann, 2001, p. 83).

An important characteristic of perennial philosophy is its “concept of relationships between the whole and the part, or the one and the many” (Miller, 2007, p. 18). Plotinus, the founder of neo-Platonism, explained the concept of the one and the many in this manner:

All beings are beings by the one, both as many as are primarily beings and as many as are said to be included in any sense at all among beings. For what could anything be, if it were not one, given the fact that if deprived of the one which is said of them, they are not these things? For neither does any army exist, if it is not one, nor a chorus or a flock if they are not one. . . . Man, at any rate, and animal and rational and many parts and these many are bound by a one. . . . And the whole being too which has all the real beings in it will be more many and other than the one, but it will have the one by sharing and participation. And being also has life; . . . being then is many. (Corrigan, 2005, pp. 9–10)

David Bohm (1980) explained the notion of the one and the many as follows:

The notion that all these fragments (specialties in science and technology) are separately existent is evidently an illusion, and this illusion cannot do other than lead to endless conflict and confusion (such as pollution, destruction of the balance of nature, over-population, world-wide economic and political disorder). . . . [However] the word “health” in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word “hale,” meaning “whole”: that is, to be healthy is to be whole. . . . The English “holy” is based on the same root as “whole.” All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute
necessity to make life worth living. Yet over the ages, he has generally lived in fragmentation. (pp. 1–3)

Physicist Fritjof Capra (1982) saw the concept of one and many in “nature appearing as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole” (p. 81). Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) has illustrated the concept using a sheet of paper. To become a sheet of paper, it has had to go through a complex process, including logging, forest, rain, and cloud in a state of what he called “interbeing.” Wilber’s (1981) perspective is of a world that is all in one and one in all, based on a Mahayana Buddhist teaching that says that the universe is like one vast net of jewels. The reflection from one jewel is contained in all jewels, and the reflections of all jewels are contained in each jewel (Wilber, 1981, p. 38). Hollick’s (2006) view is similar:

We are not only separate individuals, but also integral parts of larger systems. Our bodies can’t exist without our natural environment, and our identities grow from our social context. Thus, our real “self” is not an isolated individual, but a person-within-society-and-environment. . . . we are both fragments and wholes. (p. 358)

In perennial philosophy, all life is connected in an interdependent universe (Miller, 2007). Ultimately, perennial philosophy should lead to an active and dynamic love (Miller, 2006, p. 21). Knowledge of the elements of the perennial philosophy’s interconnectedness and its connection between ordinary reality and divine reality, and between the soul and divine reality, can be developed through contemplative practices. From the realization of the interconnectedness of reality, we can counter injustice and human suffering (Miller, 2007). However, if we focus solely on spiritual practices without reference to the relief of suffering, there is the danger of narcissism.

**Holistic education.** “The word ‘holistic’ comes from the Greek word ‘holon’ and refers to a universe made up of integrated wholes that cannot simply be reduced to the sum of [their] parts and it implies spirituality, or a sense of the sacred” (Miller, 2007, p. 6). The word education comes from the verb educate; its root is the Latin verb educare, “bring up,” which is related to the Latin verb educere, “bring out.”

Holistic education has its roots in perennial philosophy. It focuses on cultivating connections and relationships: connections to linear thinking and intuition, to earth, and to the Self within; relationships between the body and mind, among various subjects, and between self and community (Miller, 2006). Thus, the aim of holistic education is to educate the whole child—in
body, mind, and spirit—in interconnectedness and relationships within and outside of the self (Miller, 2006, 2007).

Current public education in Ontario promotes education of the mind, emphasizing students’ achievement, testing, assessment, and competition; and it fosters fragmentation. By contrast, Ron Miller (1990) has pointed out, “Children do not learn simply through their minds, but through their feelings and concerns, their imagination and their bodies . . . in a spiritual world view which is a reverence for life, an attitude of wonder and awe in the face of the transcendent Source of our being” (pp. 153–154). It is derived from the belief that “human life is fulfilling and meaningful only when it embraces the embodied, emotional, moral, ecological, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of experience that arise organically in our day-to-day lives” (Ron Miller, 1990, p. ix). His view of holistic education seeks to return teaching and learning to a sphere of freedom and creativity, and his vision for future education is philanthropy or love for humanity, with “the goal of building a caring and loving society that nourishes everyone (Ron Miller, 1990, p. 29). To Ron Miller (1990), holistic education is thus “a countercultural movement seeking radical, far-reaching changes in American society” (p. 12).

Rachael Kessler (2000) saw holistic education as the soul of education; she asserted that students come to school seeking connection at a soul level. These students can “see deeply into the perspective of others, accepting what has felt unworthy in themselves. In this manner, they can discover compassion and learn about forgiveness” (Kessler, 2000, p. x). Kessler’s holistic education focused on meeting the spiritual and emotional needs of students, by proposing certain practical alternatives. For example, she emphasized the importance of the teacher-student relationship and suggested authentic learning activities. To enhance the teacher-student relationship, she recommended deep connection, silence, creativity, transcendence, initiation, and joy, which are “gateways to the soul in education” (Kessler, 2000, p. 17). For her, deep connection—especially to God—is at the centre of the soul of education (Kessler, 2000, p. 33).

**Basic Principles of Holistic Education**

The three basic principles of holistic education are balance, inclusion, and connection. These principles lay out the core holistic curriculum for whole child education (Miller, 2007).

**Balance.** The root of this concept is represented by two interdependent opposites, symbolized by the Taoist yin and yang (Miller, 2007). Wilber (1981) has pointed out that these two opposite
energies are completely inseparable and mutually interdependent for the simple reason that the one could not exist without the other. When we look at it this way, obviously “there is no inside without an outside, no up without down, no win without loss, no pleasure without pain, and no life without death” (Wilber, 1981, p. 22). However, the two conditions are “not static, but in a dynamic process of perpetual arriving and changing that is always adjusting to the shifting flow” (Grigg, 1999, p. 253). Wilber (1981) described the interdependent nature of yin and yang energies in this Taoist verse:

Is there a difference between yes and no?
Is there a difference between good and evil?
Must I fear what others fear? What nonsense!
Having and not having arise together
Difficult and easy complement each other
Long and short contrast each other
High and low rest upon each other
Front and back follow one another. (p. 22)

Chuang Tzu (as quoted in Merton, 1965) would add:

Consequently, he who wants to have right without wrong,
Order without disorder,
Does not understand the principles
Of heaven and earth.
He does not know how
Things hang together.
Can a man cling only to heaven
And know nothing of earth?
They are correlative: to know one
Is to know the other.
To refuse one
Is to refuse both.
Can a man cling to the positive
Without any negative
In contrast to which it is seen
To be positive?
If he claims to do so
He is a rogue or a madman. (p. 88)

Miller (2007) pointed out that “yang energies such as rational, material, masculine, and individual elements have dominated the Western culture to the exclusion of intuitive, spiritual, feminine, and group yin energies” (p. 7). When the two energies are not balanced in education, the imbalances occur between individual and group, content and process, knowledge and imagination, rational and intuitive, and technique and vision.
**Inclusion.** In holistic education, inclusion means linking together various educational orientations. Miller (2007) has provided the following conceptual framework of holistic curriculum, the three main points or positions of which are *transmission*, *transaction*, and *transformation*.

*Transmission* is an orientation that “stresses mastery of traditional school subjects through traditional teaching methodologies such as rote learning, directed from the teacher to the student in a one-way flow” (Miller, 2007, p. 10). Transmission learning that requires imitation and repetition is common when we begin to learn a particular skill. Knowledge is usually broken down into smaller units so that students can master the material (Miller, 2007, p. 10). But “when we break down into isolated segments, we can feel cut off from spirituality” (Miller & Seller, 1990, p. 35). The transmission position thus ignores any nurturing of the student’s soul.

*Transaction* has its philosophical roots in the work of John Dewey (1938), whose aim for education was growth that involves reconstruction of experience and knowledge, through problem-solving and enquiry-facilitating based on the scientific method (Dewey, 1938). Dewey (1926) also stressed the importance of social aspects in child development; he said that the social environment exercises an educative or formative influence on the child (p. 21). Thus, transaction learning is interactive, especially via the dialogue between teacher and students. However, this dialogue stresses cognitive interactions, since “analysis is stressed more than synthesis and thinking more than feeling” (Miller, 2007, p. 11). The transaction position therefore results in an imbalance of education of the mind and the heart.

*Transformation* focuses on the wholeness of the child; the curriculum and the child are seen as connected. The aim of transformation is the development of the whole person (body, mind, and spirit-heart; Miller, 2007). The student is not reduced to a set of learning competencies or thinking skills, but is seen as a whole being. A teacher working from a transformational perspective will use strategies such as creative problem solving, cooperative learning, and the arts, which encourage students to make various types of connections. These connections make learning personally and socially meaningful to the student (Miller, 2007, pp. 11–12). However, transformation includes all three positions: transaction, transmission, and transformation (Miller, 2007, p. 12).
My experience of teaching and learning shows how linking these three orientations of transmission, transaction, and transformation can be used to teach in flexibility and openness. For example, my Grade 2 French Immersion students and I wanted to present a play about Blanche-Neige (Snow-White) to other classes and to parents at the end of the unit. In order to proceed with this project, I had to use the transmission position to teach my students new French vocabulary, phonics, and reading (oral and comprehension), so that they could have a foundational knowledge of the story in French. Once the students acquired this basic knowledge, I switched to the transaction position, in which the students worked cooperatively in groups of three or four, in different activity centres of their choice, solving problems and helping one another. The activity centres included memorizing lines for the play, writing a creative story entitled “Si j’étais Blanche-Neige / If I Were Snow-White”, reciting a poem, playing with puppets from Snow-White characters, painting a background scene for the play, learning French songs (using the tape recorder), or practising the recorder. This transaction period lasted seven to 10 days. Finally, when my students were ready to present the play, I switched to the transformation position: that is, I incorporated all my students’ finished activities at the activity centres that were necessary to present the play. Once we were in transformation position, it was now my students who were enthusiastically participating in the play, bringing their own talents, creativity, and imagination for the different role-playing of the drama.

**Connection.** In holistic education, curriculum strives to move from fragmentation to connectedness (Miller, 2007, p. 13). Connection, the third basic principle of holistic education, refers to relationships. Its focus is on

\[\ldots\] the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationship between self and community, the relationship to the earth, and the relationship to the soul. (Miller, 2007, p. 13)

Among these relationships, relationship to the soul is directly linked to education of the heart or compassion, as we can see in Miller’s (2007) explanation of how the soul helps us connect to the Self, a process necessary for the development of compassion:

Within self, there are two selves: the self and the Self or what Emerson \ldots calls “the big person.” In the Self, there is our soul through which we can be connected to beautiful music, children’s happy play, our work, or simply being in the moment. This Self sees deep connection to others and life, while the self, our ego, sees self as separate from everyone else. (p. 14)
Dwayne E. Huebner (1999), a theologically, morally, and ethically grounded curriculum theorist, has contributed much to our understanding of education in compassion (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, pp. 627, 637). According to Huebner (1999),

The question that educators need to ask is not how people learn and develop, but what gets in the way of the great journey—the journey of the self or soul. Education is a way of attending to and caring for that journey. (p. 405)

Huebner added, “The content of education is, first of all, ‘other human beings.’ Others see the world differently, talk differently, and act differently. Therefore, they are possibilities for me” (Huebner, 1999, p. 408). He went on to assert that teaching is a vocation (from God) that is a work of love, truth, and justice (Huebner, 1999, pp. 411–412). In order to teach moral and spiritual values, teachers should maintain some form of spiritual discipline (Huebner, 1999, p. 414).

**Summary**

In this section, I discussed holistic education’s foundation in spirituality (the Divine reality, Self, or God), interrelationships, and connectedness between the I and the Other (the Spirit, soul, mind, body, various subjects/orientations, community, and the earth). I noted how holistic curriculum’s focus on balance, inclusion, and connection form the foundation for whole child education and compassion education.

In the next section, I look at how compassion is directly linked to spirituality in holistic education. I review current literature on education that fosters spirituality and the heart, and examine how holistic education provides ways of developing compassion through its focus on contemplative practices, caring, and serving others.

### Compassion in Holistic Education

*Love and compassion are basic necessities of life- not only for the individual but also for society . . . The thing that seems to be lacking [in the Western educational system] is the dimension of enhancing and developing the heart.*

—The Dalai Lama, “Education and the Human Heart”

### Compassion and Spirituality

We all want happiness rather than suffering, and we all have the potential to be compassionate within our hearts—in Buddhist terms, we all contain the Buddha nature. Miller (2000) has asserted, “It is the soul that connects the self [ego] and Spirit which is the source of love. And the
soul seeks love” (p. 26). Even though our soul seeks love, our ignorance of the nature of reality (i.e., the interdependence among us) leads us to cause suffering and pain to ourselves and others (Dalai Lama, 2001, pp. 90–91). For Huxley (1945),

Self-ignorance leads to unrealistic behaviour, causing every kind of trouble for everyone concerned. . . . Only the ego’s absorption in a cause much greater than its own interest, such as the loving and knowing of the divine Ground, can rid it of all fear. (pp. 162–163)

A compassionate attitude is not only beneficial to oneself, but also to others. We can train ourselves, through such practices as contemplation and mindfulness, to replace the ignorance—of which the Dalai Lama (2001) has spoken—with compassion, thereby creating positive transformation within ourselves:

There are benefits of enhancing compassion through mental training, such as meditation. The greater force of your compassion, the greater your resilience in confronting hardships and your ability to transform them into more positive conditions. Another benefit is it brings more courage. The greater the force of your altruistic attitude towards others, the more courageous you become. (Dalai Lama, 2001, pp. 75–76)

Developing compassion is a central aim of holistic education (Miller, 2006). When we come to realize the connection between reality and the mysterious unity of the universe, and between our inner self (or soul) and that mysterious unity, a natural compassion for all beings can arise within us (Miller, 2006, p. 60). This notion of interconnection is closely related to the Buddhist and Dalai Lama’s (1996) concept of interdependence (p. 44), which roughly translates as everything depending on everything else: “Our interest is the interest of others, our future is the future of others. And when I say others, I am not thinking just of human beings, who are evidently the same as us. I am thinking of all other forms of life, on this earth and outside of this earth” (pp. 44–45). Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), a Buddhist monk and a poet from Vietnam, employed the term interbeing (p. 54) to explain the concept of interconnection in which I and Other merge as one.

For example, while reading this document, one might imagine a cloud floating in the sky. One might think that there is no connection between the paper of the document and the cloud. However, one must realize that without a cloud, there would be no rain; without rain, trees could not grow; and without trees, we could not make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. So the cloud and the paper are inter-are: as we see the paper in the cloud, and the cloud in the paper. Thus we realize the nonduality or no-boundary between I and Other.

Miller (1994) in Contemplative Practitioner has suggested that contemplative practices such as meditation and mindfulness can help us realize this nonduality, this interconnection among us. He defined contemplation as a merging of subject and object during which duality disappears,
thus leading to an awareness of the Whole. I believe this state of merging of subject and object is crucial for enhancing happiness in education. For example, by being an “authentic and caring presence” (Miller, 2000, p. 141) in class, rather than merely trying to cover the curriculum without much heart, I experienced much joy. I felt a sense of merging with my happy and enthusiastic students. C. M. Bache (2008) also shared Miller’s (1994) awareness of the whole in his teaching. Bache’s focus was on a spiritual oneness that could emerge between him and his students. To him, spiritual practice was about

\[ \ldots \text{cultivating an experiential opening to the larger patterns of life and the deeper roots of one’s existence. As this opening unfolds, one can see all the people and objects that were regarded as separate become as One, in their inherent wholeness and connectedness.} \]

(Bache, 2008, p. 24)

**Compassion in Education**

The literature on compassion in education (Dalton & Fairchild, 2004; Dermond, 2007; Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2004) has stressed the importance of teaching from the heart and nurturing spirituality in class through an awareness of the interconnection among all beings and our connection to nature such as through outdoor activities.

Dalton and Fairchild (2004) have laid out 40 lessons in compassion education for the school year. The lessons teach mindfulness, kindness, respect, and forgiveness, and emphasize the art of knowing oneself and others. The sacredness of all life is also stressed. All are vitally important to a child’s development—a child, whole in body, mind, and spirit. In a compassionate classroom, students’ spirituality is nurtured; a spirituality that is wise, empathetic, and mindful (Dalton & Fairchild, 2004, p. vii). For a teacher who plans to implement the lessons, Dalton and Fairchild stress teaching from the heart using intuition and spontaneity, respecting the diversity among the students, and cultivating spirituality in one’s own personal life. To do the latter, they suggested walking in the woods, sitting quietly, praying, meditating, or sharing time with people we love (Dalton & Fairchild, 2004, p. x).

The lesson entitled “Have you hugged a tree lately?” is designed to cultivate compassion for the current state of nature that is being damaged by vandalism. Dalton and Fairchild (2004) first explain that many types of trees have been regarded as sacred in many traditions, such as willow, pine, elm, and birch trees in the Celtic tradition; oak trees in Greek mythology; and the Bodhi tree under which Buddha meditated to attain enlightenment. For the main lesson, they would suggest ideas such as discussing the ways we treat trees, why we should treat them with respect,
or finding or writing poems that reflect human connection to trees. For follow-up activities, they would recommend asking questions such as the following: “How would you describe your relationship with nature during this process?” “How does spending time outdoors affect you?” “Would you like to spend more time in nature? Why?” “What other artists or writers have used nature as a source of their inspiration?” At the end of the lesson, the students would be asked to reflect on how they could deepen their compassion for nature (Dalton & Fairchild, 2004, pp. 142–144).

In *The Compassionate Classroom*, Hart and Hodson (2004) wrote that compassion has to start from oneself, if it is to spread to others (p. 24). They viewed compassion from the perspective of four types of relationships and connection: (a) teacher to self, (b) teacher to student, (c) student to student, and (d) student to his or her own learning process (Hart & Hodson, 2004, p. 23).

In teacher-to-self relationship, Hart and Hodson (2004) said that compassion for oneself is a likely prerequisite for feeling compassion for others. To help develop compassion for oneself, they suggested thinking about our work and contribution; doing things that we really enjoy doing; and to ask for and receive support from others. To foster good connection in the teacher-student relationship, they proposed listening to students, and considering their points of view with good intentions and caring actions. For good student-to-student relationship, they recommended having students share gifts with others; having them communicate their feelings and needs in class; having them make decisions about their learning and life; and having them learn together and from each other. Finally, in student-learning relationship, they noted that students have their own learning process. As teachers, we have to discover how each student learns, for example by working together and setting learning objectives that are based on what the student is eager to learn. In this process, it is important to focus on the interplay of feelings and needs in the curriculum (Hart & Hodson, 2004, pp. 24–39).

Dermond (2007), in her *Calm and Compassionate Children*, said she had felt frustrated by the dismissal of the role of feeling and intuition—feelings that arise from the heart—in her public school experience as a teacher. When she moved to the Living Wisdom School in Portland, Oregon, she learned how to teach the whole child and how to bring out the best in children, including their calm compassion (Dermond, 2007, pp. vi–vii). In her book, Dermond provided 10 approaches for compassion education, including practising rituals, performing nature activities, taking conscious quiet time, and teaching values such as kindness and respect (matters of the
heart). Her book is divided in two parts: Part 1 describes techniques to help children develop more awareness and a loving heart. Part 2 suggests approaches to help calm the body and mind, focusing on helping children find peace of mind and inner calm (Dermond, 2007, p. 13). For Dermond (2007), loving behaviour arises from an intuitive sense of connection with others (p. 7), so that the children’s contentment in class was a by-product of teachers who work with the children “from the heart” (p. 11).

Feuerverger’s (2007) beautifully written autobiographical book, *Teaching, Learning and Other Miracles*, helps us understand students who come from places of war and oppression. Feuerverger, a wounded and suffering child of Holocaust survivors, described childhood experiences of coming to feel worthwhile, respected, and loved in one of her elementary classrooms, thanks to an empathetic and loving teacher who “took her in her arms sometimes and held her as she wept after class” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 16). In that classroom, she remembered finding a promised land—a deep connection to the teacher and to learning. She said, “To make a curriculum meaningful for students today we need to focus on soul, love and wisdom” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 141). Her book starts with the statement, “Only love and compassion can guide us through the hardships of our lives—perhaps now more than ever” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 6) and concludes with a question: “Do we not need to teach and to learn that compassion is the holiest thing among educational pursuits?” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 151). Feuerverger’s (2001) other book, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel*, relates the author’s research into peace education. Its insightful narrative recounts what takes place in a village where Jewish and Palestinian schools and communities coexist in harmony and peace. In this book, Feuerverger (2001) insisted that if we are to develop models of peace education, we have to listen closely to the voices in conflict and believe in the power of love, art, and imagination.

**Ways of Developing Compassion**

Meditation exercises involve the heart (Merton, 1987, p. 52), and move towards spiritual transformation and self-knowledge (Jung, 1958). In his important work, *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion*, Miller (2006) suggested the following guidelines for cultivating compassion: loving-kindness meditation; practices of caring; care of the environment; and serving others. Before exploring loving-kindness meditation, which cultivates compassion, I look at the different forms and types of meditation.
Meditation is a structured form of contemplation (Miller, 1994, p. viii), involving concentrated practice (p. 3). Contemplation also includes spontaneous and unstructured moments when we experience connection with the unity of things (Miller, 1994, p. viii). Contemplation develops compassionate attention, during which we experience the sacred moment (Miller, 1994, p. 2).

Meditation practice involves a quieting of the mind by focusing our attention on the in-out flow of the breath, counting our breaths, or reciting a simple phrase (such as a mantra; Miller, 1994, p. 27). It focuses on developing attention, in which the correct stance is simply being, in openness: letting go, accepting, expressing gratitude, and experiencing grace (Miller, 1994). It involves the heart (Merton, 1987, p. 52), and moves practitioners towards spiritual transformation and self-knowledge (Jung, 1958).

There are four main forms of meditation: intellectual meditation, emotional meditation, physical meditation, and action meditation. Insight or *vipassana* meditation is a form of intellectual meditation. It focuses on awareness and discrimination, and sees meditation as a form of enquiry into the mind-body process. It usually starts with an awareness of the flow of the breath. Mantra meditation, in which a word or phrase is repeated over and over again as the anchor of the awareness, is a form of emotional meditation. It connects with the heart. Several kinds of moving meditation comprise physical meditation, including hatha yoga, tai chi, aikido, and other martial arts. Action meditation is service oriented. It can be said to include the work of Mother Teresa (Miller, 2006, pp. 37–39, 40–48).

In addition to the four forms of meditation mentioned above that help develop compassion (Miller, 1994), loving-kindness meditation is a way of practising sending love not only to our family and friends, but to all beings on the planet. When one sees that all humans want to avoid suffering and seek well-being and happiness like themselves, one can feel a connection to all humanity (Miller, 2010, p. 87).

**Loving-kindness meditation.** Loving-kindness meditation focuses specifically on cultivating compassion. Practitioners of loving-kindness meditation first centre themselves in the heart area, contacting it with warmth; then they seek to share the resulting warmth and energy with others by wishing them health, happiness, and peace (Miller, 2006, p. 61).

Loving-kindness meditation begins with the practitioner, for unless we practise it on ourselves first—if we cannot love and take care of ourselves—we cannot be of much help to others (Thich
Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 21). There are two approaches for practising loving-kindness meditation (Miller, 2006, pp. 61-62). In the first approach, we pray for those who are close to us and then move out from there:

- May I be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May my family be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May my friends be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May my neighbours be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May my colleagues be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all people whom I meet be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all people who may have injured me by deed, speech, or thought be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings on this planet be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this universe be well, happy, and peaceful.

In the second approach, we move out geographically:

- May I be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this room be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this building be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this neighbourhood be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this town be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this region be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings on this continent be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings on this hemisphere be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings in this planet be well, happy, and peaceful.
- May all beings everywhere be well, happy, and peaceful. (Miller, 2006, pp. 61–62)

**Practices of caring.** Caring also nourishes compassion (Miller, 2006). For example, when students learn to care for themselves, others, plants, and animals, they can develop compassion. For Nel Noddings (1984), a leading educator, caring is the approach of a mother; it is rooted in “receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness” (p. 2). Noddings (1984, 1992) encouraged caring in schools and took a feminist approach to education. For her, the aim of education was to produce competent, caring, loving, and loveable people. Her conceptual foundation derived from Martin Buber’s I-Thou relationship, which she interpreted as the *carer* and the *cared-for*. She also incorporated Martin Heidegger’s *care*, “the very Being of human life” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15), into her conceptual framework.

Martin Buber (1878–1965), an Austrian-born Jewish philosopher, was deeply impressed in his youth by the Hassidic Jewish tradition that emphasized man’s direct, mystical, spontaneous, and joyful relationship with God. He later developed a philosophy centred on the encounter between the person (the I) and God (the Thou). He said God-as-Thou had no boundaries, and included everything. A true encounter between two persons or between a person and art could also be an
I-Thou relationship, as the other person or the art is experienced without labels or bounds, and is therefore connected to everything, to God (Rogers, as discussed in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 41–42). Buber wrote on the importance of dialogue, including both the vertical dialogue with God and the horizontal dialogue between human beings. He also discussed the I and the It in human relationships. The It is perceived as object, as separate. Buber stated that a great sin of modern man was to treat a fellow-being as It, not as Thou (Assagioli, 1965, p. 205). Recognizing and accepting every human being as a Thou, for Buber, represented a basic, right relationship to our fellow humans and our duty to them (Assagioli, 1965, p. 275).

Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) perspective on human relationships was that we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of life. Heidegger proposed a range of meanings for care, of which Noddings (2005) chose as primary a caring relation, denoting a connection or encounter between two human beings of carer and cared-for (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). In well-functioning teacher-learner relationships, teachers must create caring relations in which they are the carers (Noddings, 2005, p. 18).

For the caregiver, caring involves a feeling with the other, which she called engrossment or motivational displacement (Noddings, 1992). By engrossment, she meant “an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). When the carer cares, she receives the other into herself and feels with the other. In order for this relation to be “caring,” both parties need to contribute in different ways and if they do not, completion of the caring is blocked and the caring relation is not completed. For example, no matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the students’ claim “they don’t care” has some validity. It suggests that something is very wrong. The caring relation is completed only when the students receive the teachers’ efforts at caring (Noddings, 2005, pp. 15-16). Noddings (1992) provided these guidelines for fostering caring in schools:

1. Be clear about the main aim of education, which is to produce competent, caring, loving, and loveable people.
2. Take care of affiliated needs, such as keeping students and teachers together (by mutual consent) for several years, keeping students together where possible, and helping students to think of the school as theirs.
3. Relax the impulse to control: Give students and teachers more responsibility to exercise judgement, get rid of competitive grade rating, reduce testing, encourage teachers to explore with their students, and encourage self-evaluation.

4. Get rid of program hierarchies and provide excellent programs for all students; programs for the non-college-bound students should be just as rich, desirable, and rigorous as those for the college-bound.

5. Give over at least part of every day to themes of care; discuss spiritual matters, help students to treat each other ethically, and give them practice in caring.

6. Teach students that caring is in every domain (person, animal, object, or idea). (pp. 173–175)

In order to bring caring into schools, we need “an authentic and caring presence of [a] teacher who can nourish the student’s soul” (Miller, 2000, p. 141), because “the teacher sets the tone for the class through his or her presence” (Miller, 2010, p. 64). And the presence the teacher displays in class is fundamental to teaching (Miller, 2006, p. 81).

The teacher can show caring “by relating subject matter to the interests of the student. If the teacher can make connections between the subject matter and student interests, the student will often respond by engaging with the subject matter more directly” (Miller, 2007, p. 192). Miller (2010) said the most powerful force to bring out the creative spark within each child was the loving presence of the teacher; love should be at the heart of teaching (pp. 8–9). Besides, “in the midst of our current education in the public school system that focuses on accountability and standardized tests, the compassionate and caring teachers are usually the teachers that we remember” (Miller, 2006, p. 61). Moreover, according to Hunt (2010), every person possesses an inner knowledge that guides their actions. Through his many years of teaching at OISE/UT, he realized that experienced teachers possessed their own theories and models of matching their teaching approach to their students’ learning style that informed their actions (Hunt, 2010, pp. 26–27).

Palmer (2007) said that good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness, and teach from their hearts. The connections made by good teachers to self, subject, and students emerge not from their methods but from their hearts where intellect, emotion, spirit, and will converge in the human self (Palmer, 2007, pp. 10–11). Palmer also talked about teaching with presence. He said in order to teach with presence, teachers have to attend to their inner voice, the true self within,
through such meditative methods as solitude, silence, reading, walking in the woods, or keeping a journal (Palmer, 2007, p. 33). Lastly, Palmer said that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Identity lies at the intersection of the diverse forces that make up who he, the teacher, is; integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring him into wholeness rather than fragmentation (Palmer, 2007, p. 14).

Teachers are responsible for teaching their students ethical conduct (Dalai Lama, 1996b). The Dalai Lama has stressed the importance of being an ethical and compassionate person first, before teaching ethical conduct to students. If teachers’ behaviour is principled, disciplined, and compassionate, their values will penetrate deeply into their students’ mind. He said he knew this from his own experience: As a child, he was lazy, but when he was aware of the affection and concern of his tutors, their lessons would sink in much more successfully than if one of them had been harsh or unfeeling that day (Dalai Lama, 1999b, p. 183).

Caring and presence are also stressed in existential psychotherapy. Carl Rogers (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989), an influential American psychologist, advocated that therapists bring their presence and caring into the relationship with their clients. Rogers founded client-centred psychotherapy, for which he suggested three definable conditions in the relationship with the client: therapist’s congruence; unconditional positive regard; and a sensitively accurate empathetic understanding. For congruence, therapists must achieve a strong, accurate empathy with their clients (Rogers, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 11–13). For unconditional positive regard, therapists must communicate to their clients a deep and genuine caring for them as persons with human potentialities (Rogers, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 13–15). For accurate empathetic understanding, the therapist is completely at home in the universe of the client. It is a moment-to-moment sensitivity in the here and now, in the immediate present. It is a sensing of the client’s inner world of private personal meanings as if it were your own, while never forgetting that it is not yours. (Rogers, as quoted in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. 15)

Another existential psychologist, Rollo May (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989), also insisted on bringing the psychotherapist’s presence and caring into the relationship with his clients. Like Rogers, he saw the many potentialities of human beings. His psychotherapeutic aim was to help individuals realize their unique potentiality; he sought to bring a full human presence into the relationship that was similar to Buber’s I-Thou relationship. May said that the relationship between therapist and patient was a meeting of two real human beings, with the
therapist fully present to his client. The meeting was to live together in a communication that could break the isolation of the patient. Both therapist and client would be becoming—trying to realize their potentialities (May, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 233–240).

**Care of the environment.** Taking care of the environment helps cultivate compassion; Miller (2006) said it nurtures “the souls of students” (Miller, 2006, p. 65). Knapp (2000) has agreed. In a speech, *Teaching from the Heart: A Search for Meaning*, delivered at the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, he stressed that in order to take care of the environment, teachers have to teach from the heart, because “nature lore is a mixture of love and knowledge, and it comes more by way of the heart than of the head” (p. 11). He argued that outdoor educators should lead the way to a saner way of teaching and learning by planning lessons directed to the students’ hearts, where their intellect, feelings, body, and spirit converge (Knapp, 2000, p. 11).

Since the early 1990s, South Korean educators (Kim & Lim, 2007) have been trying to create a new paradigm of soulful education in early-childhood education, eco–early-childhood education. The paradigm stresses living in harmony with the rhythms of nature and proposes an ecological point of view for reforming existing child-centred education. This perspective proposes moving from child- to life-centred, from individual- to community-centred, and early-childhood education that is body-, mind-, and spirit-centred, not cognitive-centred. The paradigm contains elements of Korean ideology, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Taoism and is based on a philosophy of life cycles of birth, growth, death, and rebirth. Its curriculum suggests activities such as walking in nature, meditation, vegetable gardening, traditional Korean martial arts, recycling, and healthy eating.

**Serving others.** Finally, service learning (learning how to serve others) can nurture love and compassion (Miller, 2006, pp. 61, 70). Good examples of service learning include John Donnelly’s (2002) engaged service with at-risk adolescents, with the goal of helping them develop compassion; Lourdes Arguelles’s (2002) community-based work with students in communities of marginalized people; and Jean Vanier’s (Renzetti, 2008) work with mentally handicapped people.

John Donnelly (2002) used the term *engaged service* to describe his work with at-risk adolescents. The goal of this work was to develop compassion in students—the ability to see that
another person’s suffering is not separate from ourselves (Miller, 2006, p. 70). Donnelly (2002) said that compassion is based in caring and concern, and it deals with consequences and character; it is a feeling that creates a sense of wholeness and integral understanding, and it is unconditional (p. 305). Through engaged service, Donnelly allowed his students to work with others, so that they can be placed in a position of responsibility. On one occasion during a field trip, 10 of his students helped one student who was confined to a wheelchair to gain mobility around a mountain camp, by working together as a team and taking full responsibility for the results (Donnelly, 2002, p. 310).

Lourdes Arguelles (2002) taught at Claremont Graduate School in California. She and her students meditate every year on how they live, learn, and die. They also begin to walk together on what they call an engaged Buddhist path. They are committed to working together to find alternative ways of living and learning in an everyday life of growing social inequalities, unfair incarceration policies, and other social issues (Arguelles, 2002, p. 285). For example, they work in grassroots settings such as in urban areas where many immigrants have recently settled, or in contexts in which people are marginalized, such as by being gay or lesbian. Their approach is to first develop intimate relationships with each other, by engaging in diverse learning activities such as reflecting and contemplating on how to cease harm to others and to nature, sharing meals and casual conversation, and doing manual labour. Secondly, they emphasize being with people “in a relaxed, reciprocal manner without immediately trying to make them objects of their service, in slower ways of knowing rather than in accelerated, focused, and goal-oriented styles of knowing” (Arguelles, 2002, pp. 294–295).

Jean Vanier (b. 1928), a Canadian philosopher, writer, speaker, caregiver, and devout Catholic, has devoted his life to helping people with mental handicaps. He founded l’Arche communities, where people with mental handicaps can have meaningful encounters with other human beings. He said people who are weak and handicapped have something to offer; we should know that they are important people and that it is important to listen to them. In some mysterious way, he said, they can help change the world of the strong and powerful, where people collect attitudes of power, hardness, and invulnerability. Vanier said it is really the vulnerability of the weak and handicapped that brings people together and bonds them. He said that the essential thing in life is to work for peace, noting the United Nations’ recommendation of the study of nonviolence to be included in all school curricula (Renzetti, 2008). In an exchange of reflective letters with Globe
and Mail" writer Ian Brown, Vanier wrote that pacifism, “where love is put at the heart of all things” (Brown, 2009, p. F8), is a way of life.

**Compassion in Holistic Schools**

In this section, I look at how particular holistic schools—Buddhist, Waldorf and Montessori—foster compassion through their focus on spirituality and a whole-child education of body, mind, and spirit (Miller, 2006, 2010). In Buddhist schools, the cultivation and practice of compassion is a main goal of education (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 1999). In Waldorf and Montessori schools, moral education through storytelling (Waldorf schools) and love of the environment through self-directed learning (Montessori schools) are nourished.

**Compassion Education in Buddhist Schools**

*Like earth and the great elements*  
*And also vast as the immensity of space,*  
*Let me be the living ground*  
*Of love for innumerable beings.*

—Mahayana Buddhist prayer, as quoted by the Dalai Lama in *The Heart of Compassion*

Compassion for others is one of the central teachings of Buddhism (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 64). According to Buddhist teachings, the basic state of our minds is completely pure. This basic purity of the mind is called the Buddha nature.¹ Buddhism states that we all have this pure mind, this Buddha nature within, no matter who or what we are. The Buddha nature, said to be inherent in all sentient beings, is seen as the source of compassion (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 10):

The rationale for loving others is the recognition of the simple fact that every living being has the same right to, and the same desire for, happiness and not suffering; and the consideration that you as one individual is one life-unit as compared with the multitude of others in their ceaseless quest for happiness. (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 65).

Buddhism is not really a religion, but rather a philosophy for humanity that deals with the mind and with consciousness (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 1999, p. 51). It emphasizes personal responsibility for inner development. Buddha said, “You are your own master; things depend upon you. I am a teacher and, like a doctor, I can give you effective medicine, but you have to take it yourself and look after your self” (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 9).

¹ In Sanskrit, *Buddha* indicates a being whose mind is purified of faults and one whose realization is completely developed (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 10).
In Tibetan Buddhism, knowledge is understood as like having a good eye. When you have good eyesight, you can see the path clearly and you can see your destination. When you have knowledge, you have a clear and sharp mind. But when you can see clearly where you want to go with your good eyesight, if you do not have feet, you cannot move. Compassion is like having healthy feet. With compassion, you can move on the clear path and take the journey towards your destination.

Buddha taught that compassion is like the seed of a fruit tree. Without the seed, we cannot have fruit; without compassion, nothing can grow. Compassion is not only like a seed, but also like water and the sun. Once we have planted the seed, we need to water it and need the heat of the sun for it to grow. The seed growing into a beautiful fruit tree is like us reaching our true nature, with a fully awakened and enlightened heart. This is why the development of compassion is so important in education (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 1999, pp. 55–58).

We can develop compassion through practising deep meditation and virtuous actions (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 11). In addition, cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness for all beings brings peace and happiness to oneself and others, while ill-will and malevolent acts will bring suffering to all (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 67). The Dalai Lama said that compassion arises when we witness suffering in others. We all want happiness and we all have the right to overcome suffering, which is a consequence or an effect of ignorance. He said that suffering was rooted in afflicting and negative emotions and thoughts, and suffering can be removed by generating the insight of interconnectedness and interdependence, which perceives the nature of reality (Dalai Lama, 2001, p. 91).

In the West, cultivating compassion is missing in most schools today, largely because we are not open to each other. The Dalai Lama (2001) explained we have this problem because of a misconception of the I: the concrete I that we believe exists really does not exist at all. To help ourselves out of this dilemma, we need to cultivate selflessness and interdependence (i.e., interconnectedness and nonduality between the I and the Other) so that we can see ourselves in others and develop compassion. “Compassion is what opens the heart” (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 1999, p. 59) and meditation is vital to teaching compassion. To cultivate compassion, we must first practise the meditation of equalization and equanimity, detaching ourselves from those people who are very close to us. Then, we must remove negative feelings towards our enemies. The Dalai Lama (2001) said all sentient beings should be looked on as equal. Through
this approach, we can gradually develop genuine compassion for all sentient beings (Dalai Lama, 2001, p. 64).

The Dalai Lama (2001) has suggested two kinds of meditation for developing compassion: visualization meditation and giving-and-taking meditation:

**In visualization practice**, you first visualize your old self who was selfish and self-centred and then visualize a group of people who represent the masses of other sentient beings. Then you adopt a third person’s point of view as a neutral, unbiased observer and make a comparative assessment of the value, the interests and then the importance of these two groups. Try to reflect upon the faults of being totally oblivious to the well-being of other sentient beings and what this old self has really achieved as a result of leading such a way of life. Then reflect on the other sentient beings and see how important their well-being is and the need to serve them. And see what you, as a third neutral observer, would conclude as to whose interests and well-being are more important. You would naturally begin to feel more inclined towards the well-being of other countless others. (pp. 75–76)

**In giving and taking practice**, you first visualize taking upon yourself all the suffering, pain, negativity and undesirable experiences of other sentient beings. You imagine taking these upon yourself and then giving away or sharing with others your own positive qualities, such as your virtuous states of mind, your positive energy, your wealth, and your happiness. This form of mental training brings about a spiritual transformation in your mind so effectively that your feeling of love and compassion is much more enhanced. (pp. 80–81)

However, the Dalai Lama (2001) went on to say that these mental transformations take time and are not easy. Thus we should not expect spiritual transformation to take place within a short time. Nevertheless, these spiritual trainings are extremely useful to enhance the power of compassion for other sentient beings. His favourite Buddhist prayer is: “So long as sentient beings remain, so long as space remains, I will remain in order to serve, or in order to make some small contribution for the benefit of others” (Dalai Lama, 2001, pp. 81–82).

Education in Buddhist schools is based on these beliefs. The two main goals of Buddhist education are compassion (or wisdom) and knowledge, both of which are conceived as already within us, as Buddha nature (Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, 1999). At the Dongguk Buddhist University and its affiliated kindergarten and elementary schools, in South Korea, the educational aims are wisdom, compassion, and compassionate practices. The curriculum consists of different kinds of meditative practices that can develop compassion, including the *zen* (seon in

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2 Compassion and wisdom are used interchangeably in Buddhist teachings.
Korean) meditation, tea ceremony meditation, walking meditation, and yoga (Dongguk University, 2009).

**Compassion Education in Waldorf Schools**

*Just as the love of God is rooted in gratitude, genuine moral impulses have their origin in love.*

—Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education*

Waldorf schools focus on goodness and morality education (Kane, 2002). In this section, I look at how Waldorf schools foster compassion through this goodness and morality education, which appeals to children’s hearts. I also discuss how Waldorf schools stir children’s imagination of sympathy or antipathy to teach moral education.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), an Austrian philosopher and educator, was the founder of Waldorf education:

>[Steiner’s] pedagogy is rooted in a spiritual conception of the world and the human being. Understanding the spiritual activity of the world requires *inner activity* within the human being. The educator’s task is to help develop children the depth of heart, capacities for the inner experience of thinking. (Kane, 2002, p. 244)

Steiner (1920/1971) saw children as sacred beings. In his view, children had dwelt as soul and spirit in a pre-earthly world, from which they descended into the physical world. In every child, he saw the unfolding of cosmic, divinely spiritual laws. He held that God’s highest and most significant creation in the world was the child. Thus, an educator’s job was to figure out ways to foster what God had sent down into the earthly world (Steiner, 1920/1971, pp. 19–20). He stated that his mission was to inspire earthly understanding with spiritual knowledge, and to create a bridge between the physical and spiritual world; he called this new spiritual science *anthroposophy*, from the Greek *anthropos* (human being) and *sophia* (wisdom; Steiner, 1923/1996a, xix), and he said: “The anthroposophical approach begins by looking at the human being as an entity, an organization of body, soul, and spirit” (Steiner, 1923/1996a, p. 23).

Steiner (as quoted in Miller, 2006) believed that human beings develop through four stages, or “bodies,” as he called them: the *physical body*, the *etheric body*, the *sentient* or *astral body*, and the human *ego*. He held that it was appropriate to emphasize these bodies at different times in a child’s education. The *physical body* represents the period between birth and the change of teeth at the age of 7, during which children learn by imitating the adults around them, and live in what he called a kind of “bodily religion,” a natural religious reverence (Steiner, 1923/1988, pp. 51–
In the *etheric body* stage, between the ages of 7 and 14, children’s thinking is of a pictorial nature. That is, through the medium of language they understand content pictorially. In this period, what Steiner (1923/1988) called an immensely powerful spiritual substance flows into children through language. Language must retain a pictorial character in children’s hearts and imaginations, for only what is immersed in imagery will reach children (Steiner, 1923/1988, pp. 59–63). The *sentient or astral body* stage starts after puberty, around the age of 14. Children now become free—free to work and think independently. In this period, children become intellectualizing and logically thinking people. In the last stage, the human *ego*, children become adults (Steiner, 1924/1971, pp. 70–71).

For educating morality, Steiner (as cited in Wilkinson, 1993) said three primary virtues had to be developed. They are gratitude, love, and a sense of duty (Steiner, as cited in Wilkinson, 1993, p. 65.

**Gratitude.** The feeling of gratitude is best taught by adult example in the first seven years of life during the stage of the *physical body*. In this early period, small children are best taught by example, because they learn by imitating the adults. Gratitude is shown through actions. An example could be saying “thank you,” or saying grace at meals. Steiner said that feelings of gratitude should be directed not only to the people and the world around us, but also to the divine beings that are the founding and sustaining powers of the universe.

**Love.** Steiner (1923/1988) said that feelings of love, respect, sympathy, and antipathy are evoked in children in the stage of the *etheric body*, between the ages of 7 and 14. He stated that only love for humankind can form the basis of truly ethical virtue. We as educators need to do everything to awaken these feelings of love in children during this period. This stage is specifically related to Steiner’s goodness and morality. During this stage, the intelligence of school-age children awakens primarily in the life of feelings from which goodness, morality, and love arise.

Steiner (as cited in Nielson, 2004) believed that learning in this *etheric body* period resided in the realms of soul and imagination. Everything should be presented by way of the imagination, in artistic form, so that the physical world could be united with the spiritual world. One of the ways to achieve this was to teach children’s literature—legends, fairy tales, and good stories—to stir children’s feelings and imagination (Nielson, 2004, p. 74). As children of etheric body age are deeply attached to their teachers, it is very important for their teachers to acquire the ability to
create the kind of mental imagery capable of guiding children through this stage (Steiner, 1923/1988, p. 103).

To foster goodness and morality during the etheric body period, Steiner (1923/1988) maintained that we must teach morality lessons through a pictorial approach to the child’s feeling-life, for pictures work directly upon the feelings, appealing directly to children’s hearts and stirring their imaginations, for example through storytelling. Instead of telling children what to do or what not to do, he said we should work upon the children’s feelings of sympathy and antipathy. Educators are encouraged to present children with pictorial elements that will cause them to feel sympathy or antipathy towards what they are meant or not meant to do. Through this approach, Steiner (1923/1988) said, we prepare children’s souls for what will develop into the adult faculty of forming sound judgements and good morality (pp. 198–200). When dealing with problem children, Waldorf teachers strive to appeal to their feelings—to their hearts—rather than to judgement. For example, if the students are grumbling, the teacher can say “Well I can certainly grumble too.” Homeopathic treatments are seen as excellent for moral education—a good way to divert the attention of the mischievous child to something else (Steiner, 1919/1997, p. 67).

A sense of duty. Developing a sense of duty is a task for the sentient or astral body of puberty, which starts after the age of 14. Adolescents who have received pictures illustrating morality during the etheric body stage, through the authority of the teacher, now have an embedded feeling of morality. Along with a developing sense of self and a growing capacity for independent judgement, they develop a sense of duty—the desire to render service to others in return (Steiner, as cited Wilkinson, 1993, p. 66).

Compassion Education in Montessori Schools

*No sooner do the children find the objects that interest them than disorder disappears in a flash and the wanderings of their minds are at an end.*

—Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*

In this section, I look at how Montessori schools foster compassion in children by instilling in them a love of the environment. Maria Montessori (1870–1952), an Italian physician, educator, and devout Catholic, believed that from birth, children had in-born divinity. Compassion in Montessori education is based on the belief that the child has divinity within: “We must not just see the child, but God in him” (Montessori, as cited in Miller, 2002, p. 227). Montessori (1972) said that children had a hidden power in them: “There is thus a secret in the soul of the child,
impossible to penetrate unless he himself reveals. Therefore only the child can bring us revelation of the natural pattern of man” (p. 18). Accordingly, she saw in the child “a hidden man, a hidden child, a buried living being, who must be liberated. Liberation in this sense means knowledge, or a discovery of the unknown” (Montessori, 1936, p. 126). According to Montessori (1936), “the child is a spiritual embryo that develops spontaneously, and if we follow him from the beginning, he can reveal many things to us” (p. 101).

To provide the child with an appropriate environment, Montessori (1936) emphasized teachers’ inner work as a spiritual preparation. This would include “certain aptitudes of a moral order. . . . The teacher must examine himself methodically in order to discover certain defects that may become obstacles (such as anger, pride, greed and envy) in his treatment of the child” (pp. 127–130). To serve children with love was “to feel one is serving the spirit of man, a spirit which has to free itself” (Montessori, 1967, p. 283).

Montessori (1936) formulated three basic principles in her teaching methods: the environment, the role of the teacher, and respect for the child’s personality. These points were initially developed in Case dei Bambini (children’s homes), as she wanted to maintain the atmosphere of a family. She claimed “the teacher’s role is to ‘decrease’ by respecting the child’s personality, while the child must ‘increase,’ applying the words of St. John the Baptist” (Montessori, 1936, p. 137). Thus, we see passive teachers, who hold their own activities and authority in abeyance, lest they should be an obstacle that would prevent children from acting for themselves. Teachers should be glad when they see children so acting, making progress on their own; and they should seek no credit for it (Montessori, 1936, p. 137). When asked what feelings she had working with children, Montessori (1972) responded:

When I am in the middle of children I do not think of myself as a scientist, a theoretician. When I am with children, I am a nobody, and the greatest privilege I have when I approach them is being able to forget that I even exist, for this has enabled me to see things that one would miss if one were somebody—little things, simple but very precious truths. (p. 101)

Montessori maintained throughout her life that her most important contribution was the true discovery of the child through her observations of the child (Montessori, as cited in Hainstock, 1997, p. 62).

In practising her methods, Montessori stressed order, free choice, silent exercise, sense of dignity, and spontaneous discipline. Accordingly, she developed materials that promoted
“independence, self-discipline, concentration, motivation, and sensitivity” (Montessori, as cited in Hainstock, 1986, p. 22) in children. Of these, the acquisition of independence was a most important part of the educational process—and necessary to children’s normal development, because no one can be free unless he or she is independent (Montessori, as cited in Hainstock, 1986, p. 70). One of the ways to teach independence was through natural approaches such as self-directed learning, in which children would freely pursue their own interests as a means of mastering mathematics and language skills, for instance (Montessori, as cited in Hainstock, 1986, pp. 49–52).

With regard to compassion education, Montessori (1967) said that children were the source of love. When we are around children, our hearts soften and we become sweet and kindly, because we feel warmed by their flame of life. Only around children, she said, does everyone feel gentleness and love. Montessori (1967) said that God is love and that love is creation itself. She said that children have all the qualities of love (charity) as described in the Bible: charity is slow to anger and it is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not its own, provoketh not opposition, plans no evil; rejoiceth not in injustice, but delighteth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (Montessori, 1967, pp. 288–291).

In order to cultivate love in children, Montessori (1972) stressed the importance of instilling a love of the environment, for which two things were necessary: the development of individuality, and the participation of the individual in a truly social life. While children must be provided with the means and objects to gain knowledge and experience, Montessori said it was really the environment that was the best teacher of love. For instance, in a constant interaction between individuals and their environment, the use of things shape the people, and people shape things in return. During this reciprocal shaping, people develop love for their surroundings and for their fellow human beings, for no one can work alone (Montessori, 1972, pp. 66–67). In addition, Montessori (1972) said that the human spirit is inherently capable of love of the environment (pp. 105–107).

In this section, I have explored how three holistic schools foster compassion by focusing on spirituality and a whole-child education of body, mind, and spirit. At the Buddhist school, where the educational belief is “Buddha nature within each of us,” compassion is nourished through various contemplative practices. At the Waldorf school, which teaches goodness and morality,
compassion is fostered through gratitude, love, and a sense of duty—a moral education that appeals to children’s feelings of sympathy and antipathy and that stirs their imagination. At the Montessori school, based on a belief in the child as spiritual embryo, compassion is fostered by instilling a love of the environment through the development of individuality and the participation of the individual in a truly social life.

In the following chapters, I will explore the actual experiences of holistic teachers who have taught in Buddhist, Waldorf, or Montessori schools. Through these experiences, I will attempt to understand how these teachers have come to know the nature of compassion through their own life experiences; how contemplative practices help them develop the compassion to be connected to the Self or God that is the source of compassion; and how they nourish compassion in their particular holistic classrooms and schools. Before moving on to these chapters, I will describe how I will proceed with this investigation. Thus I will discuss the methods and methodology of this exploration in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

A life is an unfinished project or set of projects. . . . When a life is written about, the story that is told may attempt to cover the full sweep of a person’s experiences, or it may be partial, topical, or edited, focusing only on a particular set of experiences deemed to be of importance.

—Denzin, Qualitative Research Methods: Interpretive Biography

In this chapter, I explore the methodology and methods I used for my study, and show how they are appropriate to answer my enquiry questions.

My thesis topic is “Compassion in Schools: Life Stories of Four Holistic Educators.” My purpose was to find ways to foster compassion education in today’s schools. In my research, the term compassion education refers not only to fostering empathy, caring, and love in schools, but also to nurturing emotional and moral components of heart education, such as intuition, creativity, imagination, joy (Miller, 2006), and moral education (Noddings, 1992).

The threefold focus of my enquiry is, first, to investigate the nature of compassion; second, to explore ways of connecting self to the higher self within; and third, to enquire about various ways of bringing compassion into schools.

The research questions are:

1. What is the nature of compassion?
2. How can we develop compassion within ourselves?
3. How do we foster compassion in schools?

Qualitative Research

To address my research questions, I have chosen to use qualitative research as my methodology, as I am interested in exploring the educational experience of holistic educators in the educators’ own terms.

According to Eisner (1998), “all empirical inquiry is referenced in qualities. The word empirical is derived from the Greek emperikos, ‘experience.’ Neither science nor art can exist outside of experience, and experience requires a subject matter and this subject matter is qualitative” (p. 27). John Dewey (1938) emphasized the importance of experience in education: “education, in
order to accomplish its ends, both for the individual learner and for society, must be based upon experience—which is always the actual life-experience of some individual” (p. 89).

Qualitative research is suitable for considering life experiences, as it entails studying “self as an instrument and others in the field, followed by interpretation” (Eisner, 1998, pp. 32–35). This form of research uses “expressive language and the presence of voice that pertain to empathy (einfühlung), attention to particulars, coherence, insights and persuasion” (Eisner, 1998, pp. 37–39). The expressive language to which Eisner (1998) referred is rooted in John Dewey’s (1934) distinction between the language that states meanings, as in science, and the language that expresses them, as in the arts. In addition to expressive language and the presence of voice, qualitative research concentrates on understanding the meaning of experience through interpretation (i.e., hermeneutics), rich description, and inductive processes, and the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009).

**Narrative with Portraiture and Arts-Based Enquiry**

As my main method of enquiry, I used narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schram, 2006), because it “is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 55). Since “Connelly and Clandinin (1985) and other narrative theorists did not emphasize the traditional formal qualities of storytelling, including expressive forms of language and the aesthetic story form” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, as cited in Jaeger, 1997, p. 85), I wanted to add artistic and aesthetic elements to my narrative. By *artistic*, I refer primarily to the act of production, denoting the producer’s standpoint; by *aesthetic* I refer to appreciatively perceiving and enjoying experience, denoting the consumer’s standpoint (Dewey, 1934, pp. 46–47). Therefore, I also used portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and arts-based research methods (Barone, 2000; Barone & Eisner, 1997).

**Narrative**

Since my focus is on understanding lived experience, I have chosen to use narrative as a tool of qualitative research. I employed two methods: *analysis of narrative* and *narrative analysis*, as both suit qualitative data. Data included partial biographical texts of three holistic educators, obtained through semistructured interviews, observations, and documents, as well as my own partial autobiographical text.
Narrative as a concept may be traced to Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Augustine’s *Confessions*. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle identified narrative as the representation of human action. In his view, plot in narrative features wholeness and completeness; it has a beginning, middle, and end. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote that the present in time is not a singular notion, but has three notions: a present about the future, a present about the past, and a present about the present (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 129, 145).

Narrative as a research method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Creswell, 2007; Schram, 2006) is appropriate for my study, given the nature of my investigation into holistic educators’ life stories and teaching experiences (Creswell, 2007) with compassion education. The method “represents stories lived and told, is a collaboration between researcher and participants, and conveys a way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Strongly influenced by and closely associated with John Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience—and specifically with his notions of continuity, interaction, and situation—Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested four directions to pursue in narrative enquiry: *temporality, people, context, and interpretation*, all of which are “connected and related as a unified whole through a reconstruction of the narrative” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 19).

**Temporality.** Temporality refers to the assumption that locating people, events, and ideas in time is a natural way to think about them. I used it as a “central feature” in narrative enquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). The key to narrative enquiry is the use of stories as data, related in story form with a beginning, middle, and end. Other terms for these stories of experience are autobiography, biography, life history, and oral history (Merriam, 2009). Every event has a past, present, and future. (For example, when I wrote about my father, who had taught me the nature of compassion, I located him in the temporality of the past along with events and ideas that had affected me then.) After thus locating people, events, and ideas, I employed “the plot that is able to weave together a complex of events to make a single story” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 19).

**People.** Narrative involves the reconstruction of people’s experiences in relation both to the Other and to a social milieu. In my narrative, I checked emergent stories and negotiated their meanings with my participants through reconstructing their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly,
To reconstruct people’s experiences, narrative examines people’s actions, which are an expression of human experience. Actions resemble writing a story; understanding the actions is like arriving at an interpretation of a story. Both involve the gathering of events into a plot in which significance is given to the events as they relate to the theme of the story (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 143).

**Context.** Relying on Clandinin and Connelly (2000), my intention was to understand how context moulds us, so that I could make sense of the events and actions in my narrative: “In narrative thinking, context is ever present. Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 32). To accomplish this, I concentrated on understanding what was happening in the intersubjective space between the I who was the researcher, and the Other who was the participant. I described in detail the setting or context in which the participant had experienced the phenomenon central to my enquiry questions. The context might include the participant’s workplace, home, or school (Creswell, 2007).

**Interpretation.** In addition to temporality, people, and context, narrative enquiry includes interpretation, a process of meaning-making in data collection and data analysis, since “the data acquired through narrative field texts are inevitably imbued with interpretation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). I examined the complex experiences and understandings of compassion education through autobiographical and biographical texts incorporating the three elements of temporality, people, and context, after which I extended the epistemological investigation of the field texts into broadly conceived notions of meaning-making to discover ways of nurturing compassion in schools.

**Portraiture**

While Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative was strongly influenced by John Dewey’s (1938) *Experience in Education*, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) portraiture builds on John Dewey’s (1934) *Art as Experience*, which stresses experience with emotions as an aesthetic quality (Dewey, 1934, pp. 40–41). Portraiture is a form of narrative, blending literary principles, artistic resonance, and scientific rigour (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, xv). It is a method of enquiry and documentation in the social sciences with which the researcher seeks to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, thus blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigour (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 3).
The aesthetic elements of portraiture I employed in my narrative were context, voice, and aesthetic whole.

**Context.** Portraitists find context crucial to their documentation of human experience and organization culture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 41). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997b) explained that the portraitist pays attention to the following contexts: *Internal context* gives a detailed description of physical setting, including a vivid (or “thick”) description of the geography, demography, and neighbourhood. The reader should feel as if he or she is *there*. In the *personal context*, the portraitist sketches himself or herself in. *Aesthetic context* uses symbols and metaphors to capture the reader’s attention. The metaphors serve as overarching themes and rich undercurrents that resound throughout the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, pp. 44–59).

**Voice.** In portraiture, the voice of the researcher is everywhere. Voice is the research instrument, echoing the self of the portraittist and his or her aesthetic. Using voice as witness, the portraitist stands on the edge of the scene, looking across patterns of action to see the whole. Voice as preoccupation refers to the lens through which he or she sees and records reality. Voice as autobiography reflects the life story of the portraitist; his or her history is included in the enquiry. Using voice to discern other voices is about listening for (not listening to) the actors’ voices—their timbre, resonance, and tone. Voice in dialogue means that we hear the voices of the researcher and the actor in dialogue, as they each express their views and together define meaning-making. The reader is involved in this dialogue as the listener (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997c, pp. 85–105).

**Aesthetic whole.** *Aesthetic whole* refers to how a portrait is constructed from its component parts. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997d) explained that this process is like weaving a tapestry; the elements of conception, structure, form, and coherence come together to form the aesthetic whole. *Conception* refers to the process of identifying the overarching story. The portraitist draws emergent themes from the data and organizes the many threads of individual and collective experience. Once identified, the conception shapes the development of the narrative. *Structure* serves as a scaffold for the narrative, providing its frame. *Form* comprises the currents that wash across the structure; it is made up of the intellect, emotions, and aesthetics that support, illuminate, and animate the structural elements. Through the development of *coherence*, the aesthetic whole emerges—then there is an orderly, logical, and aesthetically consistent relation
of parts, and when all pieces fall into place and we can see the pattern clearly (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997d, pp. 243–260).

**Arts-Based Enquiry**

Barone and Eisner (1997) provided methodological tools for the use of expressive language and aesthetic format that I employed in my narrative enquiry.

**The use of expressive language.** Writers of narrative literature use language that is metaphorical and evocative. Their language choices are expressive and connotative rather than direct and denotative, and are designed to call forth imaginative faculties, inviting the reader to fill gaps in the text with personal meaning. They are designed to enhance meaning (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75). Dewey (1934) stated that whereas science aims to *state* meaning, artists aim to *express* meaning:

> Science states meanings; art expresses them. . . . The poetic, as distinct from the prosaic, aesthetic art as distinct from scientific, expression as distinct from statement, does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one. . . . Van Gogh aimed to present a *new* object experienced as having its own unique meaning. . . . Before an artist can develop his reconstruction of the scene before him, he observes the scene with meanings and values brought to his perception by prior experiences. (pp. 84–89)

**The presence of aesthetic form.** According to Barone and Eisner (1997), the presence of aesthetic form in literary works can be discerned through the way formal elements are composed in them—how the content of the text has been arranged in a particular way. Arts-based research texts serve to create a new vision. When readers recreate that vision, they find that new meanings are constructed and when this happens, the purposes of art have been served (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 78). Barone (2000) explained that in a literary work, readers construct the reality of the text; they move towards the text and explore the landscape of the meaning; thereby, in an act of recreation, they create their own experience (pp. 138–139).

**Participants and Ethics**

In my narrative, there are four participants including myself. I have taught in elementary public schools for 29 years in Ontario as a Core French, Vocal Music, and French Immersion teacher on a full-time (25 years) and part-time basis (four years). The second participant taught for six years at a Waldorf school in the United States, after which she moved to Canada to teach Special Education in an Ontario public school. The third taught in a Montessori school in Ontario for
more than 20 years and is now supply-teaching at the same school. The fourth is a Buddhist professor at a Buddhist University in South Korea. He is the department head of Early-Childhood Education, and possesses a PhD in Early-Childhood Education. He has been teaching for more than 12 years.

The participants have different religious upbringings, but all have engaged with spiritual practices. I was raised in a Buddhist/Confucian family with exposure to Christianity. The participant from the Waldorf school was raised in a Christian family, while the participant from the Montessori school grew up in a Jewish family. The participant from the Buddhist University was raised in a Buddhist/Confucian family.

The teaching experiences and life stories of the three other participants have broadened and added a more in-depth perspective to the study of my own teaching experiences. At the same time, my story has assisted me in relating to and understanding the others’ lived experiences more intimately. Thus, this enquiry has been a way of learning to hear others within the context of each of our lived experiences. The process of new meaning-making has come from our different perceptions and thoughts, through “the perceiving mind of the heart” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

With regard to the ethical concerns, I did not foresee any potential ethical problems arising in my research involving participants from Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools, as my research questions did not involve any personal or intimate accounts of their lives. Nonetheless, I adhered to the formal ethical protocols of the University of Toronto and acted ethically in my enquiry process. The letter of consent followed the parameters of written informed consent from the University of Toronto’s website (University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics, n. d.). The consent form clearly outlined the parameters and focus of my study, as well as my enquiry questions. It was drafted according to these specifications: conflict of interest, confidentiality, and contact information. Copies had been signed by me and given to each participant who returned each set with his/her signature and the signed date.

During the interviews and dialogues with my participants, I was very careful about the issues of power and privilege and made sure that I thoroughly understood the implications of ethical concepts such as “risk,” “no intent to harm,” “informed consent,” and the “right to withdraw”
anytime a research participant wished to. I made it clear to my participants that they could withdraw at any time throughout all my interview processes.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through self-enquiry and other-enquiry, using semistructured interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2007). They included my partial biography and the partial biographies of the other three participants as they related to the theme of compassion education, including responses to the specific enquiry-related questions: What is the nature of compassion? How do we develop compassion in ourselves? What are the ways to foster compassion in schools?

I positioned my narrative enquiry within the framework of how theory and practice are related in schools from a knowledge/use perspective. I wrote research texts with the intention of engaging in conversation around ontological and epistemological issues of teachers’ personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3), integrating aesthetic features mentioned in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and arts-based enquiry (Barone, 2000; Barone & Eisner, 1997). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) viewed personal practical knowledge in narrative as both a phenomenon and a method of study. As phenomenon, it refers to people who lead storied lives and tell stories of their lives; as method of study, it refers to researchers who describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. The aesthetic features I made use of were metaphors/symbols, authentic voice, expressive language, and aesthetic whole.

**Partial Autobiography**

I used my partial autobiography as the focus for my self-enquiry into my life’s partial narrative on compassion and compassion education, supported by the concept that where self-awareness and reflexivity are central to an enquiry, it is vital to start with oneself in order to understand others (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Hunt, 1987; Miller, 1994; Palmer, 2007).

Hunt (1987) wrote that in order to understand students’ learning styles, educators should first begin with the knowledge of their own learning style, focusing on personal experience as a source of understanding. Cole & Knowles (2001) supported Hunt:

To research is to reveal the autobiographical self or elements of self. The more we understand ourselves as researchers, the better able we are to listen to and understand
others. If we make explicit our own understandings, and know ourselves well enough, we are better able to understand what might be getting in the way of us listening to and understanding participants’ experiences. (p. 52)

“Analysis of narrative” for partial autobiography. To gather the initial data of partial autobiography, I employed the method of analysis of narrative (Crepeau, 2000; Gee, 1996), in which I elicited complete narratives and then analyzed them inductively in terms of concepts. These narratives might be called “stories from the field” (van Maanen, 1988), because I intentionally drew out complete stories from my already present “stories from the field” of my life—those to which I had access in my memories.

I organized the narratives under three major headings: the nature of compassion, various ways of developing compassion within ourselves, and ways of fostering compassion in schools. To obtain data on the nature of compassion, I started my “stories from the field” by reminiscing about my compassionate father and recounting other personal encounters with compassion. To obtain data on different ways of developing compassion, I discussed several methods of contemplative practices I have explored, including meditation and yoga. To obtain data on fostering compassion in schools, I referred to memories of compassion education during my years as a teacher in Ontario.

To proceed with this method, my partial autobiography provided the context through which my personal accounts of teaching experience and life stories of compassion were produced in an authentic, coherent, and unified narrative. It was a process of knowing who I was, who I am, and who I will be on the subject of compassion education, and of the meaning-making out of the “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in relationship and connection with others, always keeping in mind adding aesthetic elements, such as aesthetic whole, authentic voice and expressive language (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Barone, 2000; Barone & Eisner, 1997) to my narrative.

My autobiographical narrative was the initial foundation of my data collection and preparation for the material on compassion I then gathered from my interviewees.

To conduct my inductive self-enquiry using analysis of narrative, I divided my stories into three major transitional events that I linked to my lived experience:

1. Nature of compassion and events in my childhood;
2. Ways of developing compassion within myself; my contemplative practices; and
3. Ways of fostering compassion in schools; my teaching experience of compassion education in Ontario public schools.

Questions for the other-enquiry proceeded along similar lines.

**Nature of compassion and my childhood events.** Questions regarding the nature of compassion were:

1. Tell me briefly about your family background and your teaching experience.
2. What does compassion mean to you?
3. Tell me about the person in your life who most influenced your understanding of the nature of compassion.
4. Give me a few examples of your encounters with compassion in your childhood or adult life.

To obtain data for my self-enquiry, I started “my tales from the field” (van Maanen, 1988) by reminiscing about my father, whose deep faith and compassionate deeds deeply influenced me, and from whom I learned about the nature of compassion, and with memories of my childhood/adulthood encounters with compassion.

**Ways of developing compassion within, and my contemplative practices.** The questions on the ways of developing compassion in ourselves were:

1. What does spirituality mean to you?
2. What do you do to develop compassion?
3. Tell me about any contemplative practice through which you are working on developing compassion.
4. In what ways does your contemplative practice affect your personal and professional life?

**Ways of fostering compassion and my teaching experiences of compassion education in public schools in Ontario.** Questions on the ways of fostering compassion in schools were:

1. What kind of feelings do you experience in your teaching? Please share your feelings of your special moments.
2. Describe briefly your school’s focus on education (e.g., compassion through contemplative practices, imagination/creativity through the arts, or child-centered education).

3. What is your focus in your classroom? Please give me examples that show your focus.

4. In what ways do you foster compassion in your school?

In order to seek data for the questions such as “What kind of feelings do you experience in your teaching?” and “In what ways do you foster compassion in your school?” I first reflected upon my identity and then referred to my own memories of compassion education during my teaching years in Ontario.

Reflecting on my memories of compassion education, I realized compassion education was not only about a kind and caring teacher’s presence and teaching in class, but also about integrating the educator’s authenticity with subjects (such as the arts, in my case) and orientations in class, so that there could be genuine love and happiness in class as well as the basic principles of holistic education: balance, inclusion, and connection in students’ learning (Miller, 2007, pp. 6–14).

Here is an example of compassion education from my teaching experience:

*Now I see a happy French Immersion teacher who passionately integrates several subjects into the Language Arts program and who cares deeply about her students: me. One of the positive teaching points I undertook during my teaching years was using my authenticity in class, which came from my deep caring about students’ learning and my love for the arts of which many elements were incorporated into Language Arts as drama, poetry, music, and dancing. In addition, when I taught these subjects with enthusiasm and love, my students responded the same way, often wanting to stay in class during recess period to continue with their activities. Together, we dramatized stories, wrote poetry, sang songs, played the recorder, danced, and laughed in our world of imagination and creativity.*

Partial Biographies

Once I collected the foundational data from my partial autobiography, I connected them to my participants’ experiences and stories, asking the same questions I asked myself, employing the method of *narrative analysis* (see “Narrative Analysis for Partial Biographies” below), but this time focusing on each participant’s particular pedagogy and practices, such as practice of daily meditation (Buddhist schools), teaching moral education through soul/imagination (Waldorf
schools) and the whole-child education (Montessori schools). My purpose was to find various ways of fostering compassion in schools from different perspectives and contexts, using partial biographies.

In the collaborative data collection of narrative, establishing a good relationship—akin to friendship—with each participant was crucial for me, as a researcher. The warm relationships that resulted created feelings of connectedness, equality, caring, mutual purpose, and good intention (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Noddings (1992), who is well known for her caring in education, remarked that too little attention is presently given to matters of community and collegiality in research on teaching.

“Narrative analysis” for partial biographies. I used narrative analysis (Crepeau, 2000; Czarniawska, 2002; Gee, 1996) for the partial biographies of three participants (aside from myself). Using this approach, with the aid of a plot I was able to transform events from interview responses into thematically organized stories that were interconnected and interrelated as a whole (Polkinghorne, 1988). As I did not have access to my participants’ entire stories, narrative analysis enabled me to “construct a coherent and complete narrative out of the diverse thoughts and commentaries throughout interview material” (Czarniawska, 2002, as cited in Schram, 2006, p. 105). As mentioned above, I collected the necessary data through semistructured interviews, observations, and documents.

Semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews provided me with direct quotations and stories from my participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Merriam, 2009). In order to get responses appropriate to my research questions, my interviews included a mix of more and less structured interview questions that were flexible, requiring specific data by asking detailed and specific questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 89). I started by asking interview questions such as “Tell me about the time when . . . Give me an example of . . . Tell me more about that . . . And what was it like for you when . . .” (Merriam, 2009, p. 99).

In addition, I used dialogue and note-taking to understand the elements of my research participants’ key experiences and biographical information. From this information, I made meaning through the lens of my own life experiences and perspectives.

There were five interview sessions with each participant, each session lasting one to two hours, all of which were recorded in my electronic recorder. The interviews were held once a week at
my home, at the participant’s classroom or office after school, or in a room at OISE/UT. The first session focused on the nature of compassion; the second on how we could develop compassion within ourselves; the third and fourth were spent on enquiring about various ways of fostering compassion in schools; the final session was used to summarize the data collected previously, and to verify the data’s validity, reliability, and truthfulness (Merriam, 2009).

**Observations.** Detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviours, and actions were available through observation. The research questions that I had asked myself for my partial biography determined what was to be observed during interviews. Here is a list of things I sought to observe during and after my interview sessions (Merriam, 2009, pp. 120–121):

1. Physical setting, including physical environment and context
2. Participants’ relevant characteristics
3. Activities and interactions during interviews
4. Conversations recorded using note-taking and a tape recorder
5. Subtle factors, including informal and unplanned activities

**Documents.** I obtained a personal document (a school photo album and former students’ work) from the participant at the Waldorf school, a few documents containing the school’s educational aims and curriculum focus from the participant at the Buddhist school (Merriam, 2009, pp. 139–142).

In order to determine the authenticity and accuracy of documents, I asked following questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 151):

1. What is the history of the document?
2. Under what circumstances and for what purpose was the document produced?
3. Who is the author of the document?

**Data Analysis**

The goal of data analysis is to make sense of the data. It involves *consolidating, reducing, and interpreting* what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read; it is the process of meaning-making and answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175–176).
Consolidating

Once the rough data were collected through semistructured interviews, dialogues, observation, and documents, I used Riessman’s (1993) initial data analysis methods of “transcribing and retranscribing” (p. 56). In transcribing, entire interviews are written in a rough transcription, creating a first draft. In retranscribing, selected portions of the first draft are retranscribed and reconstructed for the detailed analysis (p. 56) that answers the research questions.

In order to proceed with Riessman’s (1993) strategies, I coded, filed, and saved the data I had collected in my electronic tape-recorder and note-taking from the five interview sessions with each participant, as A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, where “A” represented the participant’s name and the numbers represented the five consecutive interview sessions. Then, I listened to each participant’s stories on the tape to write the rough transcription of the entire interviews, after which, by going back and forth to the rough draft, I retranscribed and reconstructed the second draft, focusing roughly on the parts that answered my research questions.

Reducing

Once the second draft was complete, I used Denzin’s (1989) strategies for analytic abstraction for the reduction of the draft, for which he suggested following approaches: (a) focus on the structural processes in the subject’s life; (b) focus on the different kinds of theories that relate to these life experiences; and (c) focus on the unique and general features of the life studied (p. 56).

To proceed using analytic abstraction, I structured the second draft sequentially, so that I could clearly identify three transitional segments that were responsive to my three research questions. Each segment showed a potential or partial answer geared to each research question that I have asked myself and other participants. I then compared one unit of information with the next one, to look for recurring regularities and particularities in each unit of the data, so that I could assign them into three chronological categories. Next, I named, coded, and filed each category with the participant’s name and the literature review related to the content. Next, I focused on different kinds of themes and theories that emerged in each category of the data. Lastly, I concentrated on finding out the particularities and similarities among themes and theories.

However, this process needed interpretation strategies for which I relied on Merriam (2009), Creswell (2007), and Clandinin (1985). Additionally, in order to add artistic components to my
narrative, I employed portraiture and arts-based enquiry, as described in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997), Barone & Eisner (1997), and Barone (2000).

Interpreting with artistic elements

In order to make meaning, I analyzed the collected data using hermeneutics, which focuses on interpretation and context (Merriam, 2009). In addition, I retold the participants’ stories within a framework structured along emergent themes and categories of information revealed within the participants’ stories (Creswell, 2007). I then rewrote the participants’ stories, placing them within the chronological sequence of my research questions and developing a plot that incorporated the participants’ main characters (Clandinin, 1985) as well as their contemplative and educational experiences of compassion. In addition, in order to make the plot into an aesthetic whole, I employed procedures explained in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and arts-based enquiry (Barone, 2000; Barone & Eisner, 1997), such as identifying an overarching story (i.e., vision of the aesthetic whole), and then creating structural cohesion (like weaving a tapestry), emotional/aesthetic form, expressive language, and coherence (aesthetic whole) as mentioned above.

Limitations of This Research

Some limitations of this research can arise from the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research and in the narrative method that I employed in this study. I used qualitative research as my methodology since I am interested in exploring the educational experience of holistic educators in their own terms. However, the subjectivity basic to qualitative research can lead to problems of validation with regard to the accuracy and evaluation of its findings, since qualitative research entails studying self and others in the field as instruments (Eisner, 1998, pp. 32–35). In addition, this research method involves interpretation through meaning-making in data collection and analysis that is based on subjectivity: “The data acquired through narrative field texts are inevitably imbued with interpretation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93).

Another form of narrative that I used in my study was Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) portraiture, in which the self (i.e., subjectivity) plays the main role. Portraiture builds on John Dewey’s (1934) Art as Experience. It stresses experience with emotions as an aesthetic quality (Dewey, 1934, pp. 40–41) in which the voice of the researcher is everywhere. The researcher’s voice is also used as the research instrument, echoing the self of the portraittist and his/her
aesthetic (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997c, pp. 85–105). The third form of narrative that I used for the interpretation was Barone and Eisner’s (1997) arts-based enquiry, in which the self uses expressive language and aesthetic format. Expressive language is designed to call forth imaginative faculties, inviting the reader to fill gaps in the text with personal meaning. This method includes the subjective meaning-making and the reader’s involvement in new meaning-making, as in narrative enquiry.

As a result, in order to bring validity to my narrative study, I used Merriam’s (1988) four strategies: First, I was immersed in prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field in order to build trust with my research participants, checking at the beginning and end of each interview session for misinformation that might have stemmed from misinterpretation by myself or the participants. Second, I used triangulation in which I made use of multiple and different sources and theories to provide corroborating evidence that could shed light on a theme or perspective. Third, I solicited my participants’ views of the credibility over the findings and interpretations in my narrative. Fourth, I used rich, thick description that would allow the readers to make decisions through transferability (Merriam, 1988, pp. 163–177).

Next, in order to keep a high evaluation standard in my narrative, I focused on writing about a single individual, collected stories centred around my three research questions in flexibility and openness, developed a chronology that connected the collected stories, and told the stories in a persuasive and literary way (Creswell, 2007, pp. 214–215). I note that Riessman (1993) said that procedures for establishing validity are largely irrelevant to narrative studies, since the readings of data are themselves located in discourses (p. 64).

**Significance of This Research**

I hope this research will contribute to the education of the heart that is lacking in our current Ontario curriculum. I hope it will aid interested educators and administrators in bringing compassion (along with happiness!) into classrooms and schools through the various, holistic ways of connecting to self, Self, school, and community that have been explored in this study.

The purpose of my study was to find ways of bringing compassion education into schools. In my research, the term *compassion education* refers not only to fostering empathy, caring, and genuine love in schools, but also to nurturing emotional and moral components of heart
education, such as intuition, creativity, imagination, joy (Miller, 2006), and moral education (Noddings, 1992).

In this research, I focused on investigating four different ways of bringing compassion into pre-Kindergarten and primary grades as well as to the university level from four different contexts: teacher’s authenticity/presence in my partial autobiography; moral education at a Waldorf school; love of the environment at a Montessori school; and contemplative practices at a Buddhist school. Bringing my authenticity/presence into my curriculum resulted in students’ happiness in class and enthusiasm for learning. Moral education at the Waldorf school connected to students’ hearts and imagination through storytelling, and fostered the students’ judgement for themselves of what was right or wrong, based on their feelings of sympathy and antipathy. Respect for the child at the Montessori school resulted in love of the environment. At the Buddhist school, connection to the Buddha nature within through contemplative practices resulted in cultivating compassion for all sentient beings.

**Summary**

In the first section of this chapter, I presented research methodology and methods that I used to conduct my study. In the second section, I focused on the criteria for appropriate participants for this study and explored ethical concerns that might have emerged during the field work. In the third section, I demonstrated the strategies of data collection and data analysis. In the last two sections, I discussed limitations and significance of this study.

The next chapter offers Jungjin’s partial biography. Jungjin is Buddhist and teaches at a Buddhist University in Kyung-Ju, a city situated in the southeastern part of South Korea. In Jungjin’s narrative, I focused on finding ways of nourishing compassion through contemplative practices. The chapter is divided into three sections that answer my three research questions on the nature of compassion, and ways of developing and fostering compassion.
CHAPTER 4:

JUNGJIN’S PARTIAL BIOGRAPHY—IN THE WORLD OF CONTEMPLATION

Background

Jungjin was born in Kyungsang Province, in southeastern Korea. He was the youngest of five children in a Confucian and Buddhist family and was raised mainly by his grandparents. Both his parents worked. From childhood, Jungjin was interested in self-discovery, often asking himself questions such as “Who am I?” and “What is the meaning of my existence in this world?” He loves listening to classical music, especially to Beethoven, whose music sounds so spiritual and inspirational to him.

The person who most influenced Jungjin’s understanding of the nature of compassion was his grandfather, a devout Buddhist who gave Jungjin much love and paid much attention to him. As a child, Jungjin enjoyed spending time with his grandfather, whom he often accompanied on visits to the Buddhist temple. After he became an adolescent, he started to go to Buddhist temples on his own during summer holidays. There, the monks taught him how to practise meditation. During month-long stays at the temple, he seriously considered becoming a monk himself.

Jungjin has been teaching for more than 10 years at a Buddhist university in Korea and is now head of the Early-Childhood Education Department there. Courses he teaches include Buddhist Psychology, Early-Childhood Education, and Introduction to Buddhist Psychology. After obtaining a BA in early-childhood education at the Buddhist University where he now teaches, Jungjin taught kindergarten to children with physical disabilities for a few years. Then he went to Japan to further his studies in early-childhood education at a university in Japan where he obtained Master’s and PhD degrees. During his studies in Japan, he was deeply influenced by Shigeo Haruyama’s (1996) bestselling book, A Great Revolution in the Brain World. In this book, Haruyama explored the right brain’s great potential for teaching wisdom, compassion, and creativity and suggested several ways of achieving the right brain’s potential, one of which was meditation.

What Is the Nature of Compassion?
When I asked Jungjin what compassion meant to him, he defined it as a combination of wisdom and compassion. He said true wisdom comes from the practice of compassion and true compassion can be realized through true wisdom. We can acquire wisdom when we understand our true selves and when we can see the nature of reality as it is. As for compassion, he said, it is already inherent within us. He said wisdom and compassion go hand in hand; when we acquire wisdom, we come to develop compassion. We often cannot see reality as it is because we imprison ourselves in false beliefs and delusions derived from our ignorance.

**Jungjin’s Grandfather**

In discussing compassion, Jungjin first mentioned his great-grandmother. She lived in the family home, with Jungjin, Jungjin’s parents, and Jungjin’s grandparents, as is the case in many Korean households, especially in rural areas. The whole family were devout Buddhists, who believed in doing good deeds (bosi in Korean Buddhism) for people suffering from poverty or illness.

Jungjin’s great-grandmother created a spiritual atmosphere in the household with her soothing, melodious, daily recitation of prayers from *Chunsookyung*, a Buddhist book of prayers of love and compassion that were intended to be helpful in relieving people’s suffering. She would recite these hour-long prayers every day. She would pray with devotion and reverence, kneeling in front of an altar, alone in the back of the house. Watching her, Jungjin remembers being deeply moved.

Young Jungjin started to repeat his great-grandmother’s Buddhist prayers after her. One day, he recited many of those verses in front of other family members. His grandparents were very pleased with him. Just by listening to his great-grandmother’s comforting and peaceful prayers, young Jungjin felt his heart gradually filling with compassion for others. Such devotional prayer was a form of meditation for Jungjin, something to calm and purify the mind.

Jungjin’s grandfather was born in the late 1890s. He studied Confucian and Buddhist teachings and his rural community considered him a wise and respectful scholar. In his lifetime, he diligently followed the Confucian and Buddhist philosophy that stresses leading a virtuous life as a compassionate person. Here are some of Jungjin’s childhood memories of his grandfather:

> My grandfather was a devout Buddhist like my great-grandmother and used to take me to a Buddhist temple which evoked a sense of reverence and sacredness for me, even though I was quite young. On the way to the temple, I remember walking holding my grandfather’s hand, very early in the morning, and when my legs got tired, he would pick me up and put me on his back. He walked in silence for a long time—the Buddhist temple
was situated on a high mountain, far from my village. Feeling my grandfather’s warmth and love for me on his back, I remember feeling very comforted, loved, and happy. I believe my grandfather’s deep caring and love for me has greatly influenced my character.

When I became 5 or 6, my grandfather taught me how to play the game baduk (go, in Japanese), an old Asian board game similar to chess, and how to write Chinese characters. This could have been boring to a child, but I enjoyed learning how to play Baduk and how to write Chinese characters, because he often taught me by singing songs, which I found amusing and fun. (Interview transcription, p. 95)

Jungjin’s grandfather had a stern look, because he was a strict disciplinarian, but once you knew him, he was really a warm and loving person, especially towards his favourite grandson, Jungjin.

Jungjin’s family was a jongajib household. That is, it contained four generations, continuing through the eldest sons; Jungjin’s grandfather and father were the eldest sons and so they lived together in one house. Being the eldest sons, Jungjin’s father and grandfather were in charge of holding many ancestral, memorial rituals called chesa throughout the year. These commemorated the anniversaries of their ancestors’ deaths dating back four generations. Chesa took place almost once a month in Jungjin’s household. To prepare for these important services, Jungjin’s grandparents and parents prepared abundant, festive food for each deceased ancestor, because, according to Korean tradition, the ancestors’ spirits come back on the anniversary of their passing to savour their favourite food, especially prepared for them, and to bless their living descendants with good health and prosperity.

During these ceremonies, it was Jungjin’s grandfather, as head of the household, who presided over all the regulations of the ritual, such as family members’ dutiful bowing (twice from head to floor, then once to the waist) to their deceased ancestors. The rituals took place in front of an altar. Behind the altar, all kinds of food prepared the day before were placed on a big table. Jungjin’s grandfather followed specific placement of the foods on the table, such as placing red fruits on the east side and placing white fruits on the west side. Behind the table was a big paper screen. Once everything was ready, Jungjin’s grandfather would recite prayers to invite ancestral spirits to their house, followed by more bowing.

For the chesa, Jungjin’s grandfather taught his favourite grandchild Jungjin how to bow properly, how the food should be arranged on the table in a specific way, and how to properly offer rice wine to the ancestors (rotate the rice wine cup three times with two hands over the altar through the smoke of burning incense). Jungjin told me that this traditional Korean custom
stressed appreciation, respect, and duty for deceased ancestors going back four generations, and that only the male members of the family could take part in this rite. The female members of the family were in charge of preparing the food the day before. If they wanted to watch the service, they did so standing behind the male members.

When Jungjin was young, there were many poor people who lived in his neighbourhood. Jungjin’s grandfather helped them by feeding them:

> When I was a child, I remember seeing many homeless and poor people in my neighbourhood and village who would come to ask for food at my house, especially the day after the chesa. To prepare for chesa, the women in our house had prepared much food and the homeless and the poor knew there would be enough leftover food for them the following day. When they showed up at our house, my grandparents would treat them as important guests, offering all kinds of food at the special table especially set up for them in our courtyard. (Interview transcription, p. 93)

Jungjin’s grandparents extended their compassionate deeds to other people. They had much land and hired many farmers to harvest rice or vegetables in the fall. Jungjin’s grandparents took care of them and their children, providing them with free shelter and food. Jungjin said that growing up he was deeply touched by his grandparents’ good deeds and compassion for these farmers and their families.

Then, in February, on the 15th day after the Chinese New Year, Jungjin’s grandfather, being the most respected scholar in the village, went to the Sadang (the Korean ancestral shrine) where he presided over a formal Confucian and Buddhist ceremony on behalf of the whole community. Around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, before dawn, he would get up, wash, and then wake up young Jungjin who would accompany him to the Sadang. Jungjin would have a shower and change his clothes before leaving the house. From Jungjin’s house to the Sadang was a very long walk. Once they arrived at the Sadang, young Jungjin would spend quiet time with his grandfather before the ceremony began. Before people arrived, his grandfather would take time to meditate in a half-lotus position. Even though Jungjin was only 4 or 5 years old, he remembers being deeply moved by his devotion and spirituality.

The next story related to Jungjin’s grandfather’s love and compassion comes from a deep bite Jungjin got from a dog. When Jungjin was a child, the neighbour next door kept a vicious dog. One day the dog bit Jungjin really badly. When his grandfather saw Jungjin’s leg bleeding profusely, he started to suck out the blood from the wound in order to prevent the dog’s poison
from spreading into his grandson’s body. When Jungjin saw his grandfather caring so much about him, he felt much gratitude and love for him.

Jungjin’s grandfather was also open-minded towards Western-style education and Christianity, even though he was a Buddhist. There was a church run by Christians in the village where the pastor had built a small Western-style school. Jungjin’s grandfather believed in exposing Jungjin to Western culture and sent Jungjin to the Christian school during summer holidays. And when it was Christmas, he even distributed Christmas presents to the church people who had come to sing carols at his house in the morning.

**Jungjin’s Parents**

Jungjin’s parents’ top priority was to provide their children with the best education they could afford. Thus they sent him from their remote rural village to a private elementary school in Busan, the largest city in his province. But as soon as Jungjin got transferred to this school, he had a serious eye injury that caused him to almost lose the sight in one eye. As a result of this accident, he had to spend some months in hospital and at home, recovering. When his eyes got better, he went back to school where he now had difficulty catching up with all the work he had missed during his long absence. Jungjin thought about how devoted his parents were to him, working so hard to send him to a good private school, and realized that he had to work very hard at school to repay for their sacrifice and love for him.

**An Older Girl**

Before he left for Busan, Jungjin remembers feeling compassion for the older girl (called nuna in Korean) who lived next door, who suffered from epilepsy. She had a kind heart and a shy look, and was very sensitive. People’s opinions and criticism could trigger an outbreak of her illness. For example, if people stared at her, she might faint and fall on the ground in convulsions, foaming at the mouth. This was a frightening sight for everybody around her. Watching her suffer so much from her sickness, Jungjin felt a deep empathy for her. He could not understand why such a good person like her had to go through so much pain.

**A Bully**

One day while Jungjin was attending the private high school in Busan, he happened to be playing alone on the school playground. Suddenly a big, violent-looking boy came up and started to
bully him. Noticing the boy was about to hit him, Jungjin decided to treat him with gentle and kind words, rather than to confront him. So he started to talk to him nicely with a friendly smile, and the boy surprisingly became docile like a lamb. After this incident, Jungjin and the boy almost became friends.

**How Can We Develop Compassion in Ourselves?**

**Jungjin’s Contemplative Practices**

Jungjin said his spiritual view founded on Buddhist beliefs was the basis for his contemplative practices. For him, spirituality was directly related to the Buddha nature in each of us, a feeling of oneness with the divinity or God. Spirituality also represented a realm uniting the elements of emotion, reason, and the soul. Jungjin believed all sentient beings, even plants and trees, have a spirit.

**Zen Meditation**

In order to calm his mind and to get rid of negative emotions, Jungjin practised Zen (seon in Korean) meditation, a sitting meditation (jwaseon in Korean: jwa means sitting and seon means meditation). Zen meditation emphasizes the sitting posture, breathing, and focusing on one object. In order to have the right posture and breathing, you first have to take a full or half-lotus position with your legs, after which you start counting your breaths or watch your breaths flowing in and out through your nostrils, always focusing on one object. As for other parts of your body, your back should be straight, your eyes can be half-closed or closed, and your fingers are folded together with the thumbs touching lightly and placed over your crossed legs. During the practice, when the thoughts arise, you just watch them rather than fight against them and when the thoughts dissipate, you just let them go. Jungjin explained that the aim of Zen meditation was to steady the mind and discover the Buddha nature within, so that we could become compassionate and enlightened.

Ever since high school, Jungjin has spent a good deal of time alone, thinking about and reflecting on who he was. He went to Buddhist temples, listened to the monks’ teachings, and learned how to meditate. While in high school, he was involved in organizing a club for high school students who were interested in Zen Buddhism. During his summer and winter holidays, unlike his friends who were interested in girls, Jungjin went alone to a Buddhist temple situated on a
mountain where he would spend a month. At the temple, he watched the monks meditate, recited Buddhist verses with the monks, and bowed 108 times every morning in front of the statue of the Buddha in the company of the monks. Jungjin continued to meditate the way the monks taught him, even after he went to university.

This is how Jungjin described his practice of Zen meditation:

*I enjoy practising Zen meditation by candlelight very early in the morning. I find it peaceful to meditate in silence watching the candle’s flames. Lighting a candle for meditation has been practised for centuries at the Buddhist temples in Korea, probably because just by watching the flames, you can feel peaceful and serene. When I was a child, I used to enjoy watching fires from the burning twigs in the kitchen stove that was used to cook food and warm the house. When you watch a campfire burning in front of you at night, you can feel a deep connection with the people and nature around you. Watching intensely a blazing fire or stars in the sky can help you open up your heart and become filled with a sense of awe. I believe this is why we educators have to expose our students to nature as often as we can.

When I have difficulty controlling my mind, due to anger, disappointment, or jealousy, I practice Zen meditation, from which I become aware that my negative thoughts do not originate from other people, but from within myself. As it was me who was involved in creating the problem, I am also a part of the problem which is suppressed in my shadow (negative and repressed memories tucked away in my subconscious mind, as defined by Jung). In order to bring peace to my mind, I try to shine the sunlight of compassion and wisdom on my shadow, instead of blaming others for my negative thoughts. I believe that through the practice of meditation, we can free ourselves from the shadow, by realizing that our thoughts are but illusory creations of our own mind. Through meditation, I try to see my true self, the Buddha nature within me. Even though I still become very sensitive to or angry at people’s criticism, I try not to get controlled by it and try to be detached from it. I believe that through the practice of meditation we can melt the negative thoughts suppressed in our shadow and can make changes in our selfish ways of treating life. When I meditate using this mindset, my problems do not seem that serious anymore and my mind eventually becomes steady and calm.*

*(Interview transcription, pp. 100–101)*

**Walking Meditation**

In addition to Zen meditation, Jungjin practises walking meditation every morning for one hour and listens to classical music, which helps him calm down. He also engages in daily reading. Fully absorbed in reading and losing himself in it contributes to a meditative state. Although Jungjin has been practising Zen meditation for more than 40 years, he enjoys walking meditation more now, as he becomes older. Walking alone in the high mountains for two or three hours, he looks at the beauty in nature around him—flowers, plants, and tree leaves—and feels himself becoming one with them. Contemplating nature, he feels his mind becoming clear and his heart becoming filled with compassion for all beings. Jungjin says he does not mind the fact that his
walking meditation has become more enjoyable than the sitting Zen meditation that he has practised for so long, because it is important to choose the meditation that works best for you. He notes that you can even practise mindfulness when you are engaged in daily chores, such as washing dishes or vacuuming the floor, if that suits you.

**Vipassana Meditation**

In addition to Zen meditation and walking meditation, Jungjin practises vipassana, a form of mindfulness meditation. Vipassana means to see things as they really are. Vipassana meditation is basically about proper breathing. The meditator focuses on watching the flow of the breath in and out, and the changes that arise in the mind, body, and emotions.

Jungjin explained there are two basic techniques of practising vipassana, which go hand in hand: One is *ji*, the act of stopping the thoughts that arise in the mind, and the other is *guan*, the act of just watching the thoughts that arise in the mind. Stopping the thoughts (*ji*) in meditation is very hard to do for anybody, but when you become one with your thoughts, you can stop them for a while. In the practice of *guan*, you watch the flow of your thoughts that arise in your mind. For example, when you are angry, by watching your angry thoughts, you can feel them dissipating. Inhaling and exhaling, and using two methods of *ji* and *guan*, is the foundation of vipassana meditation.

Regular practice of vipassana meditation has brought positive changes into Jungjin’s personal and professional life. He is now able to stop his negative thoughts more easily than before. He feels more peaceful and focused in his teaching and daily life. Jungjin told me that every time he is faced with a conflict in personal or professional life, he goes into his inner world, using vipassana meditation, and watches his negative and illusive thoughts. Through this practice he sees more clearly the true nature of his conflict.

Along with *ji* and *guan*, Jungjin explained three principles of vipassana meditation to follow in order to practise it properly.

The first principle to follow is *josin*, meaning having your body in a correct position. The second one is *josik*, meaning having the right inhalation and exhalation while observing the flow of the breath. The third one is *josim*, meaning calmly watching the flow of your thoughts. Jungjin said he always keeps these principles in mind while practising vipassana meditation.
He told me that in vipassana meditation, breathing is the basic link between the I and the true nature of reality. This is why breathing is emphasized in vipassana meditation. In vipassana meditation, it is also important to observe what is going on in one’s physical sensations. Jungjin observes and listens to his heart, which he knows is beating regularly; his stomach, that sometimes does not digest well; and his body cells, which are working hard to keep him healthy.

**Steps in Developing Compassion**

Jungjin explained that Buddhism teaches that good and evil are innate and exist as inseparable aspects of duality within us. In Buddhism, good is identified with the Buddha nature within us, while evil is recognized as our innate delusion, our inner dark side. Good generates a sense of connection among us, while evil brings a sense of disconnection, putting people’s hearts against each other. We cannot label a particular individual good or evil, because everyone is capable of doing both good and evil.

Jungjin said that since we inherently have the source of compassion—the Buddha nature—within, we can develop it through a meditation practice that helps us be aware of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings. Jungjin described three steps to follow in developing compassion.

**Meditate.** The first step is to quiet the mind in meditation, by stopping our thoughts. Then we can be aware of our interconnectedness in this world and in the universe. The I exists because of the other’s existence; the I cannot exist alone. We are all interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent. In order to exist in this world, we need one another. When we think about the food we eat, we find that it is connected to the sun, rain, air, and the earth; the farmer, delivery man, retailer, and so on. If there is no sun, the crops cannot grow. If there is no consumer, the farmers cannot survive. Thus, we are all interconnected. When we realize this universal law, we can understand that the I cannot exist separately, but only in relation to others. In this understanding, we can get rid of our selfish thoughts of the I alone and can remind ourselves to be compassionate towards others.

**Be aware of the innate Buddha nature.** The second step is that, in adhering to the Buddhist belief in *sungsunsul*, a belief that we are born with the Buddha nature of compassionate mind, we can cultivate compassion naturally. Sometimes, due to the social environment and conditioning
we grew up with, people can act violently and selfishly. Jungjin said it is important to realize even the people we label as bad have goodness within them; it is only hidden for now.

Serve others. The third step in developing compassion is to serve others. By doing so, we can develop the compassion that arises naturally within us. When Jungjin was in high school, he and his classmates did some volunteer charity work with marginalized people. He told me that he and his classmates not only enjoyed working with them, but also developed compassion, because, seeing the suffering and misfortune of these people, they became empathetic. Jungjin said society needed to create more opportunities to serve others, particularly those in need. By providing people in need with the right conditioning and environment, we can help them bring out their innate Buddha nature. He compared this transformation to seeds (even unhealthy seeds) that can grow into healthy and lovely plants, when they are watered and cared for. If we neglect to water and care for any kind of seed, it will not grow into a healthy plant.

How Do We Foster Compassion in Schools?

Jungjin at His Buddhist University

Problems in Current Korean Education

According to Jungjin, Korea’s results-oriented educational system has negatively affected students, because it forces educators to focus on boosting students’ test achievements, thereby exploring the left brain to excess, rather than their level of happiness, thus ignoring the right brain. If students achieved well in mathematics, language, and English on standardized tests, then their school would be regarded as a top school in Korea, and parents would want to enrol their child in this school so their children could excel academically. However, Jungjin said this outcome-oriented educational approach was not desirable, especially for preschool children, because it could harm their self-esteem. This could lead to unhappiness and academic failure later in life.

In order to bring balance into the present Korean educational system, Jungjin suggested the following guidelines:

- Pour caring and love into children, especially when they are young.
- Show support in developing children’s potential.
- Let children play freely in nature.
• Bring child-centred and individualized learning into class, so that the educators can help children one-to-one develop their own interest, resilience, and good work habits at their own pace at whatever activity they are engaged in.

By applying these pedagogies, Jungjin believed we could create a class where children would be happy and free to explore their own learning. He said happy children make for happy schools and happy parents.

Educational Aims at Jungjin’s Buddhist University

Jungjin told me that the educational goals of his university were to build up one’s character based on Buddhist virtues; to fill nation, mankind, and nature with wisdom and compassion; and to realize an ideal society in which people could trust and respect one another. He said in order to achieve these goals, his university strove to help its students on their journey of self-discovery, service to others, and spiritual enlightenment through contemplation.

Jungjin said that, in Buddhist teachings, there were six interrelated ways of fostering compassion: bosi, gigai, inyok, gihai, sunjung, and jeongjin.

Bosi means doing good deeds to others, gigai means having the right rules that we have to follow in life, inyok means having patience in life, gihai and sunjung mean practising meditation, and jeongjin means working hard towards accomplishing the right goal of compassion.

Ways of Fostering Compassion in Jungjin’s Class

Buddha nature within. For more than 10 years, Jungjin has been teaching undergraduate and graduate students at the university where he obtained his BA. His preschool teacher-candidates are sent for practice-teaching in kindergarten classes throughout the year and are encouraged to do volunteer work at the orphanages run by Buddhist monks. When the students come back from their practice teaching and volunteer work, Jungjin hears them express much joy after teaching or helping others. Jungjin’s students are also sent to a Buddhist temple once or twice a year where they practise Zen meditation. Courses he teaches include Buddhist Psychology, Introduction to Buddhist Psychology, and Buddhist Psychology of Early-Childhood Education. The latter prepares prospective teacher-candidates to become early-childhood educators at Buddhist kindergartens.
His course curricula derive from his deep study of Buddhism. Through all these courses, Jungjin focuses on teaching that we all are born with bulsung, “the Buddha nature within,” which Jungjin compares to Jung’s “individuation,” becoming one’s own self. The role of the educator in Buddhist kindergartens is to help bring out each child’s inherent Buddha nature, by providing them the right conditioning and right social environment. Through contemplation, Jungjin believed we could help children go into their inner world, so they can develop independence and goodness, find their own path, and flourish in their self-actualization. His aim was to bring transformative education into class rather than transmission education, which is the current Korean educational norm.

Jungjin’s course, “Buddhist Psychology of Early-Childhood Education,” focuses on compassion education (i.e., moral and character education). In this course Jungjin teaches his teacher-candidates that the educators should not predict or decide kindergarten children’s future too soon, because some children’s potential is only manifested when they are older. Judging children too soon can hurt their self-esteem and dignity. Instead, we have to try to meet each child’s needs with individualized teaching. He stresses that since all children have unique potential, educators should give them unlimited feedback, support, and love, so that they can feel confident in developing their own interests and talents.

Jungjin pointed out that we sometimes miss the opportunity to help children who are in desperate need. We might think children are not sensitive to how we nurture them, but they intuitively know how they are being treated in class. We need to remind ourselves of the authentic Buddha nature within each one, for each child has different strengths and talents. He said this is why we as educators need to practise meditation, because it allows us to see the children as they really are. With the wisdom and compassion that arise in contemplation, we can foster children’s diverse potentials with fairness and without any unconscious favouritism.

**Focus on student’s authenticity.** He believed happy and kind teacher-candidates could bring happiness and kindness to their future kindergarten classes. In order to nourish and bring out children’s authentic Buddha nature, Jungjin believed we educators have to observe them very carefully and give them sustained caring. Our job is to help them understand their authenticity, so that they can be independent learners who have self-discipline, self-esteem, and self-respect. The Latin origin of the word education, *educare*, means to “bring out”; our educational aim is to help bring out the students’ dormant talents and good character. Jungjin did not expect changes
to take place in his class immediately; nevertheless, he is pleased to hear external visitors give comments on his students, such as “Your students look happy and calm. Your students are well mannered and kind.”

Jungjin said if we want to promote students’ authenticity, we need to foster their self-discovery. This requires self-reflection on their identity and their purpose in life. So he encourages discussion in his classes with questions such as “Who are you? What is your mission in life? Where are you going from here?” He also asks his students to reflect on these questions when they meditate. He said that through contemplation his students could steer clear of narcissism and selfishness, realizing instead the interconnectedness of all sentient beings with whom they seek to live in harmony and peace.

**Concept of interconnectedness.** One of Jungjin’s courses is based on Buddhist psychology. In it, he teaches yeonkibub (interconnectedness), one of the most important teachings in Buddhist psychology, since it explains how our mind works and how karma (the law of cause and effect) affects our lives. Yeonkibub’s main concept is that humans and all other sentient beings are interrelated and interconnected, and that there is always a cause and effect to every phenomenon. Understanding the interconnectedness between us, we come to realize that we have to live in harmony with others, helping one another and serving those in need. On this basis, we come to understand that I exist because of the other and I should therefore regard the other as a part of myself. Jungjin said by getting rid of the boundary between I and the Other, we can develop compassion, especially for those who are suffering, because then we can feel the suffering of others as if it were our own. Through comprehending this nonduality, we can be caring and compassionate towards the environment and all sentient beings.

**Role of female students.** Jungjin said many Korean women nowadays are working in high positions in education and politics, positions that can influence the country. Their role has become very significant, he believed, if we want to build a sane and happy society where there is more caring, love, and compassion. Ninety-nine percent of Jungjin’s students are female. He said that the role of women in education has become more important than ever, because, besides their work with preschool children after their graduation, they are the ones who will be carrying and giving birth to a human being. When we understand and come to regard birth as a sacred part of an endless cycle—representing a Buddhist concept of a continuity of past, present, and future lives that never ends, such as the cycle of the four seasons—we must address this sacredness
An Example of Compassion Education in Jungjin’s Class

A troubled student. Among Jungjin’s predominantly female preschool teacher-candidates was a male student who made a positive change in his study habits and attitude towards school work, thanks to Jungjin’s empathy, sustained caring, and clear guidance.

The student was a latecomer to the class, having transferred in his first year from the Department of Philosophy. When he first appeared in Jungjin’s class, he had a rebellious look on his face, in which Jungjin saw much repressed vitality. His disruptive behaviour in class indicated that he was not a calm person. Jungjin later noticed that the student spent a good deal of time riding a motorcycle around the campus and skipping classes without giving any reason. Because of his many absences from class and his lack of interest in Jungjin’s course, the student was not doing well academically.

Even though Jungjin was deeply disturbed by the student’s irresponsible and erratic behaviour in class, he became empathetic towards him because of his position as the only male student.

Instead of giving up on him, Jungjin started to deeply care about him, giving him more attention and more chances to respond to discussions in class. When he started to show more empathy and caring towards him, the student started to attend Jungjin’s class more regularly. Then one day, unexpectedly, he dropped by Jungjin’s office to say hello, which pleased Jungjin. Then he began to come more often, and stayed longer to chat with Jungjin. After several chats with him, Jungjin found out why he was not interested in his studies: he was confused, and lost as to how to go about his studies, and he lacked a clear goal for the future. Jungjin gave him step-by-step guidance with his studies and helped him clarify a clear postgraduation goal. After that, the student began attending classes regularly and worked very hard on all his assignments.

This is how Jungjin remembers how the student transformed his work habits:

*I believe the transformation in him was possible for the following reasons: First I took time to observe him carefully in class in order to find out the reason for his misbehaviour, but at the same time I let him know that I really cared about him. During our meetings later on in my office, I found out he was lacking step-by-step study skills*
and did not know why he was pursuing his studies in early-childhood education, even though he vaguely wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. As a result, when I tried to meet his needs through guidance and dialogue, the student became very interested in his studies and started to work very hard in class and on all his assignments. I always knew the student had a kind heart and would be a good student, if I helped him solve his problems.

The student now is in his last year and has become the leader in his class, helping his classmates with their assignments. With his good grades, excellent leadership, and participation in charity work, he obtained a scholarship from our University and continues to be a good role model to other students and I am very proud of him.

(Interview transcription, pp. 110–111, 117–118)

The Buddhist Kindergarten

During our interviews, I told Jungjin I was interested in watching how meditation was practised at the Buddhist kindergarten affiliated with Jungjin’s Buddhist University. The kindergarten was located next to the university. In the front it had a large, colourful, well-equipped playground. In the back was a thick, hilly forest where I was told the kindergarten children spent time in meditative activities or just playing.

Educational Aims

Jungjin introduced me to the kindergarten principal, who also teaches in Jungjin’s department, Early-Childhood Education. She welcomed us into her office with a warm and welcoming smile. She said the educational aims at her kindergarten were threefold: to have wise eyes; to have a compassionate heart; and to have hands that practise good deeds. She said the educator’s job at her school was to nurture and support the children, so that the children could learn independently in a caring, loving environment. The educators focused on nurturing the children, and encouraging them to be inquisitive, show interest in learning, and cultivate imagination and creativity through activities such as painting, crafts, and contemplation.

Jungjin told me that his department strives to instil transformative education among the teacher-candidate students. He said he does not want to see an education that seeks to fit the students into a mould, as is the case with the present Korean education system. As far as he was concerned, even though it was important for educators to show a depth of knowledge in their subjects they taught, what counted more was for educators at all levels to exhibit deep trust and confidence in the children’s abilities. He said it was important for educators to practise contemplation, so as to achieve a self-understanding that could then be reflected in their teaching. Jungjin said that if we
do not emphasize these qualities in teacher education, the preschool teacher-candidates’ approach to teaching would remain within the transmission education model. Transmission of knowledge is important with kindergarten children, but without educators’ loving and caring presence in class, not much meaning can be imparted. Jungjin recommended that instead of sitting at their desks, educators should get up, and play and interact with the children. That way they would be able to more carefully observe them and find out their unique interests and talents.

**Pedagogical Approaches**

When I asked the principal how the pedagogical approaches at her school were different from those practised at other schools, she explained three approaches that were different: observation of the children for a longer period, no evaluation at the beginning of school year, and provision of educational toys that require thinking skills.

First, educators at this kindergarten focus on observing the children for a lot longer than at other schools. The children are observed while they are playing, doing different activities, or interacting with other children. Secondly, the school does not evaluate children when they start kindergarten. Instead, the educators spend time observing or playing with the children, because they believe the children who might not do well in mathematics or language at the beginning of school year still have the potential to blossom in these subjects later on. Thirdly, in order to foster imagination and creativity, the school provides children with educational toys that need to be assembled or require thinking skills. Jungjin supported the principal in encouraging the preschool teacher-candidates in his department to learn to play a musical instrument such as the piano or the guitar, because when children learn through singing songs or moving physically to music, they can better develop the ability and skills to learn, imagine, and create.

During our conversation, Jungjin said he was sorry to see many Korean parents pushing their children to play Mozart or Beethoven at a very early age. Instead, the purpose for music lessons should be for children to enjoy the music, not to play like a concert pianist or a violin virtuoso. The purpose for teaching painting should be the same. The principal, agreeing with Jungjin, said the school does not aim to produce brilliant painters such as Van Gogh or Monet, but rather aims to produce happy children who enjoy painting. Jungjin said the same principle should apply to teaching sports: the purpose for playing sports should be for the children to enjoy themselves. He saw many Korean parents pushing their children to be like Yuna Kim, the Korean figure skater
who won the gold medal in ladies singles at the 2010 Winter Olympics, among many other honours. Instead, he said, educators should focus on teaching children the process of hard work, perseverance, and discipline that Yuna Kim had to go through for a long time in order to be where she is now. Jungjin said the gifted program is very popular right now among Korean parents who want to boast to their friends how smart their children are, but whether they are gifted or not, parents should rather use their energy towards their children’s happiness, nurturing and supporting their unique talents and interests.

The principal told me in order to foster transformative education, and to foster children’s imagination, creativity, and compassion, her kindergarten’s curriculum includes contemplative practices such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. These practices help children feel connected to their body, mind, and spirit. The kindergarten educators cover the curriculum using physical movement, the arts (music, painting, and dance), and mindfulness.

In addition, the kindergarten curriculum includes exposure to nature. Outdoor activities are considered especially beneficial for children who live in condominiums, where they do not have much opportunity to touch the soil. Both the principal and Jungjin agreed that children’s love of playing outdoors should be encouraged, instead of watching so much TV or videos. To his dismay, Jungjin noticed that many parents were addicted to watching TV, so that they neglected their children who in turn spent time playing video games that could harm their health and their character development. A professor at Sook-Myung University in Seoul recently started a new movement to bring books into class, instead of computers. Jungjin sided with the professor—instead of putting more computers in kindergarten classes, he said he would like to see more books such as fairy tales in the classroom, since these can awaken children’s imagination.

**Contemplative Practices**

The principal told me that contemplative practices such as yoga and meditation form a large part of the kindergarten curriculum. She said these practices foster a calm, steady, and compassionate mind and nurture imagination and creativity among children.

**Yoga.** Yoga is taught once a week for 40 minutes by a kind and gentle yoga teacher from Israel, specially hired by the school. The yoga postures, breathing, and meditation he teaches to his kindergarten children are based on hatha yoga. He introduces the practices through storytelling. He meets the children in an imagined forest, where he tells stories in English and Korean that
require different yoga poses and breathing. During the class I particularly noticed the children’s happy faces and their spontaneous engagement in yoga practice.

During warm-up, the teacher and children stood in a circle. The teacher said, “Good morning! Let’s move our body freely. We welcome the sun (posture to welcome the sun, standing with legs apart, arms raised, and eyes looking up) and say good-bye to the moon (posture to say good-bye using hands). We live in a triangular house (pose of a triangle: bending to the left side sliding the left hand down to the left leg) in a forest where we practice yoga that makes our body and mind healthy (they all stand in a comfortable position).”

During the main lesson, the teacher said, “As we are thirsty from walking in the forest, let’s pull a water bucket up from the well (gesture for bringing up a bucket of water from the well, pulling the imagined bucket with both arms). Now as we are hungry, let’s make bread (gesture for kneading the dough). When we are cold in the forest, we cut wood (gesture to cut the wood) to make fire. When we are hot, we swim (gesture of swimming) in clean water. When our body is tired, we smile at the mountain (mountain pose: raise the arms up in the air to touch the hands with a smile). Now we see a crane and a stork (crane pose: standing on one leg) that talk about which fish tastes better (two children working together pretending to be a crane and a stork).

Look! There is an eagle flying in the sky (eagle pose: bring the left leg up, hooking it around the right leg, and bringing the arms out in front). The eagle is flying down to sit on its egg (motion of an eagle flying down). Oh my goodness, the egg has hatched (child’s pose: sit on the heels, bending forward, resting the forehead on the ground, and placing the hands by the sides). The mother eagle sings a lullaby to her baby eagle (in a sitting position, lift one leg to move it gently to the left and to the right, as if the leg were the baby). It is morning now and many butterflies start flying (sitting, move the arms up and down like butterfly wings). The cat is waking up from his sleep (cat pose: with hands and knees on the floor, move like a cat using the pelvis). When it is daytime, we see a camel (camel pose: leaning back with hands flat on the ground and tilting the head back as far as possible) walking by our house. Suddenly we spot a snake (cobra pose: on your stomach, placing hands down, arching back your body as far as possible, and looking up) that lifts its head and looks behind where there are many flowers. Now we all become flowers. In the morning we open up our petals and in the evening we close them (imitate a flower that opens up and closes down). Can we offer these flowers to our teachers and parents? (The yoga teacher and children make gestures of offering these imaginative flowers to the teachers and visitors in the hall.)
To finish off the lesson, the yoga teacher invited children to lie down on their back in a big circle resembling a big sunflower. They all lay down and relaxed for a few minutes. Then he lifted one leg and put it down and the children followed him. He lifted the other leg and put it down and the children lifted the other leg and put it down. Now the teacher and the children made a big lotus flower together, the symbol of true nature of beings in Buddhism, and meditated for two minutes, paying attention to the inhalation and the exhalation of their breaths. Now everybody sat in a circle and blew a kiss with one hand which was tossed up high in the air, as a gesture of spreading love to all beings.

**Meditation.** The principal stated that at her school meditation is taught by the homeroom teacher every morning. Meditative activities are seen as helping children connect to their Buddha nature within and nurturing the children’s imagination, creativity, and compassion. As I arrived at the school in the afternoon, I could not watch the children practise meditation, but the principal kindly gave me a meditation videotape made in 2009 for the 5th teachers’ workshop for Buddhist education for children (Dongguk Buddhist Kindergarten, 2009). In the video, I watched four categories of activities: becoming friends with meditation, becoming one with one’s mind, expressing one’s feelings of happiness in nature, and inviting healthy energy into the body through breathing.

Meditative activities that helped children “become friends with meditation” included making pottery, so as to have connection with the soil, as well as playing with water and walking in the forest to have connection with nature. What impressed me in the video was to watch the children deeply engaged in their activities in a calm and content demeanour.

The meditative activities that helped children “become one with one’s mind” included planting a seed of compassion in one’s heart through meditation, introducing the seed to a friend, and expressing one’s feelings about the seed through painting. Other activities included feeling and observing sunlight and the candlelight within oneself which were invited to stay within, then expressing one’s feelings about them through poetry or painting. The children were also encouraged to express their feelings through different colours, to keep their favourite colour in their heart, and to paint it as an expression of themselves.

The contemplation that allowed the children to “express their feelings of happiness in nature” included feeling the soft wind blowing over their face and body; playing in the wind with
dancing movements; and putting their wishes into soap bubbles and watching the bubbles float away or fly high in the air.

The meditation that helped with “feeling energy through breathing” included physical exercises and stretching the body outdoors; looking at the sky and the earth; playing in the forest; watching, talking to, embracing, and giving love to trees; and just playing happily, after which the children came back to class to express their meditative experiences through painting, short stories, or poems.

Additionally, I watched the kindergarten children praying for the rabbits and chickens they had raised and looked after, which had died and were now buried in the school yard. I was deeply moved by their compassionate gestures.
CHAPTER 5:
FRANCES’S PARTIAL BIOGRAPHY—IN THE WORLD OF
“THE NAME OF THE TREE”

Background

When I met Frances for the first time in her special education classroom, I was struck by her warm and caring presence. The next thing I noticed was her students’ display of intricate and colourful artwork—origami paper snowflakes of different colours, sizes, and geometric shapes. I also noticed the beautiful flower arrangements and plants on her desk and on a big, round table in the back of the classroom. The room looked welcoming, orderly, and clean. A gentle breeze came in through the window behind the round table, where we took our seats and started to talk.

Frances had been born and raised as the third daughter in an Irish, Roman Catholic family in a very remote area of northwestern Québec, a part of the Canadian Shield. She felt very much at home in nature. She also spent several years of her childhood in Ireland, due to her father’s work reestablishment. Her family was fairly well off, as her father was a mining engineer, but her parents never insisted on having the best car or a fancy house. Both parents were strong and supportive, and she had no outstanding worries as a child.

Her mother was a devout Catholic who used the religion as a formula, while her father had more of a spiritual than a religious nature. He had been raised Presbyterian, and converted to Catholicism when he got married. He was devoted to reading the King James Bible. Inspired by his meditations on it, he wrote many notes and personal interpretations. He never pushed religion on Frances, but her mother did, insisting her daughter attend Sunday mass on a regular basis. Frances went to Catholic elementary schools, but secretly she railed against Catholicism for its dogmas and rituals, which to her did not make sense, and seemed superficial.

Frances had taught in the elementary public school system for 19 years, after which she was offered a position at a Waldorf school in Atlanta, where she taught for 5 years. Later, she taught for 1 year at a Toronto Waldorf school. Now she was back to the public school system, for financial reasons, as she needed a pension for her retirement. Unfortunately pensions were not offered at Waldorf schools. She was now teaching a special education class for mentally ill children aged 11 to 14.
During our interviews, she said how much she missed her teaching years at the Waldorf schools. There, the focus was on nurturing the whole child and as a result the children were very happy to engage in learning. Before moving to Waldorf schools, she had been disillusioned by the results-driven education in public schools, which overlooked the whole child. Instead, Ministry of Education guidelines and curriculum placed a great deal of attention on students’ marks and results. For example, she once had an Indian girl in her class who had been traumatized in her country and who could not speak a word of English. When Frances focused on improving her oral skills, she was pushed to teach reading skills first, because the system believed if we taught how to read, then children would automatically know how to speak—a belief coming from an unproven theory. Frances said we should nurture and educate the whole child, focusing on the well-being of children and their process of learning, not just on the child’s intellect. In the public school system, she found herself getting burnt out.

**What is the Nature of Compassion?**

*Once, long ago, in the land of short grass, there was a great hunger. No rain fell, and no grass grew and all the animals were very hungry. . . . The fruit of that tree was delicious and good to eat, but it could be reached only by those who knew the name of the tree.*

—C. B. Lottridge, *The Name of the Tree*

In our interviews, I asked Frances how she defined compassion. She said that for her it was to be aware of the connection with other people; this meant getting in touch with the essence of who she was and who others were, and taking the time to appreciate the connection we all have with one another. It was about taking time to understand our meaning and purpose in life. For her, compassion, reverence, kindness, and respect were one and the same. To nurture compassion in schools, she believed we need to nurture our spiritual side. In order to develop compassion, some kind of meditation—finding inner quiet—would be very important.

**Her Father**

Frances’s father was most influential in helping her understand spirituality and the nature of compassion. This is how she described him:

*From the earliest memories of my childhood, I remember vividly my father who knelt with me every night in my bedroom to pray together before he retired to do his own prayers in his bedroom. His prayers were always inclusive, as he prayed not only for his family, but also for various family members such as an uncle who lived quite a distance away or any family members who were suffering, such as an aunt who was going through a hardship in life, neither of whom I had ever met. My father also included the poor in his prayers.*
What I admired most about my father was how he showed his kindness, respect, honour, and responsibility through his compassionate deeds to all humanity, especially to the homeless, the unfortunate, and the poor. My father did not believe in religious dogmas or belonging to any specific religion. He did not believe in following blindly the clergymen's interpretations of the Bible, but took ownership of this himself, by being devoted to his reading of the Bible through reflection, personal interpretation, and notes. He was a spiritual, gentle, quiet, generous, and compassionate man who always did what he could for others, and believed in helping and taking care of less fortunate people. My father said it was our responsibility to help others. This means we should put ourselves in others' shoes and understand we have to contribute to help them. For example, when I moved to Ireland at the age of 8, I remember seeing many homeless and poor people in Limerick who were shunned by others due to their bad smell and torn clothes. But my father showed compassion for them and was financially very generous to them. He taught me to be in poor people's shoes to see their perspective. His life was not about religion, but about how he lived. He took ownership of truth in life.

My father also had a deep love of nature and a wonderful sense of humour that brought lightness into life. He found joy in flowers, birds, and animals and made people laugh, both of which traits have been passed on to me. During my childhood in Ireland, I used to pick up stray dogs that I looked after. Now I own an affectionate and playful dog that greets me when I come home from school. Like my father who had a sense of humour, I strive to bring laughter and joy to my students. For example, as I am very good at making chicken sounds, I recorded chicken sounds at home, which I played to my class on April Fool's Day. When my students first heard the sounds in the middle of lesson, they could not figure out where they were coming from and started to look for chickens here and there, as the sounds were so real. But when they found out it was a joke played by me, they burst into a big and joyous laughter. (Interview transcription, pp. 6–8)

Frances said she was grateful to have spent many years with her father, after he moved in with her after her mother’s early death. During her father’s stay in her home, Frances got to know him well before he died at the age of 96. She was also grateful to be able to assist him at his deathbed. She asked him if he wanted to hear some verses from the Bible. He nodded his assent. When Frances took out his King James Bible and opened it, she was deeply impressed and touched to notice so many pages that were torn and falling apart from her father’s lifetime of reading. Many pages were covered with notes. Not knowing which page to choose to read to her dying father, she quickly found some verses that she thought might please him.

**Her Friend’s Mother**

Another person who profoundly influenced Frances in understanding the nature of compassion was the mother of a friend whom she had met in her first year of university. Starting in her early 20s, she had begun to look for something more spiritual and meaningful, as she was unsatisfied
with Catholicism and other religions. At university, she became familiar with Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy and eurythmy through her friend’s mother:

My friend once told me that her mother worked for severely developmentally handicapped people, but I later found out that her mother was not working for them, but lived with them at her huge farm house, dedicating and devoting her whole life to look after children from Europe and other places, one of whom was her own daughter. I was invited to the farm one day and watched my friend’s mother teach. Her teaching was based on Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy and I was very inspired by the reverence and honour that I felt in her house. As a result, I became familiar with Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy, which honours the earth and honours children. Witnessing this reverence and honour and Steiner’s method of education made a profound impression on me. It helped me to understand what teaching is about. Eventually I ended up working there for a year during which I read and studied Steiner’s lectures with my friend’s mother. Through these studies I got to understand Steiner’s anthroposophy, of which the main focuses are: a teaching in harmony with the child’s nature; a nurturing of the child’s thoughts and emotions in the classroom; deep connection to the soul; love of learning; reverence for nature; and the concept of oneness in the curriculum. The teaching and learning experience at the house of my friend’s mother has stayed with me forever and it is no accident that I am now teaching children with learning disabilities and mental illnesses. (Interview transcription, pp. 9–10)

A Home Invasion

Frances believed that people, especially labelled people such as convicts, can change, if we forgive and give them a chance to change. While she was teaching at the Waldorf in Atlanta, she experienced a violent home invasion. A man forced his way into her house, stole her money, and beat her up; she developed serious shoulder problems as a result. After the incident, curiously enough she could not feel anger at this person, even though she felt fear. Instead, Frances found herself empathetic and compassionate towards him. Noticing he was limping badly, she thought he had probably had been shown very little compassion in his childhood, and perhaps he had not experienced a father’s presence.

His trial took one and a half years. The assistant district attorney told Frances that he was going to offer the man a plea bargain in which he would agree to repeated offences in the past. She asked the assistant district attorney how he was going to deal with this person. He flatly replied that the man was “a write-off.” She was disappointed by this statement, and could not agree with a system that did not treat this person as a human being, but punished him based solely on his actions. She could not be angry at her invader, who probably had not had opportunities that she had had, and whose basic needs were most likely never met.
Frances developed unrealistic anxieties after the invasion, but she still saw this person with compassion. How could you not be compassionate with him, looking at his circumstances and the jail where he was thrown for 15 years without any parole? Frances believed that people can change, if they are given chance.

**How Can We Develop Compassion in Ourselves?**

*After a long time a very young tortoise spoke. “O animals,” he said, “I will go and find out the name of the tree.”*

— C. B. Lottridge, *The Name of the Tree*

**Frances’s Contemplative Practices**

Frances did not practice any formal religion but she did set aside quiet time alone, to develop self-awareness and sensitivity to the environment, and notice subtle changes in nature and in people around her. She referred to this development of the inner life through quiet contemplative practice as a kind of spiritual training.

**Nature.** Developing sensitivity to the environment around her, Frances found spirituality in nature:

*I love being in nature, where I feel most comfortable and peaceful. It is so refreshing and beautiful just to swim in a lake in the early morning, circling around the small island owned by my friend, just to get away from busyness and overwhelming stimulation of the outer world. The island is situated just south of North Bay, a part of the Canadian Shield, where I see rare wildflowers, bare rocks, and mossy patches. While swimming, I can feel the depth of the water by its changing temperatures at different spots. When I feel suddenly cold, I know I am swimming in very deep water. In the sleep cabin, which is 6 to 8 feet away from the water, I love listening to the little rippling sounds of the waves at night coming through the open windows.* (Interview transcription, p. 11)

**Mindfulness and reflection.** Frances practised mindfulness and reflected on her teaching as a means of cultivating compassion:

*My meditation can be sitting quietly in my house or classroom, contemplating a flower, walking in the forest, or observing changes in nature such as changes in the sky. Meditation means understanding the connection within me and around myself. I practise mindfulness when I do housework such as ironing or cleaning, or when I do watercolour painting. At school, several times a day, I recall the virtues of generosity and listening to others. Even though I do not belong to any religion or any group, I yearn to be generous. Meditation also means my reflections on how I have been with each of my students at the end of each day. Before going to sleep at night, I recall each of my seven students with special needs, reflect on how I have been that day in front of “my” children who might be going through much more anxiety and conflicts than other children, how I treated each of them, and why that child was that way. Education is about searching for the best in each child, the pearl, the gold, the diamond in each child, and letting it shine through in*
his/her life, and seeing the humanity in each child. When I find that I did not meet the need of a child during that day, I make sure to go back to do my unfinished work the next day or next time I see him or her. (Interview transcription, pp. 5, 12)

Reading. Reading and reflecting on books by Thich Nhat Hanh, Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, and Jean Vanier helped Frances cultivate compassion. Frances admired these teachers because they surpassed—they were able to let go of their ego. They were truly humble. They focused on the needs of others, and served others with no expectation of them. She admired Mother Theresa for her ability to let go of her ego and focus on the needs of others. What she admired about the Dalai Lama was his gentle presence and inner humility expressed in what he says and does. She felt we need figures like him in the world, for world leaders to be humbled by. In Jean Vanier, whose residence is called l’Arche, she found inspiration in his service for children with disabilities. She said she had had the privilege of visiting a l’Arche community in Richmond Hill, Ontario, called Day Break. There, compassion and respect arising from Rudolf Steiner’s work are practised. Frances liked to believe that compassion and love could make a difference in children’s lives. She believed that every child has a seed in him or her; we should bring out the light of the seed in each child. We have a moral responsibility to bring out the best in each child and nurture it.

Letting go. When Frances was able to let go of her problems, she could find answers in the spiritual world. Her mother taught her a valuable lesson for when she could not find the answer to a problem during the day: letting it go and sleeping on it. Her mother had told her to let the problem go for one night, and the answer would come during sleep. And somehow, the answer always did. The next morning, sure enough, she would find the answer to her problem. One time she sat down to play Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, which she had learned many years previously, but could not remember the melody. She went to sleep letting it go, and the next day when she woke up, she heard the melody—it had come back in her unconscious while she was sleeping.

Reflection on the teacher’s presence. Frances said that the teacher’s presence in class is very important when bringing compassion into schools. The teacher’s presence comes from the teacher’s authenticity and inner work. Frances was very passionate about her teaching and deeply cared about her students. She experienced much joy and delight in her teaching. She expressed these in humour and playfulness, which convey “I see you as who you are, I love you, I respect you, and I want you to be happy.” She was amused and delighted to watch her students develop
and see them express themselves in class. Frances said her children know that she values joy and humour in her class and would respond to them likewise. This is how Frances brought her presence into class:

_I have a strong desire to be a positive force in my children’s life. I believe in empowering children. When children are stuck with their work, I help them to overcome their hurdles. When children leave my class, I do not want any recognition or outside praise, because I am not trying to show my work off to the world. It’s good enough for me to know that children know. I want to make a difference in my children’s world and would like to make possible what was previously viewed as impossible in my children’s lives._

_I experience many joyful moments in my class, one of which was when my former Waldorf students invited me to their graduation this year. These were students at the Atlanta Waldorf, whom I had taught from Grade 1 to Grade 5. They are very special to me, and I still keep in touch with them. They flew me down to Atlanta. I took the day off from teaching in Ontario and attended their graduation. And here is another happy moment: When I check Facebook, I see pictures from my years at the Waldorf School, taken by my previous students who remember me, with messages like “I love you, Miss X!” (Interview transcription, pp. 14–16)"

**How Do We Foster Compassion in Schools?**

_It is true that the tortoise was slow and small, but was willing to help other animals who were suffering from hunger. By putting one short leg ahead of the other, he crossed the great flat plain and went through the jungle where the lion king told him the name of the tree. “It is Ungali.” . . . Then, the tortoise walked straight up to the tree and said, “The name of the tree is Ungali.” Now, the branches with abundant fruits lowered down, so low that all the hungry animals could reach the wonderful fruits._

— C. B. Lottridge, _The Name of the Tree_

**Curriculum at Waldorf Schools**

Frances explained that the Waldorf’s philosophy, which informs its curriculum, is mainly based on anthroposophy, eurythmy, and form drawing.

**Anthroposophy.** Steiner’s philosophy of education at the Waldorf looks at humans as beings of body, soul, and spirit who have lived before will live again. In this particular life journey, we are here to have life lessons. If anybody asked Frances why she believed in Waldorf education, she would say that it looks at developing the whole child—the hand, the heart, and the brain. But the greatest thing the Waldorf education does is to reaffirm what children already know and to acknowledge their connection to everything around them. Along with that awareness come compassion and a sense of responsibility for fellow human beings and other living beings, and a sense of awe in the wonders of universe.
There are four bodies in anthroposophy, representing four stages of children’s development that need to be nurtured in harmony and balance until children reach adulthood. They are the physical body, etheric body, sentient or astral body, and human ego.

The first stage, the physical body, lasts for the first seven years of life. In this phase, the educator’s task is to train children’s physical bodies, nurturing them with the right food and the right exercise. At this phase, children are not necessarily asked to think, but the educator models how to speak to one another and how to respect one another.

The next phase, the etheric body, lasts from age 7 to age 14. At this time, spiritual forces work in children, and their life body is nurtured through movement and the development of the imagination. During this period, the teacher does not appeal to children’s intellect, but rather appeals to their feelings, using pictorial elements that convey the importance of connection. For example, children are taught the concept of place value in mathematics through imagery that emphasizes feeling connected to everything surrounding them.

The third stage, the sentient or astral body, starts after the elementary education period, at puberty. In this phase, the teacher emphasizes the development of the intellect and thinking, and children learn to understand the concept of causality, begin to be able to form judgements, and start a life of thinking and making. More academic work is required of children now, due to the development of their ability to think.

The last stage, the ego, is the adult stage, which in humans starts only after the 20th year of life. Students now have become adults, and are ready for more focused, centred, and thinking ways of being and less feeling ways of being.

**Eurythmy.** Eurythmy, a subject created by Rudolf Steiner, is a form of meditative, aesthetic movement that can be a very therapeutic activity. It is taught for 40 minutes once or twice a week throughout the year at Frances’s Waldorf School. A special teacher called an eurythmist is hired specifically for this subject. There are two kinds of eurythmy, one performed to tone and music, the other to spoken words. In earlier grades, children learn both. Eurythmy is always done to live music played by a pianist, during which the children learn to keep time and to move in unison. As the years progress, children learn social skills by exploring the space around them. Eurythmy can be very effective for children with learning difficulties.
In Frances’s Grade 1 class, the eurythmist started the lesson by telling a story. Then the eurythmist taught eurythmic movement, in which the children learned how to move in harmony with others and how to move in the space around them. They were led to experience the qualities of sounds of consonants that were expressed in the movement. For example, B is different from K, which is cutting; and S different from Sh, which is firing. Vowels and consonants are expressed by different movements according to Steiner’s method.

In eurythmy, children are taught very early on to experience movements in various parts of their feet. This very social activity moves inwards and outwards, with an in-breath on certain movements and an out-breath on other movements.

**Form drawing.** Form drawing is another important Waldorf curriculum. Frances explained that the very first lesson children learn in Grade 1 was a profound truth of the universe: everything around them is made up of either straight or curved lines. Children in Grade 1 learn how to draw two lines: one straight, and one curved. They look around, observing that a part of a tree is straight and another part is curved. From there, they learn to draw the straight and curved lines. Now the children observe rain falling, in which the lines can be diagonal, straight, or curved. Straight lines can go up like a tree and down like the rain. Observing all these things, children fill their book with form drawing coming from the truth of nature.

**Moral Education at Waldorf Schools**

**Etheric body.** Frances taught moral education to children in the etheric body stage, between the ages of 7 and 14. The pedagogic approach is to appeal to children’s feelings and imagination through storytelling. To foster moral education through storytelling, the Waldorf educators seek to ignite in children a sense of being connected to others through their feelings and imagination. Feelings that arise from the heart are seen as soul forces that are related to moral education:

> For example, in order to ignite feelings in the child, we use different colours for each grade as they are related to the soul forces. There are particular aspects and temperaments of colours in each grade and the curriculum is designed to meet the soul needs of children. The classrooms are painted in the colour of the mood of that particular age and grade and it is very interesting to hear children in Grade 3 say “I cannot wait until I am in Grade 4, because I really love the colour of that classroom.” (Interview transcription, p. 29)

There is no formula at the Waldorf on how language is taught. It is up to the individual teacher. Frances said you have to make your own teaching materials before you bring them to children.
Therefore, the teacher needs to contemplate and to have time to practice, because before you teach, you have to bring something that resonates with you first. Here, Frances gave an example of this process:

*I remember teaching vowels to Grade 1 which I taught in a block or as a unit. Before starting to teach, I would first think about the meaning of what I was going to bring to the children. The children had already learned the consonants where the letters were brought in through pictures, such as the letter M as in a mountain or S in a form of a snake and so on. Letters of consonants are very concrete in pictures, but what about the vowels? Why are the vowels so different from the consonants? I first needed to understand why and it occurred to me that the vowels represent the soul, the feeling part of our language.

If you lived in the south of the United States, you would notice people drag their vowels, draw them out slowly and are not good at timekeeping. And yet, they say we can get it done, we might, we could, and their vowels are very relaxed. And if you go up to New York, the vowels in people’s accents are clipped. I realized that language is a reflection of people’s identity, their soul. And what part of the language is it? I believe it is the vowel that gives the soul and emotions to the language. This is how I came to terms with it after teaching at the Waldorf. The A as in Ah is the universal vowel of wonder, O tends to reach out to children running down the hallway, and E has a different quality of feeling to it. We bring the vowels to children through stories related to feelings and connecting vowels to colours, so that the children get a sense of deeper meaning or connection. (Interview transcription, pp. 29–30)*

**Storytelling.** Each year’s storytelling is based on curriculum that is meant to meet the children’s needs; the teacher works with the children’s temperament and how they experience the world. It is important to note that the teacher tells the stories to her students without using any book. Frances said the stories have to reach children’s souls, so that they can be prepared for to make sound judgements later as adults. A pictorial approach is always used, for pictures work directly upon the feelings, stirring the children’s souls. As the teacher tells the stories, she can see children really living in the stories. When they laugh heartily or feel sadness, they are being told universal truths, which can fill the children with feelings of sympathy, and feelings of right or wrong. Here are the stories Frances told to her students in each grade.

In Grade 1, she introduced folktales and fairy tales from different traditions. The school focuses on Grimm’s stories, which are archetypal—all are essentially the same as other stories told around the world. In Grade 2, it is fables (such as Aesop’s) and stories of the saints who lived their lives reaching out and serving others; these stories extend to Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa. In Grade 3, the Old Testament stories of the journey of the children of Israel through trying times are introduced. These stories are not taught as religious education, but as
stories that can resonate with children. In Grade 4, they hear Nordic stories with very strong characters; in Grade 5, ancient civilizations; in Grade 6, stories from Roman Empire and Greek history; in Grade 7, stories from the Renaissance; in Grade 8, modern history.

Teachers at the Waldorf begin the day with a morning meditation together that centres and prepares them for their children. Some teachers do meditation on their own in their classrooms. Then the storytelling takes place.

When school starts, the children recite the morning verse in class. This verse is the same at Waldorf schools all over the world. The recitation is a loving gesture, containing Steiner’s words: “The sun with loving light makes bright for me each day. The soul with spirit power gives strength unto my limbs. In sunlight shining clear I do revere, O God, the strength of humankind.” These words revere nature and God; they teach loving, holding, and our connection to the world in an inward gesture. The recitation is followed by the playful movement portion of the day, morning exercises—during which the breath enlivens the soul of the children, and awakens the senses. This recitation is used until Grade 5, when it changes into an outward gesture—talking about plant life, animal life, and human life, as we are part of each.

After morning verses and movement exercise, the Waldorf teacher might sing songs with the children, to enliven their breath and wake them up. Singing also brings a sense of unity to the class. In Grades 1 and 2, children push aside all the desks and clear the floor for their movement activities, such as conscious stepping and singing games, which involve multisensory learning often related to mathematical concepts. Frances told me that children are very satisfied and happy with this approach.

Storytelling takes place during the first 2-hour morning period, called the main lesson of the day, during which there is no interruption, no intercom, and no disruption whatsoever. Frances described what she does to create a soulful and serene atmosphere before she starts her storytelling:

First, I would turn off the lights after which I would light a candle. During this almost sacred time, I would have a main lesson from a block focused on fables in my Grade 2 class. I would sit on a stool in front of my children who were sitting at their seats with their eyes on me and I remember noticing their mouths wide open while listening to my story. In storytelling, I do not read from a book as in public schools, but I tell stories directly to the class in a very imaginative way. While listening to the story, children come to understand what is right and what is wrong, through pictures and imagery of the story.
In moral education, the teacher considers the children’s different temperaments, such as quiet/active, sympathetic/apathetic, or patient/impatient. And then the teacher tells a story that emphasizes elements that will connect to the children’s temperaments and to something deeper. The children connect to the characters in the story through very descriptive imagery, which helps create imagination within them. Suitable degrees of sadness, happiness, good, and evil in the protagonists are evoked. This is why stories are not read aloud in a Waldorf classroom. In the stories, good wins over evil, and the children feel very satisfied with the ending of the story.

**Examples of storytelling.** Storytelling lasts around 20 minutes. At the end of storytelling, children sing blessings before they start to eat a meal and there is no further discussion of the story. Instead, it is not discussed till the following day, to let children to sleep on it. “Sleep on it” education is important at the Waldorf. After staying with the story on an unconscious level for a night, the children bring it back the next day with many fresh ideas. Here are some illustrations of Frances’s storytelling at the Waldorf:

> *In my Grade 1 class, I start telling a story from Grimm’s fairy tales. It is important to note that I do not finish all the activities in one day as often is the case in public schools, but I let children to think about it (to let them sit on it) for the night. The second day is reserved for the summary and re-creation of previous day’s work. Children are asked to retell the story and to draw the pictures using crayons in their main lesson book or doing beeswax modelling. Through storytelling, I also teach letters that come as imagery, such as B as in Bear, B as in Bee after which children are asked to draw them. The letter M could come from a picture of Mountain or of Mouth. So these letters are brought in through imagery. The drawings in their main lesson book are considered as work, and children learn how to draw pictures that require the teacher’s guidance and children’s effort.*

> *After I moved with the same children to Grade 2, I taught Aesop’s fables, one of which is the story of “Fox and Crane.” In the story, the foxy fox invites the crane for lunch, and provides with a lovely dish of soup in a flat bowl. During lunch, he laughs to himself, because he enjoys the soup, while the crane is unable to eat with his long beak. And of course in retaliation, the crane graciously invites the fox back, but this time provides lunch in a very tall and narrow container. This time the fox is unable to eat it. Now the children are very amused by this story and the drawings that come out of it are delightful. I have heard some teachers tell the moral at the end of the story, but I do not agree. I want to leave the judgement with the children. I do not believe the teacher needs to say the moral of a story. I might say to a child who is naughty, “That was very foxy of you, wasn’t it?” and the child would laugh bringing up immediately the image of the fox who did that.* (Interview transcription, pp. 34–36)
Frances said that she does not teach morality directly to children, but provides them with experiences of morality, through the children’s ability to live with the characters brought to them.

Another fable Frances told her Grade 2 class was “The Name of the Tree: A Bantu Tale Retold” by a Canadian author, C. B. Lottridge (1989). It is an African story about poverty and compassion from which Frances wrote a play and composed songs later on. Here are some of her reflections of that teaching experience:

In the story, “The Name of the Tree: A Bantu Tale,” there would be compassion with the animals who are suffering. There would be a sense of different traits of different animals and to some extent, they are archetypal. Different characters are the flighty rabbit, the arrogant lion, the king who does not want to be disturbed, the giraffe whose nose is in the air all the time, with each animal representing vices such as pride, greed, arrogance, or selfishness. These traits are all brought out in the characters of the story without describing the different traits directly. The children feel them, because it is so much part of the story, with the personalities of the animals being brought out in the story. And as in a good story, there is some tension, some difficulty, and trials, but in the end, good triumphs. And at the beginning of the story, the tortoise had been laughed at by everyone, because he was small, short, and slow. But in the end, tortoise’s generosity and willingness to give everything he has for the sake of the good of the group has paid off, and finally he becomes of course the hero among all the animals. (Interview transcription, pp. 36–37)

Here is a detailed description of how Frances told the tale in her Grade 2 class:

Once upon a time, in a land of short grass, there was hunger. Animals were growing weary and thin and they travelled from place to place looking for anything to eat. Far off in the distance, the hare said he could see something that looked like a tree and could they all go that way. So all the animals together they went. As they drew closer, they saw the marvellous colours from that tree. And as they drew closer still, they could smell the scent of raspberries, strawberries, bananas, apples, pineapples. . . . “ [And then I would bring the imagination to this tree which was yellow, which was purple, and which was green, red, apricot, it was the colour of the ocean, it was the colour of the sky, and it was the colour of the seeds.] And when they got there, the hare tried to jump as high as he could to reach the fruits, but the fruits were so high up. It was as if the tree was holding his arms as high as he could, and not allowing the animals to have one little bite of the fruits on his high branches. But they could smell the juiciness of the fruits and it was very difficult just to look at them, because they were so hungry.

Now they heard rumours, that this tree would offer his fruits only if they could guess his name. Now you can imagine how hard each animal would think of his name. Was this tree called wind? Was this tree called beauty? Was this tree called friendship? But the tree did not lower its branches at all. And so they decided that they would send somebody to go to find the king, the king of the beasts, the lion, and ask him if he would let them know the name of the tree. The gazelle said, “I will go to find the name of the tree, because no one can run as fast as I.” In a flash, he reached the king who knew the name
of the tree. “The name of the tree is Ungali.” The pompous gazelle said “I will run as fast as the wind and tell other animals the name of the tree.” But while he was running, he did not see a rabbit hole, into which he stepped. When he saw the animals who asked him the name of the tree, he could not remember. The proud elephant who never forgets anything and even can remember the names of all stars in the sky said, “I will go.” When he reached the king who knew the answer, he was told that the name of the tree was Ungali. The elephant said, “Me, forget? I can even remember the names of all trees in the jungle.” But alas, he also stepped in the very rabbit hole that had tripped the gazelle. When he got out from the hole, he also could not remember the name of the tree. Now the animals were so tired and hungry.

After a long time, a tortoise spoke. “O animals, I will go and find out the name of the tree.” But the animals said, “You! But you are so small and you are so slow. Ha, ha, ha . . .” “Yes, I am not very fast, but I will keep working at it and I will get there. And I know how to remember,” said the tortoise. The animals looked at each other with a mocking smile. It was true that the tortoise was small and slow, but he kept on walking and finally reached the king in the jungle who said “The name of the tree is Ungali!” On the way back, the tortoise never stopped repeating the name, Ungali, even when he was tired or thirsty, and even when he fell right into the same rabbit hole in which gazelle and elephant had fallen. “Ungali, Ungali, the name of the tree is Ungali!” None of the animals saw him coming, because they were very discouraged and hungry. The tortoise walked straight up to the tree and said, “The name of the tree is Ungali.”

Now, the branches with abundant fruits lowered down, so low that all the animals could reach the wonderful fruits, red as pomegranates, yellow as bananas, green as melons, purple as plums, and orange as mangos. The animals ate, ate, and ate until they could not eat any more. Then they lifted the tortoise really high up in the air, shouting “Hurrah! Our hero, the tortoise!” and marched around the tree chanting, “Ungali, Ungali, the name of the tree is Ungali,” because they did not want to forget. And they never did. From then on, the animals were not hungry any more, all because of the compassionate tortoise who was willing to help others. (Interview transcription, pp. 37–39)

**Storytelling in mathematics, music, and the arts.** Other subjects such as mathematics, music, and the arts are taught in a way that evokes children’s feelings and imaginations, often through storytelling. In her mathematics lesson, this is how Frances proceeded to teach the concept of four operations through storytelling:

Addition feels like gentleness, subtraction feels like giving away or loss, fractions feel like life being compartmentalized, and multiplication feels like generosity. For example, when children learn fractions at school, they divide themselves in social groups in order to work with one another. Mathematics concepts would be brought in as gnomes, as characters of a story, and there is the soul gesture in each operation. So the gnomes would have different colours, for instance the red would mean division which is decisive, the adding gnome might be blue, but all these are brought as stories: “Once upon a time, there was a gnome in the kingdom of Number.” Then you would describe what he wore and where he lived. The multiply-gnome would do cartwheels, and he would like an X, so on. So the story based on those gnomes might have the work the next day using acorns or
using glass pebbles. And children would have little bags to carry these shiny stones. In this way, children have things to manipulate, to understand the concepts they are working with. (Interview transcription, pp. 40–41)

In contrast, Frances said, public schools use preset, purpose-bought materials to teach mathematics concepts, providing no connection to children’s souls.

Music is taught through imitation. Children hear the tones and sing them after the teacher, starting with simple songs and moving towards more complicated ones. During music sessions with her Grade 1 class, Frances learned how the mood in the fifth note of the pentatonic scale can resonate with very young children. As children in the etheric body stage are not yet grounded on the earth, they are not satisfied with a hanging note. For them, the last note needs to end in “do,” to give a feeling of finality. Frances said she believes there is a moral element in children insisting on this finality. She said it has to do with the soul gesture of the scale of the music and how it resonates with children. She said that having this experience helps develop the inner muscles of the soul.

In the arts, colours are used to represent different moods—for instance, blue with comforting and lonely, yellow with spreading and uplifting. The children learn how colours interact and can be in harmony with one another. The colours generally move through the rainbow for each grade. For example, instead of red, Grade 1 has pink, Grade 2 moves from pink to peach, in Grade 3 it becomes golden, Grade 4 is green, Grade 5 is more green, Grade 6 is blue, Grade 7 is blue, and Grade 8 is mauve to purple. All are geared to support each child’s development. Generally the classroom walls are coloured using the lazure method, in which many layers of colours create a beautiful, soft effect based on each grade’s colour. The rooms at a Waldorf school are generally very beautiful, peaceful, and not at all cluttered. The first thing you would notice in a Waldorf classroom is that the walls that are not jammed with children’s work. In a Grade 1 classroom, you might see a painting of a fairy tale the teacher had done, or a print from a classic story that the teacher had brought in. Another thing you might notice is chalk drawings done on the blackboard by the teacher who would have spent hours doing it on the weekend.

In evaluating the children’s work, Frances said that at the Waldorf, report cards are anecdotal and no grade marks are assigned up to Grade 6. Marks are given out in Grades 7 and 8. There is no format for writing the anecdotes. Typically, the teacher writes an anecdotal report once, at the end of the year. It focuses on the children’s physical development, movement, how they did in
various academic subjects, as well as their relationships with other people. Thus, report cards are more holistic—they do not place emphasis on academic points only.

**Compassion at Waldorf Schools**

In order to bring compassion into schools, Frances said we need to help children develop empathy, that is, the ability to walk in another’s shoes, to begin to feel what is to be in another person’s position—a very tall order for a very young child. She thought Waldorf education strives to do that by balancing the work of the intellect (cold, calculated, mathematical, thinking, gesture in the head) with the work of the heart, through which comes empathy and through which we learn to care. Waldorf strives to do this in every subject area by enlivening in children feelings of reverence, awe, and wonder in the natural world around them. When a balance between the intellect and heart is ensured, children can grow in balance of these two energies.

A great deal depends on the environment from which the children have come. We as educators should know who we are, and need to work on our own inner lives, because the authenticity of the person who stands in front of the children is probably the most powerful force. That being said, the children’s parents also have to be authentic and spiritual to a degree, and they have to model a total sense of reverence and respect for everything around them. But Frances was very sad to say that in our current world, these things are not valued. What good does it do if you say to a child “We have to recycle,” and yet you throw everything that could be recycled into the garbage? Or when you say “You must be nice to your friends,” and yet when driving home from school, you cut somebody else off on the road, because you want to get home faster? Such experiences create dissonance within a child that can hinder the development of compassion and empathy.

So schools can strive to teach empathy and compassion, but they can’t mandate. At Waldorf, teachers are selected on the basis of qualities observed in them. The teacher has to teach several lessons in front of colleagues and nonteaching staff so that people can get sense of how the teacher is in front of children. They can tell if there is indeed a connection between the teacher and the children or if the teacher is putting on an act. They strive to pick teachers who best represent empathy and authenticity. Frances believed these qualities must be developed in the teacher’s inner life, which does not necessarily mean having to belong to an organized religion.
Frances pointed out that moral education at Waldorf schools is connected to spirituality. It heightens awareness through storytelling and the arts. To nurture the inner experience of children, educators try to awaken the children’s feelings through mental imagery, colouring, painting, and music. A bamboo flute or a wooden recorder can sound piercing when it is not well played, but what Waldorf always strives for with children is to create a beautiful sound. It is not about playing the right notes, but about making beautiful sounds that touch the children’s souls. A very well-respected Waldorf teacher once said that when this beautiful sound was finally achieved, she heard one of the children commenting, “It was like an angel singing.”
CHAPTER 6:
ANYA’S PARTIAL BIOGRAPHY—IN THE WORLD OF
SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Background

Anya was a retired teacher, with 25 years’ experience teaching children between the ages of 3 and 6 at a Montessori school in Ontario. She was born in Vienna, Austria and is a Holocaust survivor. Her Jewish father was killed in a concentration camp, but her non-Jewish mother was not. To protect her four half-Jewish children, Anya’s mother sent the two older ones to a foster family in Vienna, and the two younger ones, including Anya, to live with a sister in northern Germany. Anya learned of her Jewish heritage for the first time at the age of 18. She went to high school and university in Germany and in 1964, she came to Canada. She obtained her master’s degree in German at the University of Toronto, where she also taught German. Then she took the 1-year Montessori teacher training offered at the University of Toronto at that time and began to teach. In her retirement, she has been supply-teaching at the Montessori school with which she has been associated for her whole career.

What Is the Nature of Compassion?

Anya’s Encounters With Compassion

When I asked Anya how she defined compassion in her own terms, she replied that for her it was the basic social awareness and social conscience that we as humans all share. When telling her young students a story about creation or the cosmos, she would always end with this statement: “We humans have a mind that makes us mindful of others and that’s how we are different from animals” (Interview transcription, p. 50). Anya said that the mind can lead us to mindfulness—not only for our family, but also for the community, humanity, and all others—and that mindfulness is really the basis of compassion.

Her Aunt

The person who most influenced Anya to understand the nature of compassion was the aunt who raised her and her younger sister. She was an anchor in Anya’s entire life:
I vividly remember even now taking a long train ride with my younger sister, accompanied by a community nurse. Once I arrived at my aunt’s house, I started to live an idyllic life in the country, in a big house with a large vegetable garden and animals around in the backyard. My aunt took in me and my younger sister whom she knew were Jewish and of whom no one else should know the identity, because it was a taboo. But she treated us as well as her family members and the community with an open, giving, and compassionate attitude. She gave unconditionally whatever she had to others, by which action I was deeply touched and influenced. Even though I was small at that time, I could watch how my aunt treated others with kindness and compassion in her social interactions. (Interview transcription, p. 51)

From the beginning, Anya was an independent girl who took care of her younger sister and tried to imitate her aunt’s actions in relation to others. This is how she described her aunt’s compassion for the hungry and poor:

My aunt had a country store attached to her house and right after the war there were big loads of refugees without any money who would come in to my aunt’s store and ask for shoes or food for which they could not pay. But my aunt was very generous and kind to these people and gave wholeheartedly whatever she could, along with comfort.

I remember one incident during which a young girl among the refugees came into the store and asked if she could have a pair of shoes of any kind. My aunt went to get her own pair of old hiking boots which she cleaned, brushed, and gave to her. The girl could not pay for the shoes, but said having a package of flowers with her, “Would you take this for payment?” But her aunt declined her offer. I saw the girl going out of the store with a beaming face to meet with her elderly parents who were waiting outside. I watched her weary-looking parents hugging their daughter outside and the girl’s face radiating with such happiness because now she had shoes.

At other times, many hungry refugees would come in my aunt’s store and ask for food. I remember one soldier who came in to ask if he could have some food. My aunt went to her kitchen and brought out a large plate of pea soup for him. The soldier said, “Thank you very much! This is my birthday feast, because today is my birthday.”

I recall my aunt reacting in such a compassionate way towards those who were in need and doing whatever she could to meet their needs right away. When people had problems, my aunt lent them her ears to listen and often helped them solve their problems. She was known in the community for her compassion and the people who had problems always knew to whom they could go for help. (Interview transcription, pp. 51–52)

After Anya grew up, she found out through family research how much her aunt had helped other members in the family solve their problems. Anya’s maternal grandmother had passed away early, leaving Anya’s aunt, the oldest daughter, to be the mother of the house. She took care of her younger siblings, one of whom was Anya’s mother, until the end of her life. She never had children of her own.
A New Boy in Anya’s Class

Another encounter with compassion took place when Anya was in Grade 11 or 12, in Germany. A new boy came into her class one day. He had come to town on his own, with no family. He lived in a boarding house. He tried to fit in the school, but Anya saw he was always by himself, and was excluded by others. At one point, he became very ill with pneumonia and there was no one to take care of him. In spite of his serious illness, he came to school anyway. In order to keep warm, he carried a hot water bottle under his jacket. Seeing him living all by himself and suffering all alone with nobody to look after him, Anya felt sorry and compassionate for him.

A Wolf-Game

When Anya was young, she played a wolf game with her girl friends. A bad wolf was chosen among them and stood on one side of the field, while the rest of girls were on the other side. The girls called out to the wolf, “Wolf, wolf, where are you coming from?” Then the girls would run and the bad wolf had to catch them. But Anya began to feel fed up calling the wolf “bad,” because the wolf was only an animal, not necessarily a bad animal. So Anya and her friends changed their minds and tried to help the wolf. They became kind to it instead. Because the wolf now had nothing to eat, they gathered some berries and nuts for it. They completely turned their negative attitude around, because they felt sorry and compassionate for the wolf that was stuck being called a mean animal. Anya even remembers bringing the wolf some presents, as she felt such compassion for the animal.

Anya’s Granddaughter

One night, Anya was babysitting her 3-year-old granddaughter who, instead of going to sleep, wanted to wait for her mother to come home. She asked Anya to tell her about Anya’s bicycle accident, which her mother had told her about. It had happened when Anya was riding her bicycle beside a bus. The bus door opened and hit Anya in the face, making her face all bloody.

But on this night, Anya’s granddaughter kept asking about what had happened between the bus and Anya’s bicycle. She kept asking how much Anya must have been hurt in the accident and Anya replied: “Yes, it hurt me, but I should have stayed behind the bus, not beside the bus.” Listening to this, Anya’s granddaughter said, “From now on, I will look after you, Grandma, I will hold the bicycle for you, so that you don’t go near the bus.” And then she said, “Omi, it is in
my heart that you got hurt by the bus.” Every time Anya thought about this statement, she could not help from crying, as she was so deeply touched by her granddaughter’s compassion.

**Anya’s Students**

Anya also witnessed compassion between her two Montessori students, Kristen and Madison, who were both 4 years old. It was after March Break. Kristen’s grandmother had died while the children were away on March Break. Kristen had been very close to her grandmother. When she came back to school, she told Anya that her grandmother had died and Anya could tell she was still grieving and very sad. And then Madison’s father died suddenly. So when Anya and children heard the news, they heard two tragedies in a row. Madison was absent for several days. When Madison came back to school after the funeral, the first person who went to hug Madison was Kristen, who said, “I am so sorry your Dad died.” Watching this very young child treating her friend in such a compassionate way was very touching to Anya.

**How Can We Develop Compassion in Ourselves?**

During our interviews, Anya first wanted to talk about her spirituality, which came from two belief systems, Christianity and Judaism:

> I grew up and practised the Christian faith for quite a while in Germany and then I found out by chance when I was 18 years old that I had a partly Jewish background. From that point on, I developed an interest in Judaism, but for the longest time I did not take it very personally. I studied Judaism, but that was really all. Now when I began my family research in 1990 into the background of my Jewish father, I became more directly interested and committed to Judaism. I went through the official conversion to become a reformed Jew and have tried to practise it ever since. It has been at the expense of any Christian beliefs that I had. I was not a very engaged Christian. I have now come to the conclusion that I can only live with a balance in my belief systems and have made efforts into that direction.

Even though I belong to a reformed Jewish temple, I also joined the local Unitarian church, a very universal, spiritual church that does not believe in certain scriptures in the Bible. The Unitarian church has such a strong moral spiritual foundation. So I am juggling my spirituality between the two belief systems in which I can only come up with a balance. I studied other religions and find that there is a lot that we have in common. I am just interested in their commonalities out of which I can feel the connection with the universe. (Interview transcription, pp. 58–59)
“Life Is” Rather Than “God Is”

When she studied Judaism in preparation for converting to Judaism, Anya learned some basic statements about God. The first statement was “God is,” the second was “God is one,” the third was “God is judgemental” (i.e., God is moral in nature), and the fourth was “We humans must serve God.” As a Jew, these are the basic principles, but she did not have a clear concept of God. She knew the enormous importance of the concept of God in Judaism, but she found it insufficient for her. She felt that the Jewish concept of God left out a large part of her existence and she did not feel a direct connection to it, as she should be feeling as a Jew. Instead, Anya came up with a substitute phrase, a kind of definition of God that made sense to her and that she could live with: instead of saying “God is,” she says “life is,” which leads to her sense of social responsibility:

For “God is one,” I say “life is one.” For “God is judgemental,” I say “Life contains good and evil that we cannot deny.” For “We as humans must serve God,” I say “As humans we must serve life.” This life force, life principle, this life energy is something that I can see, hear, touch, and think about all the time, whereas the concept of God is untouchable and unrecognizable. Other concepts of God that I picked up were “God is eternal, and God is holy,” but for me, “Life along with life cycle and life force is eternal, and life is holy.” So these are the principles that I can subscribe to, as they encompass everything for me, even if I still occasionally fall back to my childhood where the concept of God was interpreted through the prayers that my mother had taught me, but it also can apply to my principles of life with which I am very comfortable, from which I draw a lot of comfort, and which also renewed my concept of social responsibility. (Interview transcription, pp. 58–59)

Anya did not want to stay with one spiritual belief system. She wanted to have a balance in her faith between two religions, Judaism and Unitarianism. Judaism has a reputation of being regarded as separate from other religions which Anya also found difficult, because she wanted to feel anything but separate from anything. She said this conflict would remain and she would just have to see how she could balance her spirituality between the two religions.

If Anya wanted to substitute life for God, then was she an atheist? If not, did she believe in the soul? Anya did not think she was an atheist, but liked to call herself a pantheist, or rather a pan-life-ist. Anya believed in the soul’s existence; she said life itself has a soul, of which we are a part. However, for her the concept of the soul was too much connected to religion and having a connection with God, with whom she did not feel any connection. If God is out there, then He is in each of us, in everything around us, permeating everywhere in the infinite universe.
For Anya, mind and being mindful included being responsible for self and others. Most especially, being mindful was connected to the heart. Mind combined heart and soul, which were beyond the intellect and the body. And being mindful had a social aspect. In order to be socially engaged, Anya insisted we need both the mind (intellect) and being mindful (feelings).

**Life As Basically Good**

Anya said that our instincts for living and sustaining life are good. Our desire to live and others’ desire to live are good. There is evil, which exists in people as a disruption of life, but it would not win eventually. In her view, evil, including violence and crime, can be genetic, coming from our parents, and can also come from the social environment. Through early positive nurturing, we can prevent this evil part from developing, but this will not guarantee violence will be prevented, because nothing is guaranteed in life. But if unhealthy genes are present and if there is little or no early positive nurturing, then this would be a recipe for criminality. Positive nurturing starts with parents and family. Children first receive it and then learn to give it back to others—to the closer and wider community, eventually reaching the whole world, including nature. Anya believed compassion was related to this early social nurturing.

**Anya’s Contemplation**

Anya had tried meditation, mindfulness, Tai Chi, and yoga, but found they were not really for her. Doing yoga and Tai Chi, she felt she was appropriating someone else’s spirituality and she felt no connection to her heart and spirit. In her Jewish temple she was known as a very spiritual person and did not understand why. How did her spirituality show to others? Maybe it was because she talked about the place of humans within the universe, or life and our responsibility for humanity and everything around us, thus transcending all religions?

**Music and social responsibility.** Anya’s contemplation included the music at the Jewish temple and her strong sense of social responsibility shared at the Unitarian church:

*Contemplative practice for me is to go to Jewish temple on Saturday mornings where the first hour is spent for Torah study. During the study, I listen more than participate, but if I do participate, it is usually about an idea that links to cosmos or to peace which is definitely same as love or life. After Torah study, comes the ritual in Hebrew during which I follow with the prayers, but I do not always agree with what is in the ritual. But what really gives me a spiritual lift is the music that goes with it. When there is a traditional Jewish chanting, I feel it deeply in my heart with a sense of belonging and find the music superior to any other church type of music. When I hear this Jewish music, I feel a sense of life.*
Then on Sundays, I often go to the Unitarian church where I appreciate the absence of rituals. Rather than a sermon, I appreciate their discussion or a presentation on a great variety of spiritual and social justice topics, including last year’s presentation on atheism, as there are a lot of atheists at the Unitarian church. At the church, there are usually fascinating presentations to which I just enjoy listening and after which there is usually a discussion group. I like the friendliness and openness of the congregation there and appreciate their unfailing social commitment to many causes, such as the antipoverty movement in Africa, local food banks, and environmentally conscious movements.

Instead of scriptures or rules, the Unitarian church has seven principles that are extremely socially engaged. I think the church started in the United States around 200 years ago, but it has been like a refuge for those people who have trouble with traditional religions of any kind, because at the church they don’t talk about God or afterlife. The church is rather a gathering ground including many atheists. When we talk about God, it has to do with creation, but when we talk about life, there is no beginning, but only the eternity and continuity with which I have absolutely no problem.

I believe that life is, life was, and life always will be, continuously creating. Life means everything and all that is living and it is the energy force with which I deal with the concept of God. I have no right to take life from anything, even from a worm or an insect, actually not even from a plant, as sustaining life is the most important task in my life. I have no right to take life away and life cannot be destroyed, because it will come up again due to its eternal cycle that has no beginning and no end. Life is what sustains the universe and it always keeps changing and moving. To me, life is God, because it frees me from God who is judging and controlling as in the Old Testament. (Interview transcription, pp. 60–61)

Anya’s commitment to social responsibility has helped her to put herself in someone else’s shoes. Anya believed she has learned to see life (not God) in other people who are in danger or needing help to develop. For her this was a matter of identification—she would identify with how she would feel in their place, and with what she would need (spiritually, intellectually, or emotionally) to become spiritually more self-sufficient, more developed, and more confident.

For Anya, life was love and peace, and the concept of compassion was a response to our inborn social instincts. When she told the universe story to children at the Montessori school, she would always end the story by saying “we humans of course are a lot like animals, but unlike animals, we have a mind to be mindful” (Interview transcription, p. 65). Life meant the same as compassion, once we realize that it is our responsibility to sustain life, nurture, and help others in the world we live in.

Dancing. Even though she did not pray, she always felt connected to life when she danced:

*I feel connected to life when I dance. I love dancing to which I always gravitate. Dance for me is just a completely spontaneous thing and when any dance is going on any where, I can join in, because dancing gives me this strong sense of freedom and liberation.*
During my recent trip to Israel, I experienced this liberating feeling. When I was at the Wailing Wall, I saw lots of people and groups. It was a beautiful spring morning and there was a bar mitzvah happening for two boys. At this party a musician and a drummer were making nice music to which people started to sing and dance. As I was very close by, one of the dancing ladies asked me to join in. So I danced with them and it was so wonderful. This freeing dancing experience was one of the high points of my visit. I can say I indirectly prayed as I danced, because dancing to the rhythm of music did the prayer for me. I can never get enough of dancing, as I do not have any opportunity at all in my personal life, but dancing is what connects me to spirituality. At the Jewish temple, there is sometimes dancing in which I always join and which I really find satisfying and rewarding. All I can say is dancing to music is a way for me to pray, because during dancing I am touching and participating in life with my whole being. I believe even one dance movement affects the rest of the universe through its vibration. (Interview transcription, pp. 64–65)

Life’s Influence on Anya

How does her concept of life affect Anya?

In my personal life, the concept of life gives me a much broader view on anything and everything about people and the way they act and interact, which I can immediately see as an expression of the life force itself. I can immediately see as individuals and as groups we are fitting into the whole of it all in every way, socially, emotionally, intellectually, and yes, spiritually. And I find this liberating and it’s almost like right from the start I get to look at life from a universal point of view. This view actually started not too long ago when I wanted to thank the earth for what I receive from her. We don’t have to thank God, which is abstract, but it is actually the earth that gives us, nurtures us, and keeps us safe. And life includes the earth, all the planets and universes that are out there. Then if someone asked me how I know if there is more than we can see out there, I would say that when we deal with infinity, I have no problem explaining this concept of life.

In my professional life, I see my children at school as life to come, as life unfolding, as each child strives to find his or her place and to become one with humanity as a whole. We are all individually representative of humanity or of life. I believe children have the urge for learning in them. When I started to teach at a Montessori school near Toronto, the school was always interdenominational, but it was still based on Judeo-Christian education. There are still morning and lunch prayers, and blessings to which I still do not feel I belong. I do not actively talk about God or about other religions in the Montessori school. (Interview transcription, pp. 63–64)

How Do We Foster Compassion in Schools?

Anya brings her compassion into her teaching. As a teacher, she believed that she should reach out for children with whatever she had. With regard to the current increase in school violence, she believed the students who commit violence had not received the positive early nurturing of compassion. She felt we should nurture children with compassion, social conscience, and social awareness—I am one of many, I am one among many—when they are very young.
Montessori Schools’ Focus on Education

Four main concepts or strategies used in Montessori education are *normalization*, *individualization*, *mixed-age groups*, and *equality*.

**Normalization**

Anya said that the main, overall goal of Montessori education is normalization, namely, permitting the free, natural manifestations of children’s physical, emotional, spiritual, moral, and intellectual urges:

*We, the educators at the Montessori school aim at achieving the “normalized” child and this goal would start right from the beginning. The idea behind “normalization” is that all children are born with natural positive instincts, but as soon as they are born, our family and our society prevent them from developing their natural instincts, an urge to learn and develop. Montessori herself believed in the inborn goodness in each child and was extremely critical of families, parents, and the society of her time that deviated children. With the proper environment provided by the educator and the Montessori school, children would be “normal” again.* (Interview transcription, p. 67)

**Spiritual embryo.** During the first three years of life, a child is still caught in constant care and is thus really a “spiritual embryo” (Montessori, 1967). Children free themselves by walking, talking, and the independently moving the hands and vision, and then their inborn spirituality can come out. They are born with an inner divinity that cannot be expressed at first. Social interactions in the environment during the first three years after birth are the means with which this spirituality can be developed. According to Anya, this is probably the period during which violence in children can be germinated if there is a lack of spiritual nurturing.

Anya explained that in a Montessori school, normalization comprises a few areas. In physical normalization, children do not need to be encouraged to learn to walk, as they will walk eventually on their own. The concept behind emotional normalization is that children are born intact, and only need help in bringing out and dealing with emotional feelings such as sadness or happiness. In social normalization, children are encouraged to develop positive social urges. An important first strategy towards normalization in physical, spiritual/moral, emotional, social, and intellectual areas at Montessori schools is observation—the educator just observes what is happening to children and where they are going over a period of time:

*With regard to the increasing violence in current schools, I believe one of the reasons is the lack of social nurturing (as well as spiritual nurturing) during children’s early childhood. In social nurturing, educators help children to be aware of their social environment and to understand how they can help humanity for the benefit of themselves*. 
and others. This social normalization is probably connected to compassion education. The positive urges in children always need to have the right environment to grow, where children can be at the centre, with self-directed learning, and with the educator to support and observe them. (Interview transcription, p. 68)

Social aspects. In Montessori schools, social aspects play an important role in the classroom, which is regarded as part of children’s family and community. The teacher is there as a part of the social setting. Montessori was convinced that we are born good and socially receptive. So at Montessori schools, therefore, bringing out children’s natural urges (including their social urge) matters a great deal, so that children can become socialized together. The Montessori conception of normalization thus fosters children becoming their own natural selves, or what Anya referred to as natural compassion:

_i believe the natural urges are natural compassion for social and constructive behaviour in all of us, which we need to bring to fruition. I am convinced this is true, because as an optimist and pacifist, the design of the universe is good, where there is the sense of compassion._ (Interview transcription, p. 68)

Individualization

Along with normalization, Montessori adopted individualization. In this method, the teacher relates to one child at a time, while the rest of the class works on their own projects:

_Individualization helps us educators become one with the learning child in a democratic way. This strategy is feared in other schools, because the teacher might lose the control of class, when she works with only one child. But what is very important in observation of children and individualization is to show respect for children, no matter how children present themselves and how deviated children may be. This respect means a policy of no physical touch. As adults, we are not supposed to overwhelm children by coming too close or dominating them in any way. Instead of touching children, we shake hands to greet and we shake hands to say goodbye and we do this individually with each child and with respect._ (Interview transcription, p. 69)

Mixed-Age Groups

The third Montessori strategy is mixed-age groups, in which one class has at least two different age groups. In a class of 18 children aged 3 to 5, Anya would ideally have six children from each age group. In these mixed-age groups, there is no competition, no reward, no punishment, no prize, and no singling out who comes first, because in individualized learning each child freely chooses an activity and progresses at his or her own pace.
Equality

The last Montessori strategy is equality between teacher and student. Montessori maintained that the teacher must stay in the background, humble herself, and take her cues from children, who will show what is necessary. The teacher must never dictate anything. This pedagogy was quite revolutionary during Montessori’s time:

_The subjects that I taught are the same for all children, which Montessori called the cosmic curriculum. Montessori officially talked about starting cosmic curriculum at the age of 6, but the real preparation for this curriculum is happening in kindergarten for children aged from 3 to 6. I want to emphasize that at a Montessori school, children are introduced at his own pace and according to his own interest into any of academic subjects, such as language, mathematics, sciences, arts, music, and second languages._

_When the 3-year-olds come into my class, they are introduced gradually to all subjects. First they will see how 5-year-olds work with the materials that are always out in class. They will learn just by observing them. Any child has the right to go and observe a working child and ask, “May I observe you?” And the working child will say “Yes.” The working child is not to be disturbed by any comment, such as “You are doing good work here,” because that would break children’s concentration. Montessori always said that we would like to bring out the natural concentration from children and lengthen it. In this way, children can stay on their tasks on their own until they complete it._ (Interview transcription, p. 70)

The Rule of Learning at Montessori Schools:

Sensorial Experience

Sensorial experience includes touching with the hands, as well as seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting. Anya emphasized that learning at Montessori schools has to go through the hands, to meet the need of children’s sensorial experience. Physical movement also has to be included. Children are not required to sit at a certain seat, but can choose where they want to sit. If they do not want to sit on a chair, they can work on a mat. Their chair or mat is off limits for anyone else unless they invite someone to join them and the invitee in turn agrees. Anya added that, according to Montessori, the teacher is the link between the children and their environment.

Language Arts

Anya’s Montessori teaches introductory language arts to 3- to 6-year olds. At Montessori schools, it is very important to note that writing comes before reading. Children are naturally interested in forming letters. The letters of the alphabet are first introduced in what is called “sandpaper letters”: 
As soon as 3-year-olds show interest in the sounds of the letters, I play lots of sound games with them, during which I ask, “Show me the letter with this sound.” This is how I decide if children are ready or not. Sandpaper letters are plates with the letters engraved in them, and strips of sandpaper attached, for a sensorial introduction. They are rough and children can feel them by touching them with their hands. The alphabet letters are not taught consecutively, but with the letters that children are interested in through phonetic writing and reading.

In my class for 3- to 5-year-olds, children have a little book in which they write a few words or short sentences accompanied by pictures. Sometimes they cannot read them back, because what they did was a mechanical, sensorial thing, and because reading is a different step that comes after writing. In order to teach reading, I use a removable alphabet the feel of which children are already very familiar with, having previous sensorial experience of alphabet letters. Montessori has no prescribed readers and I teach reading on my own by introducing the sound of letters to children using phonics. Montessori said when children’s fingers and minds are ready, reading will happen in an enormous explosion from children’s natural urge. (Interview transcription, pp. 71–72)

Mathematics

Any mathematics concept that the Montessori teacher wants to introduce to children always has a sensorial base:

_I teach the numbers, using 10 counting rods. The longest is 1 metre long, and the others are 90 centimetres, 80 centimetres, and 70 centimetres long, and so on. Each rod is divided into blue and red sections with which children can count using their hands. When a child can count individually from 1 to 10 to the teacher, not to the class, children may be ready for sandpaper numbers that make the sensorial base. This teaching process is done individually, and it might take weeks until when the individual child is ready. Then I use beads for sensorial experience to teach the hierarchies of tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, so on. Children also use the beads for the operations of addition and subtraction._ (Interview transcription, p. 72)

Sciences

Anya taught an introduction to the cosmos to her 3- to 5-year-olds. The course included the universe and the planets, earth, continents, countries, and cities. She would start with the sun, moon, and stars. She would often do these lessons in a group, introducing the earth by saying “The earth is one of the planets.” And then she might move to Mars, so on. Anya would ask, “This is universe, but where is the sun? What is the sun made of? It is made of gases and fire.” While she introduces the universe, the 3-year-olds sit there and take it all in, even though they may not all get the concept. In later years, the same concept will be taught again at a more advanced level. Students aged 6 and up will have science research projects that include sensorial materials, and where the teacher only follows and facilitates their interest in the projects.
Anya has also taught an introduction to animals and plants using sensorial material.

**Geography**

In geography, Anya started with hierarchies, first talking about the town where children lived, then moving to the city, then to the country, always using materials that required sensorial experience. The main material for geography was a globe that had blue for the water and brown sandpaper for the continents. By touching the globe, children would know that blue is water and brown is land. After this, children would learn to name the individual continents, by touching puzzle pieces made of different colours. Then children, for more sensorial experience, would assemble the puzzle maps.

**Anya in Class**

What kind of special feelings did Anya go through during her teaching at the Montessori school? What were her passions in life? How did she bring her passions and authenticity into her teaching?

**Anya’s Special Feelings in Class**

**Calmness and satisfaction.** Anya felt a sense of calmness and satisfaction in her class, resulting in confidence:

> The only type of teaching I have experienced is teaching 3- to 6-year-olds through the Montessori educational individualized approach. Montessori education right from the beginning has offered me a sense of calm among children. I was trained in the Montessori individualized approach and did not know it would work for me until I started to teach. Yes, children are trained from the time they are 3 years old to function as independently as possible in the classroom. Their training includes knowing that they have the right to have the attention of the teacher. They are well used to taking turns, with the help of the teacher or with the materials, and to not interfere with each other. Of course there are accidents, as they are young children, but basically they accept these premises which keep the classroom generally calm and this calm is to everyone’s advantage.

Another feeling I experience in my class is the feeling of satisfaction in the mode of instruction. Montessori speaks of “explosions into learning” in different areas. She explained that “explosion” means that several skills that have been separately practised eventually come together at some point, so children can manage to write or read. And of course, I have to be extremely observant so that I do not push children to learn the next skill.
The “first explosion” is into language when children come at the age of 3. It will take place in children through the environment, the interaction with other children, and the teacher, during which children’s language will really come to the fore. This is also called “the sensitive period for language” during which children observe language and produce it with ease and in a completely natural context. In the beginning we teach language through rhyming, verses, and plain social interactions. Actually the early school life goes from one explosion to another.

The “second explosion” is into writing, when children have gained control over their hands. Children can hold the pencil or crayon and produce controlled lines or controlled movement. Once this has been practised, the control is pretty well complete and now children can form shapes and letters. So when we have practised a few letters with the sandpaper letters by just tracing them with the finger, the next exercise is for children to try reproducing the letters they traced with pencil and paper or finger in the sand or on a steamed-up window with the finger. When a child says “I can make the letter A!” it is an “Aha” moment for me, which gives me a deep sense of satisfaction. You get the reassurance that as an educator, you caught the child at the right time doing the right thing.

The “third explosion” is into reading. When children have learned to trace and to write a few sounds, we combine these sounds to see actually what kind of sound they make together. The first sound is an M sound, the next one is A, and the next sound is T. These three sounds make the sound MAT. Now I hear children say, “I can read!” Then children eventually will say “MAT,” and “CAT.” As an educator, when I catch these moments, I find them wonderful and very satisfying. (Interview transcription, pp. 75–77)

Anya’s Authenticity in Class

The arts. As Anya was very passionate about the arts, she brought many elements of the arts, such as drawing and painting, into her classroom, integrating them into language, mathematics, geography, and other subjects. She said Montessori teaching materials are all integrated, which leads to the integration of many subjects. In her class, Anya integrates the arts into other subjects from the beginning of the school year in September. She called her program “a special arts integration program,” which works very well. She was the first one in her school who, instead of reading, told stories to her class and sang songs with her children, as she loved and felt comfortable with the arts.

Here are a few examples of how Anya integrated the arts into other subjects:

To teach the concept and the word of “green,” I take out one colour (green) for the 3-year-olds, two (green plus one other colour) for the 4-year-olds, and three (green plus two different colours) for the 5-year-olds, and have children do their painting. This time, children were using paintbrushes and I would encourage them to fill the whole page with the colour or colours given. When children are finished on their own with this activity, they show it to me and I would ask them, “Yes, what did you make?” and children would say, “Green” and this is exactly what I wanted to hear, because now children have a very
sensorial experience of the colour green. Children with two colours would be encouraged to paint them next to each other very carefully, filling the space of the whole page.

By the time children are 5 years old, they have been exposed to lots of science and geography, and I ask them to create their own island, their own lake, so on. So when children are finished with painting, I will ask them to identify the islands and the lakes on their paintings. I added this painting activity on my own, which has been very successful. I believe this sensorial activity gives children a very good idea of islands and lakes, which I point out later in other pictures.

When I see a child who discovers on his own a horizon through his 2-colour painting, this is truly an “Aha” moment, a very satisfying moment for me. And this horizon can lead to children’s understanding of space and this is why I say integrating the arts in my class gives me such satisfying and unforgettable moments. I heard positive comments from parents who told about their daughter excitedly talking about “the horizon.” When the parents asked their daughter how she knew what the horizon was, she said “Miss Anya told us, and showed us.” And I believe this is how children learn and we cannot rush this process of development. Montessori once said it takes three years to be 3 years old, and it takes 10 years to be 10 years old. (Interview transcription, pp. 77–78)

When Anya encountered a child who had difficulty learning phonetic sounds or was not interested in learning to read phonetically, she tried a sight-reading method which is geared to learning holistically. To proceed, she just introduced a whole word, like MAT or CAT, to see if this works. If children still had difficulty, Anya would put it away and return to it in a week or a month. But usually children can manage sight-reading with a whole word.

Montessori educators have individual readers, little booklets that are put together in which there is just a word to be learned with a picture. Anya often hears a child proudly saying, “I read the whole book and I can read a book!” The book is only six pages long. If a child learned to sight-read early, at the age of 6 or 7, Anya still felt she should introduce phonics at some point, so that children could analyze language. She believed, along with phonics and sight-reading methods, that children have to practise lots of reading on their own and with their parents in order to be good readers.

Drama. When Anya was a little girl, she always wanted to be an actor. Now she brings her passion and authenticity into her school play as an actor:

One day I put a play at the school which was about the Holocaust and in which teachers, young children, and parents participated. The play was wonderful and went very well. I was playing the role of a teacher in a concentration camp and the play had an extra meaning for me, because I am Jewish. This play has become a tradition ever since at my Montessori school. I loved playing the role of the teacher, which was extremely positive and satisfying. The audience loved the play and were deeply moved by it. At the end of this experience, I realized that as an actor I am very thankful to have this privileged
opportunity to express myself and to express my feelings about Holocaust. If you are an artist, you can express yourself without having to go through political debates.

In the play, I Never Saw Another Butterfly, written by Raspanti (1971), the camp was not an extermination camp, but a collection camp where Jews were brought to be shipped to Auschwitz or other places. These Jews included children and adults. The children were not told that they were going to be shipped to another camp. The older ones had to work in the surrounding fields. The adults knew what was going to happen to children. There was minimal food available and minimal accommodation, but there was a little medical help.

At this camp, some of the adults started to teach children and the role I played was one of these teachers who insisted that children should have a kind of normalcy, an education to fill their days and to keep their courage up. This teacher let children draw and paint on a big roll of paper, and then collected their drawings and paintings. Before she was brought to an extermination camp, she buried this big roll of paper in the ground, leaving her daughter with the information where it was buried. When her daughter later went to dig it in the ground, she found hundreds of children’s drawings and paintings on the paper. The legacy this teacher left was to not be afraid, because “we are together as a community.” (Interview transcription, pp. 81–82)

Children in Class: Self-Directed Learning at Montessori Schools

Anya firmly believed that self-directed learning at the Montessori school teaches children such educational qualities as independence, order, focus, concentration, silence, endurance, respect, and responsibility.

Self-Directed Learning

This is how self-directed learning took place in Anya’s class:

When my children between the ages of 3 and 6 in my kindergarten class arrive in the morning, my classroom is in order and everything has been prepared by me to make sure that everything is available to children. Self-directed learning starts from the very beginning of the day.

When the children arrive in the morning, they are greeted individually with my personal handshake after which they go to their cubby holes to change shoes and put away their knapsack independently. If help is needed, I comply. Each child goes immediately to his classroom to select a piece of work that has been shown to me the day before, to repeat it independently, as he chooses. This greeting process takes a half hour or so.

This individual work period during which there should not be any interruption goes on with me working with students individually. The period lasts as long as possible, for 2 or 3 hours. When everybody is involved in a piece of work, alone or with a friend in silence, there are many opportunities for me to work with children individually or together. This is the only way for children at the Montessori to develop the concentration, the focus, and the endurance on a completely individualized task, so that they complete it to the end.
I am sometimes asked for help, but when I am involved with another student, a child who needs help may say “Excuse me,” but then needs to wait. Often a child will put a hand on my shoulder to have my attention, and I say, “I will be with you in a moment” and the child needs to wait. This approach is to learn to respect me. The child’s need is acknowledged and is taken care of in time. All this is done in low tones and if any loud noise erupts, I and the children have to deal with that. (Interview transcription, pp. 85–86)

Self-Correcting

All materials in my class are self-correcting along math blocks and cylinders that fit in properly when the work is done correctly. This way, I do not have to tell children this is right or this is wrong. There are no interruptions if possible for as long as 2 or 3 hours after which a snack is served. (Interview transcription, pp. 86–87)

Self-Directed Snack Time

Anya stated that even during snack time, independence is nurtured among children:

Self-directed snack time is a break for the children. Two or three children who have completed their work can sit together to go get the snack which they serve themselves on a plate. They pour their own milk into a glass and gather around the snack table. When snack time is over, there is dishwashing and floor sweeping, activities that teach taking responsibility and having respect for self, others, and the environment.

Montessori was keen on this extended period of snack time as a social time for children, in contrast to what she saw was happening in public education where everybody goes outside to play at recess. At the Montessori, there is no such recess, but at 11:00 after working 2 or 3 hours in concentration, children need a break. At 11:00, I ring a bell softly to which sound children stop their work in total silence. Then I will say something like “This is it for the day, thank you very much, please finish the job, tidy it up, and join us.” (Interview transcription, p. 87)

Snack time announced the end of morning session. This is how the afternoon in Anya’s class started:

Now the children and I get together in a circle to tell stories and sing songs or to start the introduction to plants and animals. If the weather is nice, we go outside to play on our playground until the morning buses go or until the parents come to pick up their children. Now it is lunchtime. For the older children who have full-day kindergarten, the afternoon starts at 1:00 and the morning’s same rhythm and routine starts again. However, the afternoon includes periods for French, music, and art. (Interview transcription, p. 87)

Self-Directed Learning Materials in Class

When I asked Anya what kind of materials were laid out in her class to nurture the children’s self-directed learning, she said that the materials were always based on self-correcting, independent, and sensorial activities, divided into following five areas:
1. **Practical life activities.** In this area, children practise pouring water from one jug into another, spooning, and washing things. They also practise hand-washing, nose-blowing, serving a snack independently, cleaning, and playing with beads and tweezers. All these activities teach large and fine-motor skills and are self-correcting. Children are encouraged to complete each task quietly, after which they show it to the teacher, and the younger ones (who need more practice) get to have a chance to repeat the same activity.

2. **Sensorial activities.** In this area, the five senses are trained and refined. Materials include cylinders, blocks, and colour tablets. To use colour tablets, the children take out the mat of colour tablets and the teacher shows how they are put together. For example, in matching colours, children get to use their visual sense. Then the teacher rolls the colour mat back up and asks the children to try unrolling the mat and matching the colours on their own. Here the teacher’s role is to observe how the children are managing independently.

3. **Language activities.** This area is related to practical life and sensorial activities. For example, Anya would teach how to use the objects used in the pouring activity, such as a jug, a plate, or a spoon. Sensorial activities always come first. Then, when the children repeated the colour exercises, Anya would add language, to teach the names of colours, such as red, green, and blue. In this area, she would also teach the letters of the alphabet, phonics, prewriting, and listening, using appropriate materials that the children could use to see, touch, and hear.

4. **Mathematics activities.** In this area, after sensorial mathematics activities with hands, children learn the concept of numbers from 1 to 10, using red and blue rods. The longest rod is 1 metre in length, divided into 10 sections of 10 centimetres each. The shortest rod is 10 centimetres in length. Once the children know how to count from 1 to 10, Anya introduces the concept of ones, tens, hundreds, and thousands.

5. **Cultural activities.** This area is geared to teach social sciences based on sensorial experience. It includes an introduction to science, biology, geometry, geography, and physics. For geography, Anya would show the globe on which there are sandpaper continents, teaching children the difference between water and land by having them touch the globe. And from water and land, she would progress to teach islands and lakes. For biology, Anya introduced five animal species among which humans are included as mammals. (Interview Transcription, pp. 88-90)
After each activity, children have to show what they have done to Anya, after which they must tidy up before starting to work on another activity. This strategy teaches children respect, order, and social consideration. Anya did not have to limit the number of children working at each area, because each activity was geared to be used by only one child at a time. This way, children did not have to cram for the same kind of activity nor have to share with other children, as often is the case in public schools.

When there was any behavioural problem in class, Anya made sure to point out respect for others and for the material. If two children got into a fight, raising their voices, Anya and the rest of class would stop in silence and then wait. This approach worked in Anya’s class. She observed that we as teachers often jump in too soon when there is a fight, and we should rather give children the chance to work it out on their own. She suggested when we witness a fight, we should focus on the safety of the victim, rather than blaming the perpetrator right away. This is all a part of socialization and compassion.

**Evaluation at Montessori Schools**

Anya said that there were no grades in the report card at the Montessori school. Instead, teachers write a journal in which they keep track of which materials have been shown to which child and what stage each child is at in each subject. The journal can be made available to the parents if they want to have a look at a detailed account of their child’s development in learning. The teacher gives out report cards three times a year. They have check-marks in different areas—learning, and social behaviour, and engagement in learning. Anya said this kind of report card contributes to self-directed learning at the Montessori school.

Anya has some words of caution for the parents who might be interested in enrolling their child at a Montessori school. Two kinds of children may not benefit from or not be suitable for the Montessori environment. The first is very active children, because they would find all the materials being laid out far too stimulating, and they might want to get into all of the materials at once and not be able to concentrate. The second is the very passive child, who needs constant direction.
Limitations of Montessori Schools

Even though Anya greatly respected and admired Montessori education, she found a shortcoming in Montessori’s nurturing of independence in children. She said it was not good enough to teach independence as the principle strategy in education, because there is more; interdependence and spirituality, for example. In order to explain her argument, Anya drew a circle divided into four sections to show how dependence leads to spirituality in a person’s life. The first section represents the dependence period in children aged from birth to 6, the second area would be the period of independence for school age children of 6 to 18, the third section would be the period of interdependence of adulthood of 18 to 65 years of age with the last period of senior years of 65 and over representing a spirituality comprising dependence, independence, and interdependence. The spirituality of the last section leads to real spiritual freedom.

Another criticism Anya had of Montessori education is that Montessori has no good words for the parents or for the society. Anya believed that parents and society are all helpful in education and should be included in children’s education. She was against Montessori’s exclusivity in this way, and argued that we should rather reach out to the whole community.

Compassion at Montessori Schools

Love and Compassion Through Peace

Anya stated that Montessori did not use the word love in her pedagogy. But love exists at Montessori schools, where it means socialization, self-awareness, and social processes that children go through from early years to adulthood. Anya believed this most important perspective on love was a by-product of Montessori’s methods. It stemmed from two main principles in Montessori education. The first principle is respect for the individual child, out of which comes the individualized approach to learning, and teachers who follow and respond to children’s interest. The second principle is the mixed-ages approach that eliminates competition, creates a more relaxed, family-style atmosphere, and includes the teacher as an equal. Montessori emphasized many times that the teacher needed to humble herself and stay in the background, instead of imposing her will on children.

Anya indicated that Montessori’s (1967) “spiritual embryo” developed in the first three years of life, forming the roots for socialization, social awareness, and social conscience that can happen
only in relation to the world around us. Thus with the spiritual embryo concept, the groundwork is laid; the first positive relationships have been formed for the new child. From the age of 3 on, these roots are applied to whatever children have absorbed. The love that children receive during these three years is of course something that children can inculcate, integrate, and reciprocate. Children who are treated conscientiously with love and compassion, whose needs are met, and who feel protected would respond in this way.

In Anya’s teaching experience, the word *spiritual* in Montessori schools is not necessarily religious, but is expressed in peace activism through social awareness, social consciousness, the raising of compassion as a character trait, respect, and responsibility for life. Anya informed me that Montessori herself was a well-known peace activist and peace educator who called her method of education the only way to create the peace in the world. She was a great peace advocate in her time, lectured everywhere on the subject, and was nominated for Nobel Peace Prize three times. Montessori believed that children who had been brought up to follow their natural urges would be the messengers of peace. As adults we cannot force this process on children, but can only observe them in their social and spiritual progress. Thus, in the Montessori school love and compassion are intimately connected to peace.
CHAPTER 7:
MY PARTIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY—IN THE WORLD OF SWAN

In this partial autobiography—an arts-based, self-reflective narrative—I describe my encounters with compassion, my contemplative practices, and ways of bringing compassion into schools. My narrative interweaves my aspiration for and my lived experiences of spirituality, beauty, and imagination, through which I attempt to interpret my life text through metaphors, imagery, and themes. My authenticity and life’s events have influenced and enriched my curriculum and teaching as an immigrant teacher in Ontario.

I have chosen “the world of swan” as the metaphor for my life’s aspirations, events, and teaching experiences. It is based on Hans Christian Andersen’s (1999) fairy tale, “The Ugly Duckling,” the story of how a duckling goes through hard times among other ducklings because it is different from them. It leaves home and goes through much suffering due to hunger and cold in a long, harsh winter. But when spring arrives, the duckling, swimming on the lake, to its surprise sees “a beautiful, transformed swan.” Like the swan, I have come home as “a transformed self”—I have come to develop a nondualistic, compassionate world view with an awareness of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living beings.

However, I am aware that my holistic, compassionate world view is not static, but is an ongoing, lifelong process that needs to be continuously nourished through contemplation, because “everything in this world is in a state of flux,” a statement uttered by Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher whose thoughts influenced Plato. Heraclitus, who had a holistic world view of “one in many and many in one,” taught that “nothing ever is and everything is becoming” (Russell, 1996, pp. 48–52).

Background

I was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea, in a Buddhist and Confucian family. My father was compassionate, open-minded, and adventurous, while my mother, a disciplined and hard-working person, was devoted to her family and her children’s education.

Since childhood, I have been a voracious reader and I have enjoyed such art-related activities as dancing, playing the piano, and visiting art galleries. I have always had a yearning for glimpses of beauty and the divine. As a child, I was deeply influenced by my father’s spirituality and
compassion, which played a large part in shaping the person who I am. Reflecting upon my identity and my personal and professional experiences, I now realize that I have been pursuing beauty and spirituality all my life, in the world of imagination. There, I could find happiness, freedom, compassion, and meaning.

I came to Canada in my early 20s and became a French teacher in Ontario. During my 29 years’ teaching in Ontario on a full- and part-time basis, I taught elementary school level Core French and French Immersion as well as Vocal Music in the public school system. During my life in Canada, I have been exposed to Christianity through Catholicism. While teaching Core French in a small town in Ontario in my late 20s, I befriended a Korean woman who had married an Irish Catholic. Through her, I was exposed to catechism and was baptized as Catholic. However, when she and her family moved to another city two years later, I found my faith in God through Catholicism slowly dwindling. Nevertheless, an important Christian tenet remains in my heart after these many years: Treat your neighbours as you would want them to treat you.

After my early retirement from teaching in Ontario, I came to study at OISE/UT, where I have been studying spirituality in education for the past eight years during which I have come to find my concept of God in the Self that resides within me.

The Nature of Compassion

Swan’s Origin—My Father

Then a priest said: Speak to us of prayer. For what is prayer but the expansion of yourself in living ether? . . . God listens not to your words save when He Himself utters them through your lips. . . . And if you but listen in the stillness of the night you shall hear them saying in silence, “Our God, who art our winged self, it is thy will in us that willeth.” (Gibran, 1923, pp. 67–68)

I am in my bedroom, staring at the painting, L’angelus, by Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), a French painter. It is a print I purchased at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris quite a long time ago. In the painting, a farmer couple are bowing their heads for prayer, as the evening’s church bells ring the angelus. The picture is painted in dark hues. It is evening in the picture, with twilight on the horizon. I remember seeing my father praying in his study.

That same painting hung in my father’s study. During my childhood, I remember going to my father’s study to watch my father pray. While watching him, I would notice that painting, hanging on the wall above his head. My father’s study evoked in me two elements: beauty and spirituality:
My childhood memories take me back to my father’s face lit by candlelight. The room is dark and I can see only half of his face and the painting hung above his head. I see his lips moving with incomprehensible words. On the altar there is a bowl of water and a metal ashtray in which incense is burning. I could always tell if he was in his study or not by the smell of incense coming through the door.

What I admired most about my father was his compassion and good deeds. He was kind to those who were unfortunate and to people who had problems in life, all of whom he helped with time and money. He would bring home street people, homeless people. He gave them food—a sack of rice, sometimes—and clothing. Listening to the conversations between my father and these people, I knew my father was helping them with their problems. He said we had to be as compassionate with poor people as Buddha had been in his life.

When I was young, he would take me to a Buddhist temple that he had helped build. Inside the temple a monk in a grey robe would be beating on a wooden gong. Paintings of gods decorated the walls and the ceiling. In the centre was a big golden Buddha, eyes half closed, smiling a faint smile, and sitting in the lotus position with his fingers touching. On an altar in front of him, incense sticks burned. The sounds of the gong, the smell of the incense, and the kind face of the Buddha created a peaceful and spiritual atmosphere for me:

Now I see my father bowing many times in front of Buddha statue and myself watching. In the temple, I saw many exotic and picturesque paintings of gods on the walls and ceiling. Some had a scary look with bulging eyes and some brandishing a sword. The other gods looked gentler, as they looked like girls wrapped in beautiful clothes. All these gods surrounded with lotus flowers seemed to be floating in the clouds around them. After the service, we were usually served with delicious vegetarian meals.

My father was a well-travelled man; he had spent many years in the Japanese marines in his youth. During evenings in my childhood, he would tell us stories about his visits to Marseille, Vladivostok, San Francisco, New York, and South America. One time, when he was in Vladivostok in winter time, it was so cold that he remembered seeing his spit freezing right in front of him. His stories made us yearn to travel the world when we grew up, just like him.

My father was a great influence in creating who I am today. His compassion and good deeds led me to my interest in spirituality. The beautiful paintings in my father’s study, and the sounds of the gong, smell of the incense, and the vivid paintings in the Buddhist temple greatly affected me in my pursuit of aesthetics. My father’s stories about exotic ports led me to go see some of those ports myself, and to travel many parts of the world during my adulthood.
Swan’s Dreams and Explorations of Beauty and Spirituality

When I was a child, I loved reading French literature and spent many nights immersed in a world of imagination and dreams. I travelled with imaginary friends from the characters of books in my own world of fantasy. I dreamed of becoming many people. Some days, I wanted to become a designer like Coco Chanel, as I loved trying on my mother’s beautiful and fashionable dresses. I spent many hours in front of a mirror, trying on my mother’s clothes and imitating poses of fashion models, to see if I looked beautiful. Other days, I wanted to become a poet. I would look out the bedroom window, imagining the blue sky as a girl’s pretty skirt and the clouds as so many motifs on it. The rain became her tears, because she was sad to see the world full of suffering and wars.

When I grew bored with my own imagination, I might read George Sand’s La mare au diable, because I liked the writer’s liberal thoughts. She once said: “My profession is to liberate,” and I wanted to be a free woman like her. Saint-Exupéry was another French writer whom I enjoyed reading. His philosophy on the solidarity of mankind on earth, a nondualistic view of people and world, was a big influence on my quest for spirituality in later life.

Among all my fantasies and aspirations, I loved ballet dancing most of all.

I hear some beautiful cello music accompanied by the piano. It is Saint-Saens’ Le cygne (The Swan) from Le carnaval des animaux (The Carnival of the Animals), which takes me back to my childhood memories of ballet dancing.

Even though ballet required strict discipline and rigorous practise, I loved dancing, because I could imagine myself being a swan, moving my wings gracefully and gliding lightly on the water. I loved wearing glittering white clothes and a white-feathered headdress. I enjoyed the feeling of anticipation before moving out to dance on the stage. Then there was applause from the audience which filled me with an exalted feeling of perfection and beauty. I felt connected to the sublime which resulted in a perfect connection to my aesthetics and authenticity.

An encounter with a homeless person

When I was 9 or 10, and living with my parents in South Korea, a homeless person was living on the street near our house. I remember it was winter and the weather was bitterly cold. On my way to and from school, I would spot him crouched on a piece of newspaper in thin, ragged clothes. As his head was always down, I could not see his face, but saw that he had only one leg and his hair was long and uncombed. In front of him lay an empty can in which passers-by could drop money. Every time I walked by him, I could not help but feel a deep empathy for him, imagining
how hungry he would be all day long without food and how cold he would be in his thin and torn clothes. One day, I mustered the courage to invite him to our house where our nanny fed him. While finishing the food on his plate, he never once looked at me or anybody else (perhaps he felt awkward), but I remember having a feeling of relief knowing that he would not be hungry that day.

**Madame Rousseau**

*Now, I am having a cup of tea with a cookie that reminds me of Marcel Proust’s madeleines. I remember reading about Marcel Proust’s (1927) happy childhood memories, evoked after tasting some madeleines dipped in tea.*

*My cookie takes me to my happy years in France, to the stories of cultured and open-minded French friends and of the places like Aix-en-Provence and Arles, where post-Impressionist painters such as Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin had studios and produced brilliant paintings.*

While studying in France, I used to have finger-shaped, soft cookies with Madame Monique Rousseau, the wife of my favourite professor, Dr. André Rousseau. Monique was a very cultured and smartly dressed lady with a radiant smile. She went to L’École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and was very knowledgeable about the arts. She was a good pianist and used to accompany her friends’ singing on the piano:

*Monique used to invite me along with some Japanese friends to her house for dinner. I remember passing around a tray of cheeses at the end of dinner—Camembert, Brie, Gruyère, Roquefort, and other goat cheeses. After dinner, she led us to her salon where she kept her piano and a vast collection of artworks. She would talk to us about her collection and accompany our singing on the piano. Sometimes I was asked to stay for the night and then the next morning we would have a croissant and a café au lait in her garden overlooking the lake.*

Now, when I think back, Monique’s kindness and openness towards other cultures as well as her deep appreciation for the arts led me to emulate her actions later in life. Monique’s beautiful, bright smile remains in my heart as a lesson—to look at life from the sunny side. Now, when I have a chance to meet students from other countries, I find myself treating them with kindness and openness. My passion for the arts, which she nurtured, took me to many museums in Europe. I treasure a memory of looking in awe at Van Gogh’s *The Sunflowers* at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Another time, Monique took me to a concert, to hear Mozart. It was a summer night and the concert was held outside, in the middle of thick woods. I had always loved listening to Mozart, but that night something was different. Mozart sounded superb. Surrounded by woods and good
friends, the sound of his music was blissful to my ears. This event enriched my pursuit for aesthetics—and spirituality—even more.

Mireille Brûlé

Now, the memory of Mozart’s music takes me to a cathedral in southern France. Mireille Brûlé had a room next to mine at La Cité Universitaire in France. She had beautiful blond hair with deep blue eyes and loved listening to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. One time, she invited me to a concert in a cathedral. In this most exalting experience, I heard Bach’s sacred and inspirational music in awe and wonder:

There was a big pipe organ on the upper level and when the concert started, all the lights were turned off, except for the lights shining over the organ and the player. We sat in complete darkness, listening to Bach’s elevating organ music. My heart was filled with a sense of gratitude and bliss. One piece moved me deeply: Bach’s Aria on the G String. During the performance of this music, I was so moved and touched that I could not help from weeping.

How Can We Develop Compassion Within Ourselves?

After many years of studying spirituality in education at OISE/UT, I have come to discover my concept of God through the Self that resides within me. In essence, I regard God or the Self as representing infinite love, compassion, goodness, and beauty. “It” loves all beings unconditionally regardless of their religion, colour, or race and has a profound compassion for people suffering in innumerable places around the world, due to greed, injustice, and inequality. “It” comes to my heart in the form of tears of happiness and of gratitude, when I am connected to supreme beauty through the arts. “It” always consoles me when I am sad, advises me when I need direction, and helps me when I need to disassociate myself from my negative emotions and thoughts. “It” is always there in my heart as my best friend, watching me, listening to me, smiling with me, crying with me, and laughing with me, in my world of imagination and of infinite possibilities.

However, the true meaning of my God or the Self lies rather in how I conduct my life everyday with regards to relationships to self, the Self, and others. In order to lead a meaningful and happy life, I have come to realize that I have to see the world through the eyes of the Self, because how I view the world directly affects my thoughts. This, in turn, leads to my deeds, a result of an insightful Buddhist teaching that I learned during my studies at OISE/UT: Thoughts lead to deeds.
The following stories reflect my aspiration and attempt for a transformation within me from being a narrow-minded self to a broad-minded self, the Self, in an awareness of interconnectedness and interrelationships of nonduality between the I and the Other.

**Swan’s Discernment: Appearance and Reality**

*I am about to practise meditation in front of a white wall. Two images appear, crisscrossing in front of me: one is of a Buddhist painting depicting a thousand eyes supported by a thousand hands, and the other is of prisoners sitting in rows in a dark cave watching a big screen, not able to turn their heads.*

A few years ago, I stayed at a Buddhist temple in South Korea. During the day I meditated, and at night I slept with others in a room where there was an unusual painting. It depicted a thousand eyes supported by a thousand hands. And all the eyes and hands were exactly the same size and colour. At that time I did not understand the meaning usually given to this painting; nevertheless, I interpreted it as different perceptions and thoughts traversing through a thousand people’s minds. At the temple, we would have a discussion period after supper, during which we were allowed to ask one question. The question I asked was if one could alter one’s destiny in one’s lifetime, to which the monk responded that it would be possible, if we changed our perceptions, which come from the mind.

In Plato’s (2004) “Allegory of the Cave” (pp. 224–231), prisoners are chained around their necks and legs. They are sitting in rows in darkness, in front of a screen watching projected shadows (appearances), believing them to be true (reality). They cannot turn their heads, because if they do, they suffer sharp pains due to the chains around their necks. Being forced to look straight ahead at the shadows on the screen, they keep on perceiving the world based on old beliefs and habits. They cannot find a way out to a world of liberation and light. Would it be possible for these prisoners to alter their destinies at all? Plato replies that only philosophers can obtain access to light and the sun.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) defined perceptions as the background of experience, guiding every action. Contrary to the Cartesian rationalism of “cogito ergo sum” (‘I think, therefore I am’), Merleau-Ponty claimed we view the world through our “perceiving mind,” in which both mind

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3 I found out later that the painting is meant to depict the Buddha nature in each of us.
and body\textsuperscript{4} function together, in unity. Through our perceiving mind, we give meaning to the world.

However, a false perception of reality from our perceiving mind can lead to suffering. Buddha said: “The person who suffers most in this world is the person who has many wrong perceptions. . . . And most of our perceptions are erroneous” (cited in Nhat Hanh, 1997, p. 23), and how we perceive life as a whole in its interconnectedness plays a role in our attitude towards suffering (Dalai Lama, 2008, p. 53).

In the first image, I see myself among people who all have different perceptions, but with Buddha nature within; and in the second image, as one of the chained prisoners who lead their lives, insisting on the righteousness or truth of their beliefs. As a result, I see disconnection and disagreement among the prisoners. This reminds me of a story by Rumi (Barks, 1995), “Elephant in the Dark”:

Some Hindus have an elephant. No one there has ever seen an elephant. They bring it at night into a dark room. One by one, they go in the dark and come out saying how they experience the animal. One of them happens to touch the trunk and says the elephant is a water-pipe kind of creature. Another touches the ear and says the elephant is a fan-animal. Another touches the leg and says the elephant is like a column on a temple. Another touches the back and says the elephant is a leathery throne, so on. . . . The moral of the story is that each of us touches only one place and understands the whole in this way. If only we held a candle and went in together, we could see the whole. (p. 252)

Now I am wondering if we can make a change in our false perception of reality, because it causes suffering. When we keep insisting on one facet of reality instead of seeing the whole, we can become greedy, angry, and hateful, due to the duality we create between I and the Other. But, just as a sheet of paper, to become what it is, has to go through processes involving loggers, forest, rain, and cloud, we can learn to experience the interconnectedness among us, which Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) refers to “interbeing.”

**Swan’s Spirituality**

I grew up in a Buddhist family and came to know the nature of compassion from my father, whose spiritual practice and compassionate deeds greatly influenced the formation of my spiritual view. Later, I became a Catholic for two years. Now I am an adherent to neither

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\textsuperscript{4} And, I would add, heart.
Buddhism nor Christianity; however, Buddhist and Christian concepts are foundational to my spiritual beliefs. Buddhism teaches that the Buddha nature lies within and that thoughts lead to deeds. Christianity teaches “Treat your neighbours as you would want them to treat you.” From the Buddhist concept of the Buddha nature within, I learned to lead a spiritual life of compassionate deeds, alleviating the suffering of others. From its teaching that thoughts lead to deeds, I learned to watch my thoughts, because compassionate thoughts lead to compassionate deeds. From the Christian teaching, I learned to treat others with empathy and caring.

When I came to study in the Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning (CTL) department at OISE/UT, specializing in holistic education, I started to formally practise contemplation, as I wanted to lead a more meaningful life in an awareness of the connection between myself and others. I started Chapter 1 with a poem about finding the meaning of my life through God’s smile on my heart, which demonstrates my aspiration to find meaning and happiness through compassionate thoughts and deeds. Through contemplation, I wanted to understand who I was, so that I could better understand and serve others, because I believe that through contemplative practices, we can see things as they really are (Dalai Lama, 2006). As I write this, I remember Wilber’s (1981) perspective of a world that is all in one and one in all, based on a Mahayana Buddhist teaching that says that the universe is like one vast net of jewels. The reflection from one jewel is contained in all jewels, and the reflections of all jewels are contained in each jewel (Wilber, 1981, p. 38).

**Swan’s Contemplative Practices**

In order to lead a meaningful life by helping and serving others, I started to practise contemplation, which “involves the development of compassionate attention” (Miller, 1994, p. 2; Miller, 2006, p. 36). Compassionate attention in turn develops empathy, the ability to enter into and, to some extent, share others’ suffering (Dalai Lama, 1999b, p. 123). I have been formally practising contemplation for over 10 years now. My contemplative practices include prayers, seon (Zen) meditation, mindfulness, swimming, and yoga. Of these, I will describe prayers, swimming, and yoga, which I practise more regularly these days. Like my father, through daily prayers to God who I believe unconditionally loves all humanity regardless of their religion, colour, or nationality, I find comfort and infinite love and often feel His invisible grace and spirit. In swimming, I find happiness, in a state of being one with the water. Yoga helps me develop compassion in an awareness of connections to self, the Self, and others.
Prayers. I pray to God a few times a day, especially when I feel lonely or face life’s problems. I start my prayer by expressing my gratitude for His great blessings in my life and then by talking to Him about my problems and listening to Him. I cannot say He always provides me with right answers, but I find a great comfort and a deep connection to Him; He loves me unconditionally, like my father did. I come back to Him several times a day through prayers, as He represents only compassion and unconditional love for all sentient beings. When I pray, I also feel His loving presence and spirit, and feel His guidance to walk on the right and compassionate paths.

Swimming. We all want happiness (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 144), and I find my happiness in swimming. In a state of freedom and joy coming from detaching from my negative thoughts and becoming one with the water, I often think about my now deceased father, who was an excellent swimmer, feeling his loving and compassionate presence around me. He could cross a very wide river with ease. I can still see him, swimming forever in front of me, his head bobbing in and out of the water, getting smaller and smaller as he swims farther away from me.

While swimming, I sometimes visualize a vast ocean and blue skies, evoked by childhood memories of being taken to a cottage by the sea on summer holidays. During the day, my father taught us how to swim in the rough salt water and when the night fell, he would put us to bed where, instead of sleeping, I spent long hours listening to the soothing sounds of the waves on the shore. I would imagine many stories the waves might be carrying, having been to many unknown places in the world. Tagore (1941) saw the sea in this way: “On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances...The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach” (p. 78).

In my experience, swimming represents Taoist nondoing. Nondoing is a state of no-obstruction and no-restraint, in which doing and nondoing become one, resulting in natural joy (Grigg, 1999, pp. 279–280). In Taoism, water represents spontaneity as it flows around rocks following its downward course. Chuang Tzu heard water in this way: “The sound of water says what I think” (Grigg, 1999, p. 279). When I swim, I feel as if I am becoming one with the water, which feels so welcoming and comforting. As I glide through the water, I become relaxed and happy, being freed from my self-imposed shackles.

Yoga. Yoga is Sanskrit for union—of body, mind, and spirit. It is a practice of mindfulness, compassion, grace, and love through all actions. The goal of yoga is to achieve union, not only
with body and mind, but also with the Absolute, also known as Atman, or the true Self. To achieve this union through the practice of yoga is to realize our oneness with something higher than ourselves. When we feel connected to this Self, we come to develop love and compassion (Turlington, 2002).

I first became acquainted with yoga nine years ago, when I read Miller’s (1994) *The Contemplative Practitioner*. The story about how he started yoga to “de-stress” his then stressful problems in life was very moving. I started to practise yoga on my own, using the postures described in the book, to help with health-related problems. Later, as my health improved, I started to take formal yoga lessons. I enjoy yoga’s slow and gentle movements, control of the breath, stretching of the body, and loving wishes for all.

Here is the routine and practice of my yoga class, which lasts 90 minutes. At the beginning of class, we do a short devotional prayer, to wish peace and forgiveness for all. We then proceed to do breathing exercises, using deep inhaling and exhaling. Next, we do gentle and slow stretching of the body, maintaining the centring of the spine and trying to extend our body as far as we can. More asanas (postures) follow, during which we try to align our body, mind, and spirit, focusing on *being*. The instructor says we do not have to perform the asanas well, as there is no goal in yoga, but just a process. She puts an emphasis on a forgiving and loving state of mind in the practice; this brings peace within me. Soothing music plays in the background.

At the end of class, the instructor asks us to rub our hands and then to cover our eyes with our hands for a few seconds. Then we lie down on the mat for a few minutes, relaxing our body. We end our class by bowing to each other saying *Namaste*, which means *I bow to you*.

**Swan’s Reflections on Contemplative Practices**

**Just being, and connection.** When I swim or practise yoga, I notice that I am being, not doing. Just being with the water brings me relaxation and joy for which I become grateful to God. The breathing, centring, extension of the body, and loving wishes in yoga lead me to focus on being in the present which also makes me feel connected to the Self.

In connecting with the divine or the Self, I feel empathy and compassion arising in me, especially when I wish forgiveness and love for my self. I may have neglected my self for a long time, been too harsh or critical of my mistakes, and unable to be detached from the past. But, as.
the Blessed One in *the Bhagavad Gita* (Thompson, 2008) said: “Do not degrade the self, for the self is one’s only friend, and at the same time the self is one’s only foe. The self is one’s friend when one has conquered the self by means of the self. But when a man neglects the self, then, like an enemy at war, that very self will turn against him” (pp. 30–31). Thus, if I want to forgive and love others, I have to first forgive and love myself, as “love needs to start with ourselves. Otherwise, it is difficult to love others” (J. Miller, 2010, p. 83).

I am also aware of a feeling of inner connection, as the different parts of my body work together as a whole to make my movements possible. For example, when I do the backstroke in swimming, to make it possible I need to use not only my arms and legs, but also the rest of my body. In yoga, if I need to bend my spine backward to do the cobra asana, my spine must do the bending, but I also need other parts of my body, such as my abdomen and chest, to make the posture possible. As I bend, I think about the people whom I might have ignored or judged, due to my false perception.

**Devotion and gratitude.** The connection and liberation that swimming and yoga evoke in me help me to realize that I need to treat myself and others with respect and love; to be grateful for my life on this earth; and to live each day to its fullest, with good intentions. Instead of rushing through my day or judging self or others, I need to live my life in a gentle, slow manner, knowing that everything is all right—I and others are not perfect in life, for life’s journey is a process.

**Love and compassion.** The love and compassion that arise during contemplation are the ultimate goals of our spiritual life (Miller, 2006). The prayers and loving wishes for self and others that I practise in yoga help me develop compassion and an awareness of the interconnection among us all. When I look around, I see so much suffering in people, which is caused by a false perception of reality. Having a boundary between the I and the Other is said to be one of the main causes of human suffering. By clinging to an I that really does not exist, we create such dualities as rich and poor, good and evil, and strong and weak. If we can get detached from this illusion, we can be more compassionate about the suffering of others (Dalai Lama, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2006).

Ray Grigg (1999) has cited Morinaga Soko Roshi, who explained how our attachment to the I can be a hindrance to the development of compassion: “Unless we . . . wean ourselves from this
stubborn attachment to ‘I,’ our inherent wisdom is clouded and our inherent compassion is blocked” (p. 208).

How Do We Foster Compassion in Schools?

Swan’s Self-Knowledge

And a man said, speak to us of Self-Knowledge. And he answered, saying: Your heart knows in silence the secrets of the days and nights. . . . You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. . . . The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea; and the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes. . . . For self is a sea boundless and measureless. (Gibran, 1923, p. 54)

Before I came to OISE to further my studies, I taught Core French, French Immersion, and Vocal Music in the public school system in Ontario. The following stories tell how I found happiness and meaning by bringing my authenticity into class during my life as an immigrant teacher in Ontario, and how I fostered compassion in my class and school by being connected to the Self that nourishes my authentic soul.

Now I am a French teacher, living in Canada. I think the swan’s white feathers on my ballet costume were an omen for my destiny to live in Canada, because the colour white is associated with snow, as in Gilles Vigneault’s song, “Mon pays” (‘My Country’). In it, the famous chansonnier from Québec sings: “Mon pays, ce n’est pas un pays, c’est la neige” (‘My country is not a country, it is snow’). During my teaching years in Canada, I have gained self-knowledge by reading inspiring books, continuing with my piano lessons, taking dance lessons, practising prayers, and reflecting on my extremely hard life as an immigrant.

Like the Canadian winter, my early years in Canada were very harsh, due to cultural differences. At school, I focused on doing a quality job, and I was regarded as a caring and enthusiastic teacher with many talents. In short, I felt appreciated. But otherwise, suddenly I was in a country where I often did not feel welcome. Even though many Canadians treated newly arrived immigrants with fairness and kindness, there were others who treated immigrants with continual injustice and prejudice. I had to overcome the obstacles of racism and injustice. My struggles with this kind of treatment were so trying that I often wondered when the misery would ever come to an end. I felt like a hopeless Sisyphus, the figure in Greek mythology who was condemned eternally to roll a large stone up a hill; when it reached the top, it would always roll down again.
During this time, I found solace in Tolstoy, Erich Fromm, and Hermann Hesse. For me, truly “literature allows the Self to emerge” (Miller, 2006, p. 107). For example, while reading Tolstoy (1983)’s *War and Peace*, I imagined myself as Natasha, dancing with a dashing nobleman in a gold-adorned salon. Erich Fromm’s (1956) *The Art of Loving* taught me to love myself, so that I could love everybody else as I do myself (p. 53), to be the creator of my world (p. 95), and to have compassion for the helpless one (p. 41). When I read Hesse (1951)’s *Siddhartha*, I accompanied the main character on his journey to India in search of knowledge about himself and about Buddhism. In short, these writers allowed me to transcend my ordinary reality and go into the world of imagination and wisdom which helped me develop “a Big Mind” (Miller, 1994), a patient and compassionate mind. Moreover, Crowell, S., Caine, R. N., and Caine, G. (1998) said that “When we open our minds to imagining possibilities, we open it to change. If we focus only on the limitations confronting us, we will be forever held back by our own boundaries of belief” (p. 95).

Feuerverger (2007) also found salvation through language. As a child of Holocaust survivors, she was captivated by language in a deep way, because it provided her a means to escape from reality. Through stories that allowed her to go into the world of imagination she could feel a sense of home, because they helped her be connected to her selfhood. For example, she said that the words of fairy tales would lift her onto a rock and give her a restful shelter there (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 11). French classes were a special salvation for the little Feuerverger; they became her refuge. Her mother, a Holocaust survivor, always seemed to be weeping and grieving the loss of her brothers, who had been sent to a death camp. The beautiful and stylish French teacher, Madame Simon, was her mother’s opposite, and Feuerverger adored her. She was like a fairy godmother. Learning French with Madame Simon gave Feuerverger a chance to escape into a different cultural and linguistic landscape (Feuerverger, 2007, pp. 12–13). She developed a passion for French language and culture (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 25), loving them in the profound way that only a child can, such as when she gets her first really fancy toy. She never had any fancy toy or dresses, but French became her fancy dress, her escape from the bleak world into which she had been born. Before French, she felt homeless, alone, and without direction. After French, she became a person with purpose and desire: she was going to be just like Madame Simon, whose Parisian accent delighted her ears. Life, in the French of her imagination, was just wonderful. The child was to become a passionate and caring French teacher later on in her adult life (Feuerverger, 2007, pp. 34–35).
While finding solace through books like Feuerverger (2007), I also found comfort through music. Playing the piano connected me to composers’ spirituality and aestheticism. During my early years in Canada, I passed Royal Conservatory of Music exams up to Grade 8. By then, I could play some sonatas by Beethoven and a few nocturnes by Chopin. Being able to play by heart the first movement of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* gave me much happiness. The piece was dedicated to a countess with whom Beethoven was in love, and I felt connected to the composer’s deep and aesthetic emotions as I played. I also enjoyed playing Chopin’s nocturnes, picturing the composer playing the piano for George Sand in Paris⁵, a favourite French novelist from my childhood.

**Swan’s Authenticity in Practice**

And a poet said, Speak to us of Beauty. And he answered: Beauty is not a need but an ecstasy. It is rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted. . . . Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face. . . . Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror. But you are eternity and you are the mirror. (Gibran, 1923, pp. 75–76)

We teach who we are. (Palmer, 2007, p. 1)

When I started to teach French Immersion in the 1970s, there was no curriculum or guideline for it—the program was new in Ontario. As a result, we pioneering French Immersion teachers had to figure out on our own how to deliver the program using the textbooks that reflected Québec or French culture, because all the textbooks were from Québec. When I tried to teach straight from the texts, I could tell right away that the contents did not interest my students, because they reflected a culture my students were not familiar with. My teaching became boring. As a result, I decided to bring authenticity and caring into my class; these might be referred to as the teacher’s “presence” (Miller, 2006, 2007). I wanted my teaching to be a stimulating, exciting, and happy experience for my French Immersion students. In return, they responded with passion, excitement, laughter, and curiosity.

In order to bring in teaching material to motivate my students in Language Arts, I decided to use fairy tales that were already known in English to my students, such as “Le vilain petit canard” (‘The Ugly Duckling’), “Les trois ours” (‘The Three Bears’), and “Blanche-Neige” (‘Snow White’). For Feuerverger (2010), fairy tales can be used as spiritual guides for children, since

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⁵ Chopin and Sand were lovers in reality.
they contain universal truths such as good winning over evil, and feature acts of kindness, friendship, and courage. Feuerverger (2010) said that these story elements are especially helpful for children suffering from the trauma of war and other oppressions. As a wounded child of Holocaust survivors, she loved to read fairy tales such as *Cinderella*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *The Little Match Girl*. She could commiserate with the characters in these stories—they became her friends, and offered her faith in the knowledge that, in spite of all the terrors and injustices she had suffered, she was part of a wider humanity. Even in the midst of destruction, there was connectedness to life. Through reading these stories, she discovered reading’s liberating force; it became for her a sanctified activity, one in which she could find solace. Her father once told her: “Each book has a special message. Each one has an important lesson about life.” The young Feuerverger loved to sit near him at the library, reading side by side. Fairy tales also “can be a conveyer of wisdom and wonder” (Miller, 2006, p. 107).

Along with these universal stories that could connect to children’s hearts and imagination, I brought in authenticity, including my passion and enthusiasm for literature and the arts, such as drama, poetry, music, dancing, and painting. The resulting curriculum worked extremely well.

**Le vilain petit canard (The Ugly Duckling)**

Despite some unpleasant surroundings outside my classroom, I was very happy working with my students in the classroom, because I could take them with me into the artistic and literary world of beauty, creativity, and imagination in complete freedom. I loved teaching language, drama, music, dancing, and visual arts, and these enormously excited my students:

*One day after reading the story of Le vilain petit canard (the Ugly Duckling) in my Grade 2 French Immersion class, I wrote a script to make it into a play. There were two narrators, a few ducklings, a mommy duck, and an ugly duckling that was to become a beautiful swan one day.*

*We had such a good time together during this process: some students memorizing the lines, some practising actions, some students singing French songs, some writing short poems or stories about the sadness of the ugly duckling with no friend or the happiness of the ugly duckling who now has many friends as a beautiful swan, and some enthusiastically learning how to play the recorder. To those who wished to dance, I taught my childhood’s simplified ballet dance, *Le Cygne* (the Swan). The students who did not want to act or dance painted scenery and made props. In this manner, all the students were engaged and immersed in exploring their own authenticity. Then one night, we invited parents into the gym to present the play. Oh, how happy I was watching the children and the parents’ proud and happy faces, their eyes glued to their children on the*
stage. I still can remember one student’s exquisite swan costume with white feathers and rhinestones.

That night, I truly felt my soul connected with my students’, and understood the truth in Khalil Gibran’s words: “And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes” (Gibran, 1923).

**Le cimetière (The Graveyard)**

In my Grade 2 French Immersion class, we played a game called *Le cimetière* when my students became restless in the afternoon. This game worked very well, because my students loved to be in a make-believe world. The game lasted 5 or 10 minutes, and this is how we played it:

1. The teacher turns off the lights in the classroom.
2. We imagine we are in a graveyard; there is a complete silence.
3. Now, taking a comfortable position on the classroom carpet, we all pretend to be the dead people in the graveyard.
4. Once the students take their positions, they are not allowed to talk or move, except to blink their eyes and breathe.
5. Now there is no noise in the classroom because we are all dead.
6. The student chosen as “the ghost” (*le fantôme*) floats around like a phantom to see who is moving. When he sees a student who is moving, he gently taps him or her on the shoulder, and the tapped student also becomes a ghost.
7. Now two ghosts walk around silently to see who is moving. If they spot a student who is giggling or scratching, they tap him or her on the shoulder, and now there are three ghosts.
8. Now three ghosts walk around quietly to find students who are moving.
9. We continue on with this game until most students are tapped and become ghosts.

Now, the game is over and calm students are ready for the afternoon’s work!

**A Student Named C**

C was a bubbly student with many friends. His face was always flushed. He did well in class, except in spelling. During my teaching years in Grade 4 French Immersion, we had a weekly spelling test (*la dictée*), which he failed every week. C was very sad about his spelling test results and I could tell he was losing self-confidence. I tried to find a solution which would make him feel good about himself:
As C was good in science, I decided to praise him one day for his excellent science project in front of class. When I asked how he did his project with such creativity and depth, I saw his face lighting up and getting even more flushed with excitement. We all listened to his presentation and applauded really hard when he was finished, shouting “Great scientist!” I spoke to C privately, to let him know that he had great potential to excel in spelling also, if he had the will. The following week, his spelling grade was better. We all applauded him. As weeks went by, his spelling improved and in a few months, he was getting almost perfect marks. I called his mom to let her know how C had been improving in spelling and made sure she also encouraged and praised him at home for his spelling. By the end of school year, C became one of the better spellers in class.

The year I took early retirement, the school secretary told me that there were some parents and students waiting for me in the foyer. I went to the foyer, and to my surprise, there was a taller C, holding a big bouquet of flowers, and his family. I burst into tears and hugged him in gratitude and love. They said they had been waiting for me for more than an hour, till I was finished with a school meeting.

When I got home, I sat in front of the bouquet and stared at it for a long time. All of a sudden, I realized that there is an unknown and unknowable force in the universe that governs and interacts in our lives in a mysterious way, influenced by our intentions and beliefs. If our intentions are good and harmonious, we can attract positive forces which result in good outcomes in our lives, for “self is a sea boundless and measureless” filled with good intentions.

Shell Concert at Roy Thomson Hall

Like Eisner (1998), who found salvation in the arts during his school years, I found my salvation in classical music, operas, and dance during my hard years in Canada. I loved watching operas at the Metropolitan Opera House when I was in New York and at l’Opéra when I was in Paris. When favourite arias started, I would always feel “my heart enflamed and my soul enchanted.” I would hum my favourite arias from Puccini, Verdi, or Bizet to soothe my soul, especially when I was exhausted at the end of a long day at school. My passion for classical music, opera, and ballet dancing led me to incorporate these artistic elements into my teaching:

I found happiness teaching the recorder to my students. After teaching theory first, I then taught my students how to play. We practised very hard every day for several weeks to prepare for the Shell Concert at Roy Thomson Hall. I could tell my students were enjoying playing the recorder, because as soon as they came to school in the morning, they would start practising on their own. Also I had no discipline problem in class, as the students were so immersed in practising. The music pieces we had to prepare were a simplified theme of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and two simplified pieces by Mozart.
Now my students knew how to play the pieces by heart and were ready for the concert. At Roy Thomson Hall there were many student players from other schools. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra accompanied us! When the conductor lifted his baton to start the music, I saw my students’ focused attention and eyes on him. At the end of the performance, I was so proud of my students that I hugged each and every one of them.

This exalting experience with my students taught me that when we follow our passion, we become happy and fulfilled. Then we are connected to our authentic self—the Sublime—because pursuing “beauty is not a need but an ecstasy” (Gibran, 1923, p. 75).

**Folk Dance Jamboree**

As an extracurricular activity, I taught folk dance for many years. Twice a week after lunch, the students in junior grades who signed up for folk dance came to the gym for class. One year, I prepared my young dancers for a folk dance jamboree that would be held in three months:

*There were 12 dances that I had to teach. We started with an easy one, the Mexican Hat Dance. I always started by letting them first listen to the music, so that they could be familiar with the melody and beats.*

Once the students were familiar with the music, I taught the basic dance steps which we practised over and over, as I believe having a firm foundation in dancing is very important. Once they mastered the basic steps, the rest was only a matter repeating the same or varied steps for the rest of the dance. My students did not mind these rigorous practices, because they loved dancing to the music.

As a dance teacher, I always paid attention to the clumsy students, as they needed the most help. Once we had mastered the basic steps, we would try the whole dance with the music. We would practise the parts where the clumsy students had some difficulty several times. In this manner, all the students learned how to dance 12 dances really well, from the easiest, the Mexican Hat Dance, to the hardest, Never on Sunday, a Greek dance. Three months passed and we were finally ready for the dance jamboree.

On the night of the performance, in a big arena, my students in their costumes took their position for the first dance. They were excited and nervous. Their parents were in the audience. The students from several other schools were also standing there. My students danced all 12 dances during some of which I joined in, dancing with them. They were superb. We giggled and laughed together during the dances. We had a wonderful time together that night. At the end of jamboree, some parents came to congratulate me with bouquets of flowers.
When I returned home that night, I could not sleep for a long time, tossing in my bed, not being able to stop the dance music that was playing in my head over and over again. Then I thought of the connection I made with my students during the dances. Then I could relax, happy and feeling rewarded by our hard work. Nothing mattered as long as I adhered to my pursuit of aesthetics and spirituality in authenticity, because “beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.” Suddenly I saw myself in my students’ happy and flushed faces in the arena, and felt the wholeness of us all.

Community Involvement in My Class

I believe we should include both parents’ and senior citizens’ expertise in our schools, to bring wholeness and depth to our curriculum and students’ learning. Bringing senior citizens’ expertise into class not only can deepen students’ learning, but also can help develop empathy and love among students, thanks to senior citizens’ wisdom and warmth. Contrary to the Asian culture in which old people are respected and revered for their wisdom and life experiences, the seniors in North American culture are often ignored and marginalized, probably due to people’s focus on youthful appearance and physical attractiveness, which can result in a disconnection between the young and old.

During my teaching years, I once invited a parent who was a high school science teacher to teach “frog” to my Grade 3 French Immersion class. The parent brought all the necessary equipment from his lab, including real frogs preserved in alcohol. My students enjoyed his lesson enormously, dissecting frogs and learning their different parts and functions, which I later taught in French. Without his expertise, I would have resorted to some frog diagrams and to a boring science lesson.

Another time, a parent who was a firefighter came to my Grade 2 French Immersion class to help us study “Community Workers.” Instead of using a picture of a firefighter, there was the real firefighter! To our delight and surprise, he came to the class in his uniform and helmet, equipped with all his tools to put out fire. My children loved the firefighter’s job description as well as the demonstration of his tools, after which he let my students try on his helmet, uniform, and boots. My students loved the experience—many boys later said they wanted to be a firefighter.

One year, I brought a senior citizen into my class. As Remembrance Day was approaching, I invited a student’s grandfather who had fought in the Second World War to talk about his
experiences fighting as a Canadian soldier. His stories fascinated my students who later developed a deeper understanding of why we had to remember and thank the soldiers who had died for others and for peace in the world. I could tell that my students loved the senior citizen’s warm presence and his stories, because they were listening so intensely to him. I was happy to see his granddaughter’s face beaming with pride and affection for her grandfather.

**Winged Swan: Coming Home as a Transformed Self**

. . . for the god wants to know himself in you. (Rilke, 1982, p. 261)

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. We are to discard old ways of thinking and acting. Put on new ways of living. (Colossians 3:8–10)

The journey of my partial autobiography has led me to these awarenesses:

- When I follow my passion or “calling,” I become happy and fulfilled, as I am connected to my authentic self, or the Sublime. In this connection, I can spread my joy and passion to others.
- We can alter our false perceptions of reality through contemplation that allows us to develop compassion, in an awareness of the interdependence and interconnection among us (Dalai Lama, 2001).
- The aspiration for beauty and sublime leads me to spirituality, imagination, and creativity, and I become connected to an Emersonian divinity (Gilman, 2003) or Buddha nature within (Dalai Lama, 2001). At this transcendental level, I can free myself from old beliefs and habits, and have connection with something higher than me: the Self or God, the source of love and compassion.

I realize how different perceptions and thoughts arising in my mind have affected personal and professional experiences in different stages of my life. For example, my father’s daily prayer, the paintings in his study, his compassionate deeds, and visits to the Buddhist temple are the origin of and influence on my pursuit of aesthetics and spirituality. My friends in France taught me to treat others with kindness and openness, and I also learned a great appreciation for the arts from them. My teaching experiences in Canada taught me to follow my authenticity with passion and to treat life with devotion, reverence, and compassion.

As “our thoughts lead to deeds” (Miller, 1994, p. 91), I now see that we first have to develop compassionate thoughts, as only they can lead to compassionate deeds. What about human suffering, racism, and social injustice in the world? I see that they arise from wrong perceptions
in the mind, ones that create a barrier between I and Thou. By altering the mind, and knowing through contemplation that “every living being has the right to, and the same desire, for happiness and not suffering” (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 65), we can create a new destiny. This awareness has led me to a transcendent level of the Winged Swan.

The Swan in my story symbolizes two themes: aesthetic beauty, because of its appearance; and spiritual purity, because of its white colour. At the end of my journey, I see the Swan emerging as a transformed (and continually transforming) and winged swan that has finally come home. Now equipped with this new Swan, which is ready to fly out with its wings widely spread, and after experiencing “God’s smile on my heart,” I am about to fly out into the unknown world of unlimited possibilities in search of new knowledge in order to create a new destiny, a new meaning-making—my future destiny. And yes, “At the end, it will always be about love” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 151).
CHAPTER 8:
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of my study was to investigate various ways of nourishing compassion in our schools, through my life story and those of three holistic educators from Buddhist, Waldorf, and Montessori schools. These schools foster compassion not only through empathy, caring, and love, but also through emotional and moral heart education components such as intuition, creativity, imagination, joy (Miller, 2006), and moral education (Noddings, 1992). To accomplish this purpose, I explored the different ways one could connect with oneself, with classroom subjects, with students in the school, and with the community at large.

I used qualitative research as my methodology, as I was interested in exploring the educational experience of holistic educators in the educators’ own terms. Qualitative research is suitable for considering life experiences, since it entails studying self as an instrument and others in the field, followed by interpretation. I employed the narrative research method, because it is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life. In addition I used two other forms of narrative—portraiture and arts-based enquiry—to add artistic components.

In my narrative, there were four participants, including myself. I, Young-Yie, have taught in elementary public schools for 29 years in Ontario as a Core French, vocal music, and French Immersion teacher on a full-time (25 years) and part-time basis (4 years). The second participant, Frances, taught for 6 years at a Waldorf school in the United States, after which she moved to Canada and taught Special Education in an Ontario elementary public school. The third participant, Anya, taught in a Montessori school in Ontario for more than 20 years and is now supply-teaching at that same school. The fourth participant, Jungjin, is a Buddhist professor. He possesses a PhD in Early-Childhood Education and has been teaching at a Buddhist University in South Korea for more than 12 years. He is the department head of Early-Childhood Education.

Data were collected through self-enquiry and Other-enquiry, using semistructured interviews, observations, and documents. For data analysis (that is, the process of meaning-making and answering the research questions), I went through consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what the researcher and others saw and read (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175–176).
In this chapter, I discuss research findings from my participants’ partial biographies presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 and from my partial autobiography presented in Chapter 7. The findings are discussed in accordance with the sequence of research questions.

My research questions were:

1. What is the nature of compassion?
2. How can we develop compassion within ourselves?
3. How do we foster compassion in schools?

I first describe the findings relevant to each question. Then I analyze the findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 in order to see whether the findings were consistent or inconsistent with the literature.

**Emergent Themes on the Nature of Compassion**

The holistic educators’ partial life stories demonstrated the following interrelated emergent themes in relation to the nature of compassion:

- Spirituality—Connection to the Self
- Empathy and caring—Connection to others’ suffering and helping others

**Spirituality—Connection to the Self**

The data reveal that spirituality denotes a connection to the Self. All participants learned the nature of compassion through people who led a spiritual life. They believed in God or Buddha, and they practised altruism.

Jungjin’s Buddhist grandmother’s spirituality showed in her daily prayers to Buddha:

> My great-grandmother created a spiritual atmosphere in the household with her soothing, melodious, daily recitation of prayers from Chunsookyung, a Buddhist book of prayers of love and compassion that are intended to be helpful in relieving people’s suffering. She would recite these hour-long prayers every day. She would pray with devotion and reverence, kneeling in front of an altar, alone in the back of the house. Watching her, I remember being deeply moved.

Frances’s Christian father practised spirituality through his prayers to God every night with his daughter and then in his own room:

> In my earliest memories, I remember vividly my father who knelt with me every night in my bedroom to pray together before he retired to do his own prayers in his bedroom. His prayers were always inclusive, as he prayed not only for his family, but also for various
family members such as an uncle who lived quite a distance away or any family members who were suffering, such as an aunt who was going through a hardship in life, neither of whom I had ever met. My father also included the poor in his prayers.

Anya’s aunt in Germany demonstrated spirituality through her altruism:

But she treated us as well as her family members and the community with an open, giving, and compassionate attitude. She gave unconditionally whatever she had to others, by which action I was deeply touched and influenced. Even though I was small at that time, I could watch how my aunt treated others with kindness and compassion in her social interactions. (Interview transcription, p. 51)

Young-Yie’s father said devotional prayers every night before retiring to bed:

I see my father praying in his study . . .

My father’s face is lit by candlelight. The room is dark and I can see only half of his face and the painting above his head. I see his lips moving; the words are incomprehensible. On the altar there is a bowl of water and a metal ashtray in which incense is burning. I could always tell if he was in his study by the smell of incense coming through the door.

The participants’ narratives depicted compassionate people who practised spirituality that demonstrated a connection to God, Buddha, or the Self, all three of which have been seen as the source of love and compassion by various thinkers. The connection to the Self, God, or Buddha shown in the spiritual practices of Jungjin’s grandmother, Frances’s father, Anya’s aunt, and Young-Yie’s father illustrates Miller’s (2000) view that humans can be connected to the Self through spirituality and Assagioli’s (1965, as cited in Miller, 2007) view that a transpersonal or higher self connects the psyche and the universal. According to Miller (2000), “Soul connects our ego and spirit. While ego is our separate sense of self, spirit is the divine essence within. Through spirit, we experience unity with the divine” (pp. 24–26); “the soul seeks love” (p. 26), and “gives meaning and direction to our lives” (p. 9). Assagioli’s (1965) oval diagram of the psyche locates the transpersonal or higher self in the top region among three interrelated regions of lower unconscious, middle unconscious, and higher unconscious. He said that we receive inspirations and urges to humanitarian and heroic action from this transpersonal or higher self, which is also the source of higher feelings such as altruistic love, and states of contemplation and illumination (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 17–18).

Martin Buber (1965) developed a philosophy centred on the encounter between the person (the I) and God (the Thou). He said God-as-Thou had no boundaries, and included everything (Rogers, as discussed in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 41–42). Buber’s I-Thou relationship emphasizes a direct, mystical, spontaneous, and joyful relationship of humans with God, a view
that is echoed in Miller’s (2000) view that humans can be connected to the Self through spirituality and Assagioli’s (1965, as cited in Miller, 2007) view that a transpersonal or higher self connects the psyche and the universal.

**Empathy and Caring—Connection to Others’ Suffering**

Participants learned about the nature of compassion from family members who demonstrated empathy and caring for other people’s suffering.

Jungjin’s grandfather showed empathy and caring towards the poor and the unfortunate:

*When I was a child, I remember seeing many homeless and poor people in our neighbourhood and village who would come to ask for food at my house, especially the day after the chesa [a rite of food-offering to ancestors]. To prepare for chesa, the women in our house had prepared much food and the homeless and the poor knew there would be enough leftover food for them the following day. When they showed up at our house, my grandparents would treat them as important guests, offering all kinds of food at the special table especially set up for them in our courtyard.*

Frances described her father’s empathy and caring:

*What I admired most about my father was how he showed his kindness, respect, honour, and responsibility through his compassionate deeds to all humanity, especially to the homeless, the unfortunate, and the poor. My father did not believe in religious dogmas or belonging to any specific religion. He did not believe in following blindly the clergymen’s interpretations of the Bible, but took ownership of this himself, by being devoted to his reading of the Bible through reflection, personal interpretation, and notes. He was a spiritual, gentle, quiet, generous, and compassionate man who always did what he could for others, and believed in helping and taking care of less fortunate people. My father said it was our responsibility to help others. This means we should put ourselves in others’ shoes and understand we have to contribute to help them. For example, when I moved to Ireland at the age of 8, I remember seeing many homeless and poor people in Limerick who were shunned by others due to their bad smell and torn clothes. But my father showed compassion for them and was financially very generous to them. He taught me to be in poor people’s shoes to see their perspective. His life was not about religion, but about how he lived. He took ownership of truth in life.*

Anya portrayed her altruistic aunt who showed empathy and caring to refugees in northern Germany who were hungry and poor during World War II:

*I remember once a young refugee girl came into the store and asked if she could have a pair of shoes of any kind. My aunt went and got her own pair of old hiking boots, which she cleaned, brushed, and gave to her. The girl could not pay for the shoes. All she had was a package of flowers. She said, “Would you take this for payment?” But my aunt declined her offer. I saw the girl going out of the store with a beaming face to meet with her weary-looking, elderly parents who were waiting outside. I watched her parents hugging their daughter outside and the girl’s face radiating with such happiness because now she had shoes.*
At other times, many hungry refugees would come in my aunt’s store and ask for food. I remember one soldier who came in to ask if he could have some food. My aunt went to her kitchen and brought out a large plate of pea soup for him. The soldier said, “Thank you very much! This is my birthday feast, because today is my birthday.”

Young-Yie described her father’s empathy and caring:

What I admired most about my father was his compassion and good deeds. I remember him bringing home poor people, street people. He gave them food and clothing, and I also remember sometimes seeing him giving them rice. He said we had to be compassionate with poor people, just as the Buddha had been. He was kind to those who were unfortunate and had problems, all of whom he helped with time and money. Listening to the conversations between my father and these people, I knew he was helping them.

The research participants also demonstrated empathy in their own lives. Jungjin remembered a girl who suffered from epilepsy. People’s criticism could trigger an outbreak of her illness. For example, if people stared at her, she might faint and fall on the ground in convulsions, foaming at the mouth. This was a frightening sight for everybody around her. Watching her suffer so much, Jungjin felt a deep empathy for her. He could not understand why such a good, kind-hearted person like her had to go through so much pain.

Frances felt a deep empathy towards the home invader who had hurt her physically:

Frances believed that people, especially labelled people such as convicts, can change, if we forgive and give them a chance to change. While she was teaching at the Waldorf in Atlanta, she experienced a violent home invasion. A man forced his way into her house, stole her money, and beat her up; she developed serious shoulder problems as a result. After the incident, curiously enough she could not feel anger at this person, even though she felt fear. Instead, Frances found herself being empathetic and compassionate towards him. Noticing he was limping badly, she thought he had probably had been shown very little compassion in his childhood, and perhaps he had not experienced a father’s presence.

In Grade 11 or 12, in Germany, Anya felt empathy towards a seriously ill classmate during her high school years. A new boy came into her class one day. He had come to town on his own, with no family. He lived in a boarding house. He tried to fit in at school, but Anya saw that he was always by himself, and was excluded by others. At one point, he became very ill with pneumonia and there was no one to take care of him. In spite of this serious illness, he came to school anyway. In order to keep warm, he carried a hot water bottle under his jacket. Seeing him living all by himself and suffering all alone with nobody to look after him, Anya felt sorry and compassionate for him.
Young-Yie described how she felt a deep empathy towards a homeless person who was living on a street near her home when she was a young child:

I was 9 or 10, and living with my parents in South Korea. There was a homeless person living on a street near our house. I remember it was wintertime and the weather was bitterly cold. On my way to and from school, I would spot him crouched on a piece of newspaper in thin, ragged clothes. As his head was always down, I could not see his face, but saw that he had only one leg and his hair was long and uncombed. In front of him lay an empty can in which passers-by could drop some money. Every time I walked by him, I could not help but feel a deep empathy for him, imagining how hungry he would be all day long without food and how cold he would be in his thin and torn clothes. . . . One day, I mustered the courage to invite him to our house, where our nanny fed him. While finishing his food on the plate, he never once looked at me or anybody else (maybe he felt awkward), but I remember having a feeling of relief, knowing that he would not be hungry that day.

Compassion is “a mind that is motivated by cherishing other living beings and wishes to release them from suffering” (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2000, p. 110). The above stories demonstrate that empathy and caring are precursors to compassion.

Empathy and compassion are intimately connected (Dalai Lama, 1999b; Miller, 2006). Empathy means “putting yourself in the shoes of another person to feel with that person, to gain an awareness and understanding of what that person must be feeling, and to identify your own feelings accurately and respond appropriately” (Aronson, 2001, p. 112). The Dalai Lama (1999b) said that compassion (nying je) is understood mainly in terms of empathy—our ability to enter into and, to some extent, share others’ suffering (p. 123). Simply put, it denotes a feeling of connection with others (Dalai Lama, 1999b, p. 74). Through this sense of interconnection, Miller (2006) said, we can realize that other beings also want relief from suffering (p. 60).

According to Nussbaum (1997), compassion involves two things: empathy and the recognition of one’s own vulnerability (pp. 90–91).

In empathy, we recognize that like us, other people have suffered some significant pain or misfortune for which they are not, or not fully, to blame. Using compassion, we estimate the significance of the misfortune as accurately as we can, through empathetically imagining what it is like to be in that person’s place, and also standing back and asking whether the person’s own judgment has taken the full measure of what has happened. Next, compassion involves a sense of one’s own vulnerability to misfortune. It promotes an accurate awareness of our common vulnerability. Nussbaum (1997) said:
To respond with compassion, I must be willing to entertain the thought that this suffering person might be me. And this I will be unlikely to do if I am convinced that I am above the ordinary lot and no ill can befall me. (p. 91)

Empathy is also closely linked to caring (Miller, 2006). Martin Heidegger’s (as cited in Noddings, 2005) perspective on human relationships was that we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of life. Heidegger proposed a range of meanings for care, of which Noddings (2005) chose as primary a caring relation, denoting a connection or encounter between two human beings of carer and cared-for (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). In well-functioning teacher-learner relationships, teachers must create caring relations in which they are the carers (Noddings, 2005, p. 18).

When the carer cares, she receives the Other into herself and feels with the Other. In order for this relation to be “caring,” both parties need to contribute in different ways and if they do not, completion of the caring is blocked. For example, no matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the students’ claim “they don’t care” has some validity. It suggests that something is wrong. The caring relation is completed only when the students receive the teachers’ efforts at caring (Noddings, 2005, pp. 15–16).

According to Im (2010), we can develop empathy through nondual ways of knowing—such as contemplation—that allow us to come to be aware of what other people and other beings are experiencing: “In this state of mind, we inevitably share other people’s or other beings’ status of emotion as if they were our own” (p. 13). She further stated that, according to many scholars (Azar, 1997; Feuerverger, 2007; Hart, 2004; Hoffman, 1990), “empathy is one of the fundamental elements for developing humans’ moral attitudes towards others and developing characteristics such as authentic caring and compassion” (Im, 2010, p. 13).

**Emergent Themes on How We Can Develop Compassion Within Ourselves**

Central themes that were derived from the data are:

- Practice of contemplation
- Awareness of interconnection

All four research participants practised a form of contemplation which allowed them to come to be aware of the interconnection between the I and the Other. This sense of interconnection
helped them develop compassion. As the themes of practice of contemplation and awareness of the interconnection are interrelated, I analyze them accordingly.

**Contemplation and Awareness of Interconnection**

Jungjin practised Zen meditation. He said his spirituality was based on his belief in the Buddha nature within, and he said also that his spirituality represented a realm uniting the elements of emotion, reason, and the soul. Jungjin believed all sentient beings, even plants and trees, had a spirit. In his contemplations he would focus on connecting to the Buddha nature within.

Here is a description of how Jungjin steadied his mind through Zen meditation:

> I enjoy practising Zen meditation by candlelight very early in the morning. I find it peaceful to meditate in silence, watching the candle’s flame. Lighting a candle for meditation has been practised for centuries at the Buddhist temples in Korea, probably because just by watching the flames, you can feel peaceful and serene.

Jungjin said, during the practice, when thoughts arose, he would just watch them rather than fight them; and when the thoughts would dissipate, he would just let them go. He explained that the aim of Zen meditation was to stabilize the mind and discover the Buddha nature within, so that the practitioner could become compassionate and enlightened.

The following narrative illustrates how Jungjin became aware of the connection between himself and others in his Zen meditation practice:

> When I have difficulty controlling my mind, due to anger, disappointment, or jealousy, I practise Zen meditation, from which I become aware that my negative thoughts do not originate from other people, but from within myself. As it was me who was involved in creating the problem, I am also a part of the problem which is suppressed in my shadow. In order to bring peace to my mind, I try to shine the sunlight of compassion and wisdom on my shadow, instead of blaming others for my negative thoughts. I believe that through the practice of meditation, we can free ourselves from the shadow, by realizing that our thoughts are but illusory creations of our own mind. Through meditation, I try to see my true self, the Buddha nature within me.

Jungjin explained how he realized the interconnection between himself and others:

> I exist because of the Other’s existence; the I cannot exist alone. We are all interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent. In order to exist in this world, we need one another. When we think about the food we eat, we find that it is connected to the sun, rain, air, and the earth; the farmer, delivery man, retailer, and so on. If there is no sun, the crops cannot grow. If there is no consumer, the farmers cannot survive. Thus, we are all interconnected. When we realize this universal law, we can understand that the I cannot exist separately, but only in relation to others. In this understanding, we can get rid of
our selfish thoughts of the I alone and can remind ourselves to be compassionate towards others.

Through mindfulness and reflection, Frances felt connection with the Self (her yearning for generosity and deep caring) and others (her students and her surroundings):

My meditation can be sitting quietly in my house or classroom, contemplating a flower, walking in the forest, or observing changes in nature such as changes in the sky. Meditation means understanding the connection within me and around myself. I practise mindfulness when I do housework such as ironing or cleaning, or when I do watercolour painting. At school, several times a day, I recall the virtues of generosity and listening to others. Even though I do not belong to any religion or any group, I yearn to be generous. Meditation also means my reflections on how I have been with each of my students at the end of each day. Before going to sleep at night, I recall each of my seven students who have special needs. I reflect on how I have been that day in front of “my” children who might be going through much more anxiety and conflicts than other children, how I treated each of them, and why that child was that way.

Anya’s spirituality is based on two belief systems, Christianity and Judaism:

Even though I belong to a reformed Jewish temple, I also joined the local Unitarian church, a very universal, spiritual church that does not believe in certain scriptures in the Bible. The Unitarian church has such a strong moral spiritual foundation. So I am juggling my spirituality between the two belief systems in which I can only come up with a balance. I studied other religions and find that there is a lot that we have in common. I am just interested in their commonalities out of which I can feel the connection with the universe.

To achieve a balance between the two belief systems, Anya would attend synagogue on Saturdays and the Unitarian church on Sundays. She found that she wanted to replace the term God in Judaism and Christianity with the term Life. This has contributed to her strong sense of social responsibility:

For “God is one,” I say “life is one.” For “God is judgemental,” I say “Life contains good and evil that we cannot deny.” For “We as humans must serve God,” I say “As humans we must serve life.” This life force, life principle, this life energy is something that I can see, hear, touch, and think about all the time, whereas the concept of God is untouchable and unrecognizable. Other concepts of God that I picked up were “God is eternal, and God is holy,” but for me, “Life along with life cycle and life force is eternal, and life is holy.” So these are the principles that I can subscribe to, as they encompass everything for me, even if I still occasionally fall back to my childhood where the concept of God was interpreted through the prayers that my mother had taught me, but it also can apply to my principles of life with which I am very comfortable, from which I draw a lot of comfort, and which also renewed my concept of social responsibility.

Young-Yie came to study spirituality at OISE/UT. From these studies, she came to view her concept of God as the Self that resides within her. In essence, for her this God or Self represented infinite love, compassion, goodness, and beauty. God or Self loves all beings unconditionally
regardless of their religion, colour, or race and has a profound compassion for the suffering of innumerable people around the world. For her, the true meaning of God or Self lies in how she conducts her everyday life in her relationships with self, the Self, and others.

For example, Young-Yie felt a connection to self, the Self, and others while doing yoga, which she regarded as a form of spiritual practice. Yoga (Sanskrit for union—of body, mind, and spirit) is a practice of mindfulness, compassion, grace, and love through all actions. The goal of yoga is to achieve union, not only with body and mind, but also with the Absolute, also known as Atman, or the true Self. To achieve this union through the practice of yoga is to realize our oneness with something higher than ourselves. When we feel connected to this Self, we come to develop love and compassion (Turlington, 2002). Young-Yie cultivated compassion in her yoga class by focusing on forgiveness and sending loving wishes to all sentient beings in an awareness of the connection between her and others.

One can develop compassion through mental training such as meditation (Dalai Lama, 2001) and the practice of contemplation is the initial step to the development of compassion (Miller, 1994). The above stories illustrate how the participants’ contemplative practices have contributed to the development of compassion, through an awareness of the connection between themselves and others.

According to Huebner (1999),

> . . . the question that educators need to ask is not how people learn and develop, but what gets in the way of the great journey—the journey of the self or soul. Education is a way of attending to and caring for that journey. . . . The content of education is, first of all, “other human beings.” Others see the world differently, talk differently, and act differently. Therefore, they are possibilities for me. (pp. 405–408)

Further, Huebner (1999) asserted that teaching is a vocation (from God) and is a work of love, truth, and justice (pp. 411–412). He said that to teach moral and spiritual values, teachers should maintain some form of spiritual discipline (Huebner, 1999, p. 414). Palmer (2007) has agreed, saying that we teach who we are (p. 1) and that, in order to teach with presence, teachers have to attend to their inner voice, the true self within, through such meditative methods as solitude, silence, reading, walking in the woods, or keeping a journal (p. 33).

Compassion is rooted in seeing that we are all deeply interconnected; this sense of interconnection is fundamental to compassion (Miller, 2006, p. 60). When we come to realize the connection between reality and the mysterious unity of the universe, and between our inner self...
(or soul) and that mysterious unity, a natural compassion for all beings can arise within us (Miller, 2006, p. 60). This notion of interconnection is closely related to the Dalai Lama’s (1996) concept of interdependence (p. 44), which roughly translates as everything depending on everything else:

Our interest is the interest of others, our future is the future of others. And when I say others, I am not thinking just of human beings, who are evidently the same as us. I am thinking of all other forms of life, on this earth and outside of this earth. (pp. 44–45)

**Ways of Fostering Compassion Through Contemplation at the Buddhist School**

Jungjin learned the nature of compassion from his grandparents who were spiritual, empathic, and caring. In his personal life, he practised meditation, which helped him develop compassion and an awareness of the connection between him and others. Later, as a Buddhist professor who cares deeply about his students, he has suggested the following guidelines for fostering compassion in schools:

- Teach meditation and service learning, for connection to self, the Self, and other
- Teach the concept of interconnectedness
- Focus on nurturing student’s authenticity (i.e., the innate Buddha nature)
- Incorporate the arts and storytelling into the classroom meditation practice

**Meditation and Service Learning**

Jungjin said that, in Buddhist teachings, there are six interrelated ways of fostering compassion: *bosi, gigai, inyok, gihai, sunjung,* and *jeongjin.*

*Bosi* means doing good deeds to others, *gigai* means following the right rules in life, *inyok* means having patience in life, *gihai* and *sunjung* mean practising meditation, and *jeongjin* means working hard towards accomplishing the right goal of compassion. Out of these teachings, Jungjin suggested meditation practice (*gihai* and *sunjung*) and service learning (*bosi*) as ways of fostering compassion in schools.

He said that the first step in nourishing compassion is to quiet the mind, stopping the thoughts through meditation. The next step was to be aware of the connection between the I and the Other. Jungjin’s contemplative practice and his awareness of interconnection were developed through contemplation (discussed above). Jungjin said that the I cannot exist alone; it exists because of
the Other’s existence. We are all interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent. In order to exist in this world, we need one another and we exist only in relation to others. With this understanding, we can get rid of selfish, I-alone thoughts and can remind ourselves to be compassionate towards others.

The Dalai Lama (1997) also said we can develop compassion through practising deep meditation and virtuous actions (p. 11). He stated that compassion arises when we witness suffering in others. We all want happiness and we all have the right to overcome suffering, which is a consequence or an effect of ignorance. He said that suffering was rooted in afflicitive and negative emotions and thoughts, and it can be removed by generating the insight of interconnectedness and interdependence, through which we can perceive the nature of reality (Dalai Lama, 2001, p. 91). Miller (1994) also suggested that contemplative practices such as meditation and mindfulness can help us realize the nonduality among us that can help us develop compassion.

Second, Jungjin suggested service learning to foster compassion in schools. The preschool teacher-candidates at his Buddhist University are sent not only for practice-teaching in kindergarten classes throughout the year, but are also encouraged to do volunteer work at the orphanages run by Buddhist monks. They come back from their practice-teaching and volunteer work expressing much joy at being able to help others.

Miller (2006) also recommended service learning (i.e., learning how to serve others) as a way of nurturing love and developing compassion (pp. 61, 70). Good examples of service learning include John Donnelly’s (2002) engaged service with at-risk adolescents, with the goal of helping them develop compassion; Lourdes Arguelles’s (2002) community-based work with students in communities of marginalized people; and Jean Vanier’s (Renzetti, 2008) work with mentally handicapped people.

**Teach the Concept of Interconnectedness**

To foster compassion in schools Jungjin felt we should teach the concept of yeonkibub, or interconnectedness. He teaches this concept in one of his courses, which is based on Buddhist psychology. The concept is one of the most important teachings in Buddhist psychology, since it explains how our mind works and how karma—the law of cause and effect— affects our lives. The main idea of yeonkibub is that humans and all other sentient beings are interrelated and
interconnected, and that there is always a cause and effect to every phenomenon. Understanding this interconnectedness, we come to realize that we have to live in harmony with others, helping one another and serving those in need. On this basis, we come to understand that I exist because of the Other and I should therefore regard the Other as a part of myself. By getting rid of the boundary between I and the Other, we can develop compassion, especially for those who are suffering, because then we can feel the suffering of others as if it were our own. Through comprehending this nonduality, we can be caring and compassionate towards the environment and all sentient beings.

Jungjin’s concept of interconnectedness is consistent with Miller’s (2006, p. 60). It is also closely related to the Dalai Lama’s (1996) concept of interdependence (p. 44). Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and poet, has employed the term *interbeing* (p. 54) to explain the concept of interconnection in which I and Other merge as one. For example, while reading this document, one might imagine a cloud floating in the sky. One might think that there is no connection between the paper of the document and the cloud. However, one must realize that without a cloud, there would be no rain; without rain, trees could not grow; and without trees, we could not make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. So the cloud and the paper are *inter-are*: as we see the paper in the cloud, and the cloud in the paper. In this awareness of nonduality or no-boundary, we can develop compassion.

**Focus on Nurturing Students’ Authenticity (the Innate Buddha Nature)**

Jungjin’s course curricula derive from his deep study of Buddhism. To foster compassion, he said we should focus on nourishing students’ authenticity in class, drawing on principles of the innate Buddha nature (*bulsung*) and the goodness within every person (*sungsunsul*). In all his courses, Jungjin focuses on teaching that we all are born with *bulsung*, “the Buddha nature within,” which Jungjin compares to Jung’s “individuation,” that is, becoming one’s own self. The role of the educator in Buddhist kindergartens is to help bring out each child’s inherent Buddha nature, by providing the right conditioning and the right social environment. Through teaching contemplation, Jungjin believed we could help children go into their inner world, so they could develop independence and goodness, find their own path, and flourish in their self-actualization. His aim was to bring transformative education into class rather than transmission education, which is the current Korean educational norm.
Another Buddhist belief to which Jungjin adhered is sungsunsul, the principle that we are born with goodness. Sometimes, due to the social environment and conditioning they grow up in, people can act violently and selfishly, but it is important to realize that even the people we label as bad have goodness within them; it is only hidden for now.

Focusing on nurturing student’s authenticity also means pouring much caring and love into class, making sure to meet the needs of students, and awaken their interests and talents. He believed happy and kind teacher-candidates could bring happiness and kindness to their future kindergarten classes. In order to nourish and elicit students’ authentic Buddha nature, Jungjin believed that we educators have to observe the students very carefully and give them sustained caring. Our job is to help them understand their authenticity, so that they can be independent learners who have self-discipline, self-esteem, and self-respect. In the following narrative, Jungjin described how, by believing in a student’s innate Buddha nature and goodness, he nurtured the authentic self in the student, who was disruptive and was getting poor marks:

I believed the transformation in him was possible for the following reasons: First I took time to observe him carefully in class in order to find out the reason for his misbehaviour, but at the same time I let him know that I really cared about him. During our meetings later on in my office, I found out he was lacking step-by-step study skills and did not know why he was pursuing his studies in early-childhood education, even though he vaguely wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. As a result, when I tried to meet his needs through guidance and dialogue, the student became very interested in his studies and started to work very hard in class and on all his assignments. I always knew the student had a kind heart and would be a good student, if I helped him solve his problems. (Interview transcription, pp. 110–111, 117–118)

At the time of writing, the student was currently in his last year and had become a leader in his class, helping his classmates with their assignments. With his good grades, excellent leadership, and participation in charity work, he obtained a scholarship from the university and has continued to be a good role model for other students.

Jungjin’s belief in the innate Buddha nature is reflected in Montessori’s (1972) approach to education. Her belief was based on the child’s divinity within: “We must not just see the child, but God in him” (Montessori, as cited in Miller, 2002, p. 227). Montessori said that children had a hidden power in them: “There is thus a secret in the soul of the child, impossible to penetrate unless he himself reveals. Therefore only the child can bring us revelation of the natural pattern of man” (Montessori, 1972, p. 18). Accordingly, she saw in the child “a hidden man, a hidden child, a buried living being, who must be liberated. Liberation in this sense means knowledge, or
a discovery of the unknown” (Montessori, 1936, p. 126). According to Montessori (1936), “the child is a spiritual embryo that develops spontaneously, and if we follow him from the beginning, he can reveal many things to us” (p. 101).

Steiner (1924/1971) also saw children as sacred beings. In his view, children had dwelt as soul and spirit in a pre-earthly world, from which they descended into the physical world. In every child, he saw the unfolding of cosmic, divinely spiritual laws. He held that God’s highest and most significant creation in the world was the child. Thus, an educator’s job was to figure out ways to foster what God had sent down into the earthly world (Steiner, 1924/1971, pp. 19–20).

Rollo May (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989) also believed in the many potentialities of human beings. His psychotherapeutic aim was to help individuals realize their unique potentiality. May said that the relationship between therapist and patient, similar to Buber’s I-Thou relationship, was a meeting of two human beings, with the therapist fully present to his client. The aim of the meeting was to be together in a communication that could break the isolation of the patient. Both therapist and client would be becoming—trying to realize their potentialities (May, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 233–240).

**Incorporate the Arts And Storytelling Into Meditation (Meditation at the Buddhist Kindergarten)**

The principal of the kindergarten affiliated with Jungjin’s Buddhist University also teaches at the Buddhist University. She told me that contemplative practices such as yoga and meditation form a large part of the kindergarten curriculum. She said these practices fostered a calm, steady, and compassionate mind and nurtured imagination and creativity among the children.

Unlike all yoga classes I had attended or seen, the Israeli yoga teacher at the Buddhist kindergarten introduced his yoga practice through storytelling. He met the children in an imagined forest. In this make-believe forest, he told stories in English and Korean that required different yoga poses and breathing. I particularly noticed the children’s happy faces and their spontaneous engagement in the yoga practice.

This is how the yoga teacher proceeded:

> As we are thirsty from walking in the forest, let’s pull a water bucket up from the well (gesture for bringing up a bucket of water from the well, pulling the imagined bucket with both arms). Now as we are hungry, let’s make bread (gesture for kneading the
dough). When we are cold in the forest, we cut wood (gesture to cut the wood) to make fire. When we are hot, we swim (gesture of swimming) in clean water. When our body is tired, we smile at the mountain (mountain pose: raise the arms up in the air to touch the hands with a smile).

Meditation was taught by the homeroom teacher every morning. Meditative activities were seen as helping children connect to their innate Buddha nature and nurturing their imagination, creativity, and compassion. Since I arrived at the school in the afternoon, I could only watch these activities in the video the principal played for me. In it, I watched four categories of activities: becoming friends with meditation, becoming one with one’s mind, expressing one’s feelings of happiness in nature, and inviting healthy energy into the body through breathing. Meditative activities that helped children “become friends with meditation” included making pottery, so as to have connection with the soil; playing with water; and walking in the forest to have connection with nature. What impressed me, watching the video, was how the children were deeply, calmly, and contentedly engaged in their activities.

The inclusion of the arts and storytelling in the curriculum to foster compassion has been mentioned by Miller (2007). This refers to the transformation position that belongs to inclusion, one of three basic principles of holistic education. Inclusion means linking together various educational orientations. The transformation orientation focuses on the wholeness of the child; curriculum and child are seen as connected, as we saw, similarly, in the meditative activities at the Buddhist kindergarten. The aim of transformation is the development of the whole person (body, mind, and spirit-heart; Miller, 2007) and transformative teaching nurtures compassion, because students see themselves as connected to others (Miller, 2010, p. 30).

**Ways of Fostering Compassion Through Moral Education at the Waldorf School**

Frances was deeply influenced by her compassionate father who had prayed every night with her and on his own. In her personal life now, she practised mindfulness and reflection, which helped her develop compassion. In the stories about her teaching experiences at the Waldorf School, the following main points emerged:

- Spiritual practices (meditation, praying to God)
- A focus on children’s souls, feelings, and imagination, in a whole-child education of hand, heart, and brain
- Storytelling through a pictorial approach that appeals to children’s hearts
- Frances’s presence in class
Spiritual Practices in Class

Frances pointed out that moral education at Waldorf schools was connected to spirituality. Through storytelling and the arts, awareness was heightened. To nurture the inner experience of children, educators tried to awaken the children’s feelings through mental imagery, colouring, painting, and music.

Frances told me that Steiner’s philosophy of education looks at humans as beings of body, soul, and spirit who have lived before will live again. In this particular life journey, we are here to have life lessons. She said that spiritual practice at Waldorf schools starts in the morning when children come into class. This is how it is done in her class:

When school starts, the children recite the morning verse in class. This verse is the same at Waldorf schools all over the world. The recitation is a loving gesture, containing Steiner’s words: “The sun with loving light makes bright for me each day. The soul with spirit power gives strength unto my limbs. In sunlight shining clear I do revere, O God, the strength of humankind.” These words revere nature and God; they teach loving, holding, and our connection to the world in an inward gesture. The recitation is followed by the playful movement portion of the day, morning exercises—during which the breath enlivens the soul of the children, and awakens the senses. This recitation is used until Grade 5, when it changes to an outward gesture—talking about plant life, animal life, and human life, as and how we are part of each, and more.

Spirituality that connects to God reflects Miller’s (2000) idea that spirit is the “divine essence within and through spirit, we experience unity with the divine” (pp. 24–26), and the practice of the loving gesture at Waldorf schools is similar to Miller’s (2006) loving-kindness meditation, which sends out loving wishes for wellness, happiness, and peacefulness for self and others in order to develop compassion. Tacey (2004) said that “spirituality arises from love of and intimacy with the sacred” (p. 11) and that “spiritual exercises such as prayer, meditation, and contemplation are needed to pry us away from ordinary desires and connect us with a deeper will and purpose” (pp. 11, 52).

Focus on Children’s Souls, Feelings, and Imagination

Frances explained that the philosophy informing the Waldorf school’s curriculum is founded in anthroposophy, eurythmy, and form drawing, which all have soulful, spiritual elements. Anthroposophy is Steiner’s philosophy that looks at humans as beings of body, soul, and spirit who have lived before will live again. Eurythmy is a form of meditative, aesthetic movement that
can be very therapeutic. And the very first lesson children learn in Grade 1 form drawing is a profound truth: everything around them is made up of either straight or curved lines.

If anybody asked Frances why she believed in a Waldorf education, she would say that it looks at developing the whole child—the hand, the heart, and the brain. But the greatest thing a Waldorf education does, she would also say, is to reaffirm what children already know and acknowledge their connection to everything around them. Along with that awareness come compassion and a sense of responsibility for fellow human beings and other living beings, and a sense of awe in the wonders of universe.

The whole-child education curriculum of Waldorf schools is in accordance with Miller’s (2006, 2007, 2010) holistic curriculum, which focuses on the development of children’s body, mind, and spirit. This curriculum focuses on cultivating connections and relationships: connections to linear thinking and intuition, to earth, and to the Self within; relationships between the body and mind, among various subjects, and between self and community. Ron Miller (1990) has also pointed out that children do not learn simply through their minds, but through their feelings and concerns, their imagination, and their bodies in a spiritual world view which is a reverence for life, an attitude of wonder and awe in the face of the transcendent Source of our being (pp. 153–154).

**Storytelling That Connects to Children’s Hearts**

Moral education through storytelling at Waldorf schools is accomplished by appealing to children’s hearts rather than adhering to school policies, doctrines, or punishment. Frances said that the stories have to reach children’s souls, so that they can be prepared for to make sound judgements later as adults. Moral education is taught to children in the etheric body stage (i.e., between the ages of 7 and 14), because spiritual forces are at work while the etheric body is developing, according to Steiner, and the life body of the child is nurtured through movement and the development of the imagination. Steiner (1923/1988) stated that only love for humankind could form the basis of truly ethical virtue. Thus, educators needed to do everything they could to awaken feelings of love in children during the period of the etheric body. During this stage, the intelligence of school-age children awakens primarily in the life of feelings from which goodness, morality, and love arise. Feelings that arise from the heart are seen as soul forces that are related to moral education.
In Waldorf storytelling during this period, the teacher does not appeal to children’s intellect, but rather appeals to their feelings, using pictorial elements that convey the importance of connection to children’s hearts and to their imagination. A pictorial approach is used, which appeals to children’s hearts and stirs their feelings of sympathy and antipathy, for pictures work directly upon the feelings, stirring the children’s souls; the children recreate the characters in the story through very descriptive imagery in their imagination. Frances said she does not teach morality directly to children, but provides them with experiences of morality, through the children’s ability to live with the characters brought to them.

It is important to note that a Waldorf teacher tells the stories to her students without using any book. As Frances told her stories, she could see the children really living in the stories. When the children laughed heartily or felt sadness, they were being told universal truths, Frances said, which could allow them to feel sympathy or antipathy, or right or wrong. According to Frances, each year’s storytelling is based on curriculum that is meant to meet the children’s needs. She said that in moral education, the teacher considered the children’s different temperaments, such as quiet/active, sympathetic/apathetic, or patient/impatient, and how the children experience the world. When she told a story, she would emphasize elements that connected to the children’s temperaments. The children would connect to the characters in the story through very descriptive imagery, which helps create imagination within them. Suitable degrees of sadness, happiness, good, and evil in the protagonists would be evoked. In the stories, good wins over evil, and the children feel very satisfied with the ending of the story. This is why storytelling is so emphasized in a Waldorf classroom for moral education.

No discussion is held following the storytelling, so that the children are given the opportunity to bring the images into their sleep, another important consideration in Waldorf education. After staying with the story on the unconscious level for a night, the children are able to bring back many fresh ideas about it to class the next day.

Here is a description of how Frances’s storytelling teaches compassion in her Grade 2 class:

In the story, “The Name of the Tree: A Bantu Tale,” there would be compassion with the animals who are suffering. There would be a sense of different traits of different animals and to some extent, they are archetypal. Different characters are the flighty rabbit, the arrogant lion, the king who does not want to be disturbed, and the giraffe whose nose is in the air all the time, with each animal representing vices such as pride, greed, arrogance, or selfishness. These traits are all brought out in the characters of the story without describing the different traits directly. The children feel them, because it is so
much part of the story, with the personalities of the animals being brought out in the story. And as in a good story, there is some tension, some difficulty, and trials, but in the end, good triumphs. And at the beginning of the story, the tortoise had been laughed at by everyone, because he was small, short, and slow. But in the end, tortoise’s generosity and willingness to give everything he has for the sake of the good of the group has paid off, and finally he becomes of course the hero among all the animals. (Interview transcription, pp. 36–37)

The storytelling at the Waldorf is reflected in Miller’s (2007) *Transformation* position of holistic curriculum, which focuses on the wholeness of the child; the curriculum and the child are seen as connected, as we can see in Frances’s storytelling. The aim of the transformation orientation is the development of the whole person (body, mind, and spirit-heart; Miller, 2007) and the aims of transformative teaching include wisdom, compassion, and a sense of purpose in one’s life (Miller, 2010, p. 30). In the whole-person education, a student is not reduced to a set of learning competencies or thinking skills, but is seen as a whole being. A teacher working from a transformational perspective will use strategies such as creative problem solving, cooperative learning, and the arts, which encourage students to make various types of connections. These connections make learning personally and socially meaningful to students (Miller, 2007, pp. 11–12).

Connection is one of holistic curriculum’s three basic principles (Miller, 2007). It strives to move from fragmentation to connectedness and refers to the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, and the relationship to the soul (p. 13). Among these relationships, relationship to the soul is directly linked to education of the heart or compassion, as we can see in Miller’s (2007) explanation of how the soul helps us connect to the Self, a process necessary for the development of compassion:

Within self, there are two selves: the self and the Self or what Emerson calls “the big person.” In the Self, there is our soul through which we can be connected to beautiful music, children’s happy play, our work, or simply being in the moment. This Self sees deep connection to others and life, while the self, our ego, sees self as separate from everyone else. (p. 14)

In curriculum, the importance of connection to children’s feelings has been pointed out by Miller (1990); children do not learn simply through their minds, but through their feelings and concerns, through their imaginations and their bodies (pp. 153–154). Dalton and Fairchild (2004, p. x) have also stressed teaching from the heart, using intuition and spontaneity, respecting the diversity among the students, and cultivating spirituality in one’s own personal life.
Furthermore, Crowell, S., Caine, R. N., and Caine G. (1998) said that teachers could tell a story instead of reading a book to capture students’ attention: “Instead of reading it, tell it as a story. If you can, vary your tone a bit, use some gestures, and speak with expression, perhaps imitating a character or some aspect of the story. Watch your students carefully for their reactions, their attention, their responses. If your experience is what so many others have been, you will be amazed at the difference in your students’ focus” (p. 89).

**Frances’s Presence in Class**

Frances stressed the importance of the teacher’s presence in class. For her, this presence came from the teacher’s authenticity and inner work, and would be expressed in humour and playfulness. Frances experienced much joy and delight in her teaching, and her expressions conveyed “I see you as who you are, I love you, I respect you, and I want you to be happy.” She was amused and delighted to watch her students develop and to see them express themselves in class.

Miller (2000, 2006, 2007, 2010) stressed that in order to bring caring into schools, we need “an authentic and caring presence of a teacher who can nourish the student’s soul” (Miller, 2000, p. 141), because “the teacher sets the tone for the class through his or her presence” (Miller, 2010, p. 64), as Frances set the happy tone in her class. The presence the teacher displays in class is fundamental to teaching (Miller, 2006, p. 81) and the caring relation is completed only when the students receive the teachers’ efforts at caring (Noddings, 2005, pp. 15–16). Miller (2010) said the most powerful force to bring out the creative spark within each child was the loving presence of the teacher; and love should be at the heart of teaching (pp. 8–9).

Caring and presence are also stressed in existential psychotherapy. Carl Rogers (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989), who founded client-centred psychotherapy, suggested three definable conditions in the relationship with the client: the therapist’s congruence; his or her unconditional positive regard; and a sensitively accurate, empathetic understanding. For congruence, therapists must achieve a strong, accurate empathy with their clients (Rogers, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 11–13). For unconditional positive regard, therapists must communicate to their clients a deep and genuine caring for them as persons with human potentialities (Rogers, as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 13–15). For
accurate empathetic understanding, the therapist must be completely at home in the universe of the client, in a moment-to-moment sensitivity in the here and now, in the immediate present.

**Ways of Fostering Compassion**

**Via Love of the Environment at Montessori Schools**

Anya said love at Montessori schools was expressed through love of the environment, including the socialization, self-awareness, and social processes that children go through from early years to adulthood.

The approaches that can foster compassion at Montessori schools are:

- “A spiritual embryo” through normalization
- Respect for the child through individualization
- Equality among children through mixed-age groups
- Independence and discipline through self-directed learning and self-correcting

**“A Spiritual Embryo”**

The main, overall goal of Montessori education is normalization—namely, permitting the free, natural manifestations of children’s inherent physical, emotional, spiritual, moral, and intellectual urges:

*We, the educators at the Montessori school aim at achieving the “normalized” child and this goal would start right from the beginning. The idea behind “normalization” is that all children are born with natural positive instincts, but as soon as they are born, our family and our society prevent them from developing their natural instincts, an urge to learn and develop. Montessori herself believed in the inborn goodness in each child and was extremely critical of families, parents, and the society of her time that deviated the child. With the proper environment provided by the educator and the Montessori school, children would be “normal” again. (Anya, interview transcription, p. 67)*

According to Anya, Montessori (1967) believed that, during the first three years of life, a child is still caught in constant care and is thus really a “spiritual embryo.” Children are born with an inner divinity that cannot be expressed at first. When they free themselves by walking, talking, and independently moving their hands, their inborn spirituality can come out. Social interactions in the environment during the first three years after birth are the means with which this spirituality can be developed. Anya said this is probably the period during which violence in children can be germinated if there is a lack of spiritual nurturing.
Social aspects play an important role in the Montessori classroom, which is regarded as part of children’s family and community. The teacher is there as a part of the social setting. Montessori was convinced that we are born good and socially receptive. Therefore, bringing out children’s natural urges (including their social urge) matters a great deal, so that children can become socialized together. In the Montessori concept, normalization fosters children in becoming their own natural selves, or what Anya referred to as natural compassion:

\[ I \text{ believe the natural urges are natural compassion for social and constructive behaviour in all of us, which we need to bring to fruition. I am convinced this is true, because as an optimist and pacifist, the design of the universe is good, where there is the sense of compassion. (Interview transcription, p. 68) } \]

The spiritual embryo of Montessori education is related to the innate Buddha nature of Buddhism and to Steiner’s (1920/1971) view of children as sacred beings. Steiner held that God’s highest and most significant creation in the world was the child. The Dalai Lama (1997) said that the basic state of our minds is completely pure. This basic purity of the mind is called the Buddha nature. Buddhism states that we all have this pure mind, this Buddha nature within, no matter who or what we are. The Buddha nature, said to be inherent in all sentient beings, is seen as the source of compassion (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 10).

The social aspects of a Montessori education, which stress connections to teacher and community, are consistent with Miller’s (2006) holistic education curriculum that focuses on cultivating connections and relationships, especially connections to the Self within and to relationships between self and community. As mentioned previously, Miller’s (2006, 2007, 2010) aim of holistic education is to educate the whole child of body, mind, and spirit in interconnectedness and relationships within and outside of the self.

**Respect for the Child Through Individualization**

For individualization, the Montessori teacher relates to one child at a time, thus showing respect for the child, while the rest of the class worked on their own projects. This is Anya’s description of individualization:

\[ \text{Individualization helps us educators become one with the learning child in a democratic way. This strategy is feared in other schools, because the teacher might lose the control of class, when she works with only one child. But what is very important in individualization is to show respect for children, no matter how children present themselves and how deviated children may be. This respect means a policy of no physical touch. As adults, we are not supposed to overwhelm children by coming too close or dominating them in any way. Instead of touching children, we shake hands to greet and } \]
we shake hands to say goodbye and we do this individually with each child and with respect. (Interview transcription, p. 69)

Anya said respect for the child was crucial. A great respect for the Other has been emphasized by many philosophers. Buber, for example, stated that a great sin of modern man was to treat fellow-beings as It, not as Thou (Assagioli, 1965, p. 205). For Buber, recognizing and accepting every human being as a Thou represented a basic, right relationship to our fellow humans and our duty to them (Assagioli, 1965, p. 275). Dalton and Fairchild (2004) stressed respect for the child as one of the lessons they use to bring compassion into the class. Dermond (2007) also included respect for the child as one of her 10 approaches for compassion education.

Equality

For Anya, equality in class could foster compassion in schools. In a class of 18 children aged 3 to 5, she would ideally have six children from each age group. In these mixed-age groups, there would be no competition, no reward, no punishment, no prize, and no singling out who came first, because in individualized learning each child would freely choose an activity and progress at his or her own pace. Montessori maintained that the teacher must stay in the background, humble herself, and take her cues from the children, who would show what is necessary. The teacher must never dictate anything. This is how equality was practised in Anya’s class, using Montessori’s cosmic curriculum:

The subjects that I taught are the same for all children, which Montessori called the cosmic curriculum. Montessori officially talked about starting cosmic curriculum at the age of 6, but the real preparation for this curriculum is happening in kindergarten for children aged from 3 to 6. I want to emphasize that at a Montessori school, children are introduced at their own pace and according to their own interest into any of academic subjects, such as language, mathematics, sciences, arts, music, and second languages.

Equality among all human beings has been stressed by the Dalai Lama (2001) who said, to cultivate compassion, we must first practise the meditation of equalization and equanimity, detaching ourselves from those people who are very close to us. Then, we must remove negative feelings towards our enemies and all sentient beings should be looked on as equal. Through this approach, he said, we can gradually develop genuine compassion for all sentient beings (p. 64).
Independence and Discipline Through Self-Directed Learning and Self-Correcting

Anya believed teaching independence and discipline through self-directed learning and self-correcting could nourish compassion, because when children worked independently, deeply involved in their work, there would be no disruptive behaviour in class:

*When my children between the ages of 3 and 6 in my kindergarten class arrive in the morning, my classroom is in order and everything has been prepared by me to make sure that everything is available to children. Self-directed learning starts from the very beginning of the day.*

*When the children arrive in the morning, they are greeted individually with my personal handshake after which they go to their cubby holes to change shoes and put away their knapsack independently. If help is needed, I comply. Each child goes immediately to his classroom to select a piece of work that has been shown to me the day before, to repeat it independently, as he chooses.*

*This individual work period during which there should not be any interruption goes on with me working with students individually. The period lasts as long as possible, for 2 or 3 hours. When everybody is involved in a piece of work, alone or with a friend in silence, there are many opportunities for me to work with children individually or together. This is the only way for children at the Montessori to develop the concentration, the focus, and the endurance on a completely individualized task, so that they complete it to the end.*

*All materials in my class are self-correcting along math blocks and cylinders that fit in properly when the work is done correctly. This way, I do not have to tell children this is right or this is wrong. There are no interruptions if possible for as long as 2 or 3 hours.* (Interview transcription, pp. 86–87)

The importance of social aspects in child development has been mentioned by Dewey (1926). He said that the social environment exercises an educative or formative influence unconsciously and apart from any set purpose, for which he specified a few directions: First, the social environment affects the habits of language. Babies acquire their mother tongue through their social environment. Secondly, it affects manners. Good manners come from good breeding and breeding is acquired by habitual action in response to habitual stimuli. And manners are but minor morals. Moreover, in major morals, conscious instruction is likely to be efficacious. Thirdly, the social environment affects good taste and aesthetic appreciation (p. 21). Dewey also said that the development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment (Dewey, 1926, p. 26).

Ways of Fostering Compassion Through Teacher’s Authenticity in Young-Yie’s Class
In Young-Yie’s narrative, central themes for fostering compassion are:

- Teacher’s authentic self in class through the teacher’s talents and caring
- Integration of the arts into the Language Arts Program (connection to other subjects)
- Inclusion of community members in the curriculum

**Authentic Self in Class**

Like Eisner (1998), who found salvation in the arts during his school years, Young-Yie found her salvation in classical music, operas, and dance during her hard years in Canada as an immigrant teacher. She loved watching operas at the Metropolitan Opera House when she was in New York and at l’Opéra when she was in Paris. When favourite arias started, she would always feel her heart enflamed and her soul enchanted. She would hum her favourite arias from Puccini, Verdi, or Bizet to soothe her soul, especially when she was exhausted at the end of a long day at school. Her passion for classical music, opera, and ballet led her to incorporate these artistic elements into her teaching:

> I found happiness teaching the recorder to my students. After teaching theory first, I then taught my students how to play. We practised very hard every day for several weeks to prepare for the Shell Concert at Roy Thomson Hall. I could tell my students were enjoying playing the recorder, because as soon as they came to school in the morning, they would start practising on their own. Also I had no discipline problem in class, as the students were so immersed in practising. The music pieces we had to prepare were a simplified theme of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and two simplified pieces by Mozart.

> Now my students knew how to play the pieces by heart and were ready for the concert. At Roy Thomson Hall there were many student players from other schools. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra accompanied us! When the conductor lifted his baton to start the music, I saw my students’ focused attention and eyes on him. At the end of the performance, I was so proud of my students that I hugged each and every one of them.

This exalting experience taught Young-Yie that when we follow our passion, we become happy and fulfilled. Then we are connected to our authentic self, the Sublime.

Next, Young-Yie deeply cared about her students. Here is a description of how she helped a student who was doing poorly in spelling (la dictée):

> C was a bubbly student with many friends. His face was always flushed. He did well in class, except in spelling. During my teaching years in Grade 4 French Immersion, we had a weekly spelling test (la dictée), which he failed every week. C was very sad about his spelling test results and I could tell he was losing self-confidence. Young-Yie tried to find a solution which would make him feel good about himself:
As C was good in science, I decided to praise him one day for his excellent science project in front of class. When I asked how he did his project with such creativity and depth, I saw his face lighting up and getting even more flushed with excitement. We all listened to his presentation and applauded really hard when he was finished, shouting “Great scientist!” I spoke to C privately, to let him know that he had as great potential to excel in spelling also, if he had the will. The following week, his spelling grade was better. We all applauded him. As weeks went by, his spelling improved and in a few months, he was getting almost perfect marks. I called his mom to let her know how C had been improving in spelling and made sure she also encouraged and praised him at home for his spelling. By the end of school year, C became one of the better spellers in class.

Miller (2010) said, “The teacher sets the tone for the class through his or her presence” (p. 64). And the presence the teacher displays in class is fundamental to teaching (Miller, 2006, p. 81). In order to bring caring into schools, Miller (2000) said, we need “an authentic and caring presence of a teacher who can nourish the student’s soul” (p. 141). Miller (2010) also said the most powerful force to bring out the creative spark within each child is the loving presence of the teacher and love should be at the heart of teaching (pp. 8–9). Besides, “In the midst of our current education in the public school system that focuses on accountability and standardized tests, the compassionate and caring teachers are usually the teachers that we remember” (Miller, 2006, p. 61).

However, in order to love others, we have to be able to love ourselves first. In teacher-to-self relationship, Hart and Hodson (2004) said that compassion for oneself is a likely prerequisite for feeling compassion for others. To help develop compassion for oneself, they suggested thinking about our work and contribution; doing things that we really enjoy doing; and to ask for and receive support from others. To foster good connection in the teacher-student relationship, they proposed listening to students, and considering their points of view with good intentions and caring actions. Miller (2010) also said, “Love needs to start with ourselves. Unless we love ourselves, it is difficult to love others” (p. 83).

**Integration of the Arts Into the Language Arts Program**

When Young-Yie started to teach French Immersion in 1970s, there was no curriculum or guideline for it; the program was new in Ontario. As a result, the pioneering French Immersion teachers had to figure out on their own how to deliver the program using the textbooks that reflected Québec or French culture, because all the textbooks were from Québec. When Young-Yie tried to teach straight from the texts, she could tell right away that the content did not interest her students, because it reflected a culture her students were not familiar with. Her teaching
became boring. As a result, she decided to bring authenticity and caring into her class; these might be referred to as the teacher’s “presence” (Miller, 2006, 2007). She wanted her teaching to be a stimulating, exciting, and happy experience for her French Immersion students; she wanted them to respond with passion, excitement, laughter, and curiosity.

In order to bring in teaching material to motivate her students in Language Arts, Young-Yie decided to use fairy tales that were already known in English to her students, such as “Le vilain petit canard” (The Ugly Duckling), “Les trois ours” (The Three Bears), and “Blanche-Neige” (Snow White). Similarly, Feuerverger (2007) used Greek myths that “were interesting and meaningful” rather than the “basal” reader that did not have any connection to her students (p. 54). Fairy tales “can be a conveyer of wisdom and wonder” (Miller, 2006, p. 107). Along with fairy tales, Young-Yie brought in authenticity, including her passion and enthusiasm for literature and the arts, such as drama, poetry, music, dancing, and painting. The resulting curriculum worked extremely well.

This is how Young-Yie proceeded with her integrated teaching:

One day after reading the story of Le Vilain Petit Canard (the Ugly Duckling) in my Grade 2 French Immersion class, I wrote a script to make it into a play. There were two narrators, a few ducklings, a mommy duck, and an ugly duckling that was to become a beautiful swan one day.

We had such a good time together during this process: some students memorizing the lines, some practising actions, some students singing French songs, some writing short poems or stories about the sadness of the ugly duckling with no friend or the happiness of the ugly duckling who now has many friends as a beautiful swan, and some enthusiastically learning how to play the recorder. To those who wished to dance, I taught my childhood’s simplified ballet dance, Le Cygne (the Swan). The students who did not want to act or dance painted scenery and made props. In this manner, all the students were engaged and immersed in exploring their own authenticity. Then one night, we invited parents into the gym to present the play. Oh, how happy I was watching the children and the parents’ proud and happy faces, their eyes glued to their children on the stage. I still can remember one student’s exquisite swan costume with white feathers and rhinestones.

The teacher can show caring “by relating subject matter to the interests of the student. If the teacher can make connections between the subject matter and student interests, the student will often respond by engaging with the subject matter more directly” (Miller, 2007, p. 192). Hunt (2010) stated that every person possesses an inner knowledge that guides their actions. He realized that, through his graduate courses at OISE/UT, experienced teachers possessed their
own theories and models of matching their teaching approach to their students' learning style that were informing their actions (pp. 26–27).

Palmer (2007) said that good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness, and teach from their hearts. The connections made by good teachers to self, subject, and students emerge not from their methods but from their hearts where intellect, emotion, spirit, and will will converge in the human self (pp. 10–11).

Young-Yie’s integration of several subjects into her Language Arts Program is reflected in Miller’s (2007) transformation position, one of three positions in holistic education. As mentioned above, transformation focuses on the wholeness of the child; the curriculum and the child are seen as connected (see “Storytelling Through a Pictorial Approach”).

**Inclusion of Community Members in Curriculum**

Young-Yie believed we should include both parents’ and senior citizens’ expertise in our schools, in order to bring wholeness and depth to our curriculum and students’ learning. Bringing senior citizens’ expertise into class not only can deepen students’ learning, but also can help develop empathy and love among students, thanks to senior citizens’ wisdom and warmth.

During her teaching years in Ontario, Young-Yie once invited a parent who was a high school science teacher to teach “frog” to her Grade 3 French Immersion class. The parent brought all the necessary equipment from his lab, including real frogs preserved in alcohol. Her students enjoyed his lesson enormously, dissecting frogs and learning their different parts and functions, which Young-Yie later taught in French. Without his expertise, Young-Yie would have resorted to some frog diagrams and to a boring science lesson.

Another time, a parent who was a firefighter came to Young-Yie’s Grade 2 French Immersion class to help them study “Community Workers.” Instead of using a picture of a firefighter, there was the real firefighter! To their delight and surprise, he came to the class in his uniform and helmet, equipped with all his tools to put out fire. Her children loved the firefighter’s job description as well as the demonstration of his tools, after which he let her students try on his helmet, uniform, and boots. Her students loved the experience—many boys later said they wanted to be a firefighter.
One year, as Remembrance Day was approaching, Young-Yie invited a student’s grandfather who had fought in the Second World War to talk about his experiences fighting as a Canadian soldier. His stories fascinated her students who later developed a deeper understanding of why we had to remember and thank the soldiers who had died for others and for peace in the world. Young-Yie could tell that her students loved the senior citizen’s warm presence and his stories, because they were listening so intensely to him.

Miller (2010) said that the connection to community can involve members of community coming to the school to share their expertise and tell interesting stories about the community (p. 67). In holistic education, curriculum strives to move from fragmentation to connectedness (Miller, 2007, p. 13). Connection, the third basic principle of holistic education, refers to relationships between self and community and the relationship to the soul (Miller, 2007, p. 13).

**Conclusion**

In closing, I have summarized the emergent themes from the data that answered my research questions. The findings were organized in three areas: the nature of compassion, ways of developing compassion within, and ways of fostering compassion in schools. It is apparent that most findings identified by the scholars in the literature review in chapter 2 were displayed in the participants’ narratives.

The content of the findings on the nature of compassion revealed that compassion emerges from connection with and relationships to God, self, and others through contemplation, empathy, and caring. These findings were identified in Martin Buber (Rogers, as discussed in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, pp. 41–42), Miller (2000, 2006, 2007), Assagioli (1965), Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2000), the Dalai Lama (1999b), Martin Heidegger (as discussed in Noddings, 2005), Noddings (2005), and Im (2010).

The content of the findings on how we can develop compassion within ourselves demonstrates that contemplation and an awareness of interconnection between the I and the Other are necessary to develop compassion. These findings are reflected in the works of Turlington (2002), Dalai Lama (2001), Miller (1994, 2006), Huebner (1999), Palmer (2007), and the Dalai Lama (1996).
The content of the findings on how compassion can be fostered through contemplation at the Buddhist school shows that belief in the innate Buddha nature, meditation, serving others, the awareness of interconnectedness, nurturing student’s authenticity, and incorporation of the arts and storytelling were necessary approaches to foster compassion in school. These findings are supported by the Dalai Lama (1996, 1997, 2001), Miller (1994, 2002, 2006), John Donnelly (2002), Lourdes Arguelles (2002), Jean Vanier (Renzetti, 2008), Thich Nhat Hanh (2001), Montessori (1936, 1972), Steiner (1924/1971), and Rollo May (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989).

The findings on how compassion can be fostered through moral education at the Waldorf school reveals that spiritual practices such as meditation and praying to God, a focus on children’s souls, feelings, and imagination, storytelling without a book, and the teacher’s presence are necessary to teach moral education. These findings are identified in the works of Miller (2000, 2006, 2007, 2010), Tacey (2004), Miller (1990), Steiner (1923/1988), Dalton and Fairchild (2004), Noddings (2005), and Rogers (as cited in Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989).

The content of findings on how compassion can be fostered through love of the environment at the Montessori school demonstrates that belief in divinity within (the “spiritual embryo”), respect for the child, equality, independence, and discipline are essential. These findings are reflected in the ideas by Montessori (1967), the Dalai Lama (1997), Steiner (1920/1971), Miller (2006; 2007; 2010), Buber (Assagioli, 1965), Dalton & Fairchild (2004), Dermond (2007), the Dalai Lama (2001), and Dewey (1926).

The findings on how compassion can be fostered through the teacher’s authenticity and integration of various subjects, as demonstrated in Young-Yie’s class in public school, are also identified in the works of Eisner (1998), Miller (2000, 2006, 2007, 2010), Hart and Hodson (2004), Feuerverger (2007), and Palmer (2007).

In conclusion, the participant teachers’ experiences and recommendations in fostering compassion in schools are consistent with the ideas in the literature review that compassion can be brought into schools through fostering connections with and relationships to self, the Self, and the Other; through appealing to the heart in an awareness of interconnection and interrelationship between the I and Other; for all want happiness.
CHAPTER 9:  
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I wanted to research on how to bring compassion—an education of the heart—into Ontario public schools. I wished to investigate how connection could be made between the school and the students where currently there is disconnection, a disconnection evidenced in the heightening degree of violence in schools. I believe we need a balance in our schools between the Ministry of Education’s focus on students’ achievements and measurements through the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and education of the heart, because violence in schools means that students do not feel connected to and are not happy in their schools. While I was teaching a Grade 3 French Immersion class in the late 1990s, for instance, I remember a perfectly healthy student who used to get a stomach ache on the days of EQAO tests.

The findings in Chapter 8 revealed that compassion could be brought into schools by connecting to students’ hearts (to be). However, in order to bring compassion into our schools, we first have to become educators who teach from our hearts (Dalai Lama, 2001; Miller, 2000; Palmer, 2007), because to perform caring and compassionate deeds, we need to have caring and compassionate thoughts (Dalai Lama, 2001; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2001). In such a school, educators would attempt to nurture wise and compassionate individuals who lead their lives as whole people, connected to their intellect, emotions, body, and spirit (Miller, 2006), instead of forcing knowledge into students’ heads.

Conclusion

I look at the same, big tree outside of my window that I stared at, at the beginning of this thesis journey, which has brought me comfort through its calmness and steadiness. The tree is still there, standing solidly, enjoying the warm sunlight, and spreading its branches widely. And I still see and hear about much suffering taking place in the world instead of the happiness that we all want; I reflect again on the Dalai Lama’s statement, that one person’s happiness is dependent on others’ happiness (Dalai Lama, 2001).

Have I experienced God’s smile on my heart during my thesis journey? I think I have.
I saw God’s smile on the face of a student who has made a transformation within himself: In Jungjin’s class at the Buddhist University, I see a troubled student who was disruptive and was skipping classes. Then with Jungjin’s sustained caring and guidance, the student became a top student who enjoyed school. Now he could help other students to do well in their studies. Jungjin always believed in that student’s potential to do well in school one day.

I saw God’s smile on the faces of Frances’s students who were deeply engaged in the storytelling, with all their eyes glued on Frances’s face: I see Frances telling a story about compassion in a very imaginative and expressive way. Her students were in awe, because the story spoke to their hearts and souls, stirring their imagination. I remember Frances telling me that she had to spend many nights memorizing the story, because of Waldorf’s rule to tell stories without a book. I also noticed how Frances’s classroom was beautifully coloured.

I saw God’s smile on the faces of the children who were independently and quietly working at the centres of their choice in Anya’s class. I felt a great respect for each child in the class. While the children worked independently with great discipline, I saw Anya helping a child in a corner of the classroom. There was complete silence in class except the sounds made by the materials manipulated by children. When the children needed to talk to Anya, they waited patiently until their teacher was available.

I saw God’s smile on the faces of happy students who busily worked at the different activity centres that I had set up in the classroom to integrate the arts into my Language Arts Program. These included singing, dancing, poetry, story-writing, puppetry, and visual arts. The students were happy, because they were allowed to work at the centre of their choice.

The findings and discussion in Chapter 8 reveal that we can bring compassion into schools through an education of the heart.

The main themes from the data that answered my first question on the nature of compassion were spirituality, empathy, and caring. These findings revealed that compassion encompasses spirituality, empathy, and caring.

The central themes that answered my second question, on how we can develop compassion within ourselves, were contemplation and an awareness of connection between the I and the Other, which the participants reported experiencing during their contemplative practices. These
findings disclosed that contemplation and an awareness of interconnection are necessary to develop compassion within ourselves.

The major findings and guidelines from the data that answered my third research question, on how we can foster compassion in school, were as follows.

It was found that, at the Buddhist school, the main teaching approaches that could foster the development of compassion among the students were: meditation, service learning, teaching the concept of interconnectedness, nurturing student’s authenticity at the Buddhist University, and incorporation of the arts and storytelling as meditative practices at the Buddhist kindergarten. These guidelines demonstrated that we can foster compassion by making connections to self, the Self, the Other, and the arts through contemplation.

The findings at the Waldorf school indicated that the following aspects of teaching had the potential to foster compassion: spirituality; focus on children’s souls, feelings, and imagination; moral education through storytelling; and the teacher’s presence. These findings demonstrated that we can foster compassion through moral education by telling stories that connect to children’s hearts and that can stir a sense of sympathy and antipathy in children’s imagination.

Regarding the Montessori school, fostering compassion among the students was achieved through: a belief in the spiritual embryo, respect for the child, equality among children, independence, and discipline. The findings at the Montessori school revealed that we need spirituality, respect, equality, independence, and discipline in class to nourish a love of the environment.

The findings in relation to my own teaching in Ontario public schools showed the following teaching characteristics led to fostering compassion: the teacher’s authenticity, and the incorporation of different subjects into the Language Arts Program, to bring happiness into class. These findings demonstrated that the teacher’s authentic and caring presence could bring happiness and enthusiasm into class, because it can spread to children. Also when the teacher brings her talents into the curriculum, the learning can be more enriching and can lead to the transformation orientation of holistic education.

Now that I have in front of me all the findings from the various schools about teaching qualities, teacher’s characteristics, or teaching environment that can foster compassion, I return to my
great concern about the current heightening violence in our schools that had triggered my investigation in the first place. How can we create a personal, caring school where students feel cared, happy, and connected to their learning? I believe the answer my findings provide can be summed up as the interrelated connection to the Self, self, and the Other.

In order to bring compassion into schools, we first have to become caring and compassionate educators ourselves. Our thoughts must be caring and compassionate, because they lead to our deeds. We can develop compassion through such practices as contemplation and mindfulness, practices which help create positive transformation within ourselves (Dalai Lama, 2001). And our soul seeks love (Miller, 2000, p. 26). Through going inwards, we connect to the Self, God, or the Buddha nature within, which is the source of love and compassion:

In the Self, there is our soul through which we can be connected to beautiful music, children’s happy play, our work, or simply being in the moment. This Self sees deep connection to others and life, while the self, our ego, sees self as separate from everyone else. (Miller, 2007, p. 14)

When we come to realize the connection between reality and the mysterious unity of the universe, and between our inner self (or soul) and that mysterious unity, a natural compassion for all beings can arise within us (Miller, 2006, p. 60).

Through the practices of mindfulness and contemplation, we can detach ourselves from the ego by observing the way our mind works (Armstrong, 2010). Mindfulness helps us develop more control over our minds so that we can transform ingrained tendencies such as negative thoughts into new, positive ones. In contemplation, we mentally stand back and observe our behaviour, and thereby discover more about the way we interact with people, what makes us angry or unhappy, how to analyze our experiences, and how to pay attention to the present moment. Living in the moment means observing the way we speak, walk, eat, and think, in an awareness of the impermanence of life. Observing our thoughts in this manner, we may find that blaming others is the cause of our pain, but over time, we learn that the real cause of our suffering lies within ourselves (Armstrong, 2010, pp. 106-107).

Connection to self is about understanding the impermanence of life. Everything changes and nothing is permanent. One minute we are seething over a colleague’s inefficiency; the next we are daydreaming about our summer vacation. Through mindfulness, we can have calm, dispassionate appraisal of our behaviour and become aware that our judgements are often biased and dependent on a passing mood, and that our self-preoccupation brings us into conflict with
people who seem to get in our way. In the process, we notice that the cause of so much human pain is inside ourselves; this may bring us the motivation we need to change, for through mindfulness we find that we are happier when we are peaceful than when we are angry or restless. And when we perform an act of kindness, we ourselves feel better (Armstrong, 2010, pp. 105–109). Cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness for all beings brings peace and happiness to oneself and others (Dalai Lama, 1997, p. 67).

Connection to the Other means to be aware of the interconnection between the I and the Other through contemplation and mindfulness, so that we can treat others as we want them to treat us. And this interconnection is well illustrated in Thich Nhat Hanh’s (2001) “interbeing.” For example, while reading this document, one might imagine a cloud floating in the sky. One might think that there is no connection between the paper of the document and the cloud. However, one must realize that without a cloud, there would be no rain; without rain, trees could not grow; and without trees, we could not make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. So the cloud and the paper are inter-are, as we see the paper in the cloud, and the cloud in the paper. By understanding this interconnectedness among us, we come to realize that we have to live in harmony with others, helping one another and serving those in need. On this basis, we come to understand that I exist because of the Other and I should therefore regard the Other as a part of myself.

Perhaps, we will discover one day that all the dragons of our life are princesses, who are only wanting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps, everything terrifying is at bottom the helpless that seeks our help (Rilke, 1929/2008, p. 39). And our job as educators would be to lift up and spread our imaginative wings widely to fly out into the world of infinite possibilities in search of self-knowledge and self-love, so that we can know and love the Other to finally see God’s smile on the hearts of all the dragons and princesses.

In conclusion, the findings in participants’ narratives revealed that compassion is comprised of spirituality, empathy, and caring. We develop compassion through contemplation and an awareness of the connection between the I and the Other, an awareness that arises during contemplation. We can foster compassion in schools if we base it on holistic education’s (Miller, 1981, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2010) basic principles of balance, inclusion, and connection, which nurture spirituality, connection, and relationships; and if we bring in different
ways of fostering compassion that I have explored through four holistic teachers’ narratives in this study.

Lastly, reflecting upon all the findings in this study, I see two underlying characteristics: spirituality and happiness.

All four participants experienced and practised spirituality in their personal and professional lives. They came to know the nature of compassion through a spiritual member of their family, they practised a form of spirituality in their lives, and they showed their spirituality in their teaching by being a caring and soulful teacher in their classes.

All four participants experienced happiness in their classes. For example, Jungjin mentioned how happy his students were after they came back from their service learning. He also talked about visitors from outside giving comments on how kind and happy his students were. I also witnessed happiness on students’ faces in the yoga class at the Buddhist kindergarten. Frances talked about how happy sharing humour and laughter in her class made her and her students. Anya talked about how content she and her students were in her class. I talked about how happy I and my students were when we shared a passion and enthusiasm for the arts in the Language Arts Program.

The research narratives revealed that spirituality and happiness were connected. The findings indicated that spirituality is a necessary component in compassion education. The Dalai Lama (1999b) said the more we are compassionate, the more we provide for our own happiness (p. 123), because when we reach beyond the confines of narrow self-interest, our hearts become filled with strength and peace and joy become our constant companion (pp. 127–131). Moreover, “children (and adults too) learn best when they are happy” and “happy people are rarely mean, violent, or cruel” (Noddings, 2003, p. 2). The practice of contemplation, through mental training such as meditation (Dalai Lama, 2001), is the initial step to the development of compassion (Miller, 1994) and to the final outcome: happiness.

**Implications**

The findings on the nature of compassion revealed that compassion encompasses spirituality, empathy, and caring. These imply that spirituality is based on a connection to the Self (as the
source of love and compassion), that empathy is the first step to compassion, and that caring leads to compassionate deeds.

The findings on how we can develop compassion within ourselves revealed that contemplation and an awareness of connection between the I and the Other are required to develop compassion within ourselves. They imply that we need to practise a form of contemplation that allows us to be aware of this interconnection.

The main approaches for fostering compassion explored in the studies of the four holistic educators can be summarized as spirituality; nurturing of student’s authenticity; incorporation of the arts into the curriculum; teacher’s presence; a belief in the Self within; and respect, equality, independence, and discipline. These guidelines imply that compassion can be fostered in connection to and in relationships with the self, the Self, and the Other.

As mentioned above, the common characteristics underlying all the findings are spirituality and happiness. Future research could explore ways of bringing happiness into schools through spirituality and compassion.

The Dalai Lama (1999b) said the more we are compassionate, the more we provide for our own happiness (pp. 127–131). He also said that, by nature, especially as human beings, our interests are not independent of others’. Our happiness depends on others’ happiness (Dalai Lama, 2001, pp. 62–66).

Miller (2006) said that timeless learning that includes letting go, attention, compassion, and contemplation (p. 13) can lead to a deep sense of joy (p. 12). He said we can see this joy in Nelson Mandela’s warm smile and in the Dalai Lama’s laughter. The classrooms and schools that practise various forms of timeless learning will be places where students are happy and enjoy being there (Miller, 2006, p. 154).

Noddings (2003) said that “true happiness requires a capacity to share unhappiness; that is, to be truly happy, we must be moved to alleviate the misery around us” (p. 3). According to her, positive relationships with other people and a good character are sources of happiness (p. 4).

I believe people nowadays are focused on seeking happiness more than before. Even in a recent *Globe and Mail*, I read three different articles in which happiness was the subject: auto industry
(“Toyota chief looks to emerging markets,” 2011), health & fitness (Hampton, 2011), and science (Wente, 2011). And I am thinking: Why not happiness in schools, too?
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