Living in the Light of Death:
A Case for an Education-towards-Death

by

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Abstract
This thesis explores the educational potential of living and learning in the light of death. Through an analysis of Heidegger’s concept of Being, I highlight how our mortality is intimately bound up with care and therefore a potentially powerful place to begin reimagining the classroom. With the help of Noddings theory of caring, I explore how Heidegger’s key concepts of death, care, and authenticity can be integrated into an education-towards-death. Based on insights from those who have worked with individuals near the end of life, I outline four means—mindfulness, emotional engagement, deeper engagement with others, and finding and living personal meaning—of putting an education-towards-death into practice.
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**LIVING WITH DEATH**

“We all have two lives. The second one starts when we realize we only have one.”—Tom Hiddleston

Two Christmases ago I had the fortune of spending a couple of weeks on the beach in Mexico. It was my grandparents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary, so they flew all twenty-seven of their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren down south to celebrate. Half way through our trip, on a day that seemed like any other day, tragedy rippled through our resort. A boat pulling a parasailer crashed into a kayak carrying newlyweds. The force of the crash pushed the kayakers under the propeller of the boat leaving a man with a torn open leg and a woman deceased before emergency personnel could hit the water. The entire resort was at a stand still. Time seemed to have stopped. Everyone gathered around the water, watching carefully and barely making a sound. My family was in shock. What if that had been one of us? Some of the grandchildren had just gotten out of the water from kayaking—why were we so lucky to avoid this mishap? Without uttering a word, my family slowly started to move in closer to one another. No one was without an embrace for the rest of that afternoon, and no one had any doubt that they were cared for and deeply loved.

For the remainder of the time we had in Mexico we were perhaps the closest we have ever been to one another. We talked more gently; we listened
more intently. We reflected on our lives and dwelled with one another’s future aspirations. The situation gave us a chance to reflect on our lives in a way, and with an urgency, that we would probably not otherwise have done. We were given the opportunity to truly know ourselves and be with one another authentically.¹

This day has stuck with me, much like similar days have over time. For me, this was not the first time that death has had a large impact on my life. This was not unlike the time my grandfather had a heart attack that led to a risky quadruple bypass surgery. And that was not unlike learning that my oldest cousin had a life threatening brain tumour when he was in high school. Brushes with death seem to be some of the most defining features of my life. These experiences are not unlike those that many people have had—a moment when death is close and you have time to reflect on what it all really means. We carry valuable lessons from moments like these. We hold people a little closer; we act a little kinder; we focus on the things that really matter to us. We become more present in the moment—painfully awake to the situation at hand—and in turn more self-aware, more reflective, and more deeply engaged with others. What if we could keep in mind what emerged as important in these, sometimes seemingly, last moments and tried to cultivate it? What if these powerful moments could be the focus of our lives and we could keep perspective on the rest? For me, that is what this project is about. These experiences of death and

¹ The discourse on authenticity in philosophy is highly contested. In her paper, Authenticity and the Limits of Philosophy, Lauren Bialystok outlines four philosophical accounts of authenticity—the Romantic, existentialist, virtue and autonomy description—and argues that none of them are satisfying despite how convincing individual instances of intuitive authenticity remain. She ends her paper by saying that the referent for an adequate account of authenticity is more
dying—of facing mortality—have had the capacity to stay with me and have caused great reflection and recalibration in my life. It is these kinds of experiences that have brought me home to a place I thought I would never return, with relationships that I thought I never deserved, and to this thesis—a project about finding life through death.

A small note here about the value of our mortality may be important.² If on that day of the kayaker accident—or when my grandfather had a heart attack or my cousin was diagnosed with a brain tumour—my family and I were immortal, we would not have been affected in the same way. We would not have had a chance to reflect on our lives, nor would we know what it meant to have lived our particular lives.³ None of it would have mattered. The importance of events like celebrating my grandparents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary together would not have been so meaningful because we could experience moments like these an infinite number of times. They would have a one-hundredth and five-hundredth anniversary too, after all. Whatever reflections that cause us to recalibrate our lives, to live more authentically, would not have been so dire because we would have all the time in the world to ask for forgiveness, correct our mistakes, and start all over.

² Conversations of immortality are growing in philosophy, bioethics, and computer science as we come closer to the possibility of extending human life significantly or even technological singularity (some form of transhuman intelligence, See Yudkowsky 2007 for more). There is much debate about the desirability of such a move. This paper will not directly explore the desirability of immortality beyond this paragraph although it is acknowledged that there is such a conversation. For more on this see Williams (1973); Nagel (1986); Glover (1977); or Fischer (1994).
³ Questions of life and death often surface questions of a potential afterlife. I will not be arguing whether or not there is an afterlife as my primary focus is on the impacts of living with our mortality. When I discuss death I take it to be the end of this life—regardless of whether or not it is our only life—and I want to investigate what kind of impact this fact, and knowledge of it, can have on our lives. Therefore, the possibility of an afterlife has been laid aside.
Todd May, Class of 1941 Memorial Professor of Philosophy at Clemson University and author of the book *Death in the Art of Living Series*, puts it well when he says: “Death is tragic, arbitrary and meaningless. At the same time it can, because of the particular way it is tragic, arbitrary and meaningless, open out on to a fullness of life that would not exist without it” (May 4). May is pointing back towards the famous work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a continental philosopher who argued that our mortality, and our knowledge of it, is what makes us uniquely human. According to May and Heidegger, the fact that we are mortal and know we are mortal is the most important ontological fact about us. There is simply nothing that has more weight in determining the meaning or importance of our lives.\textsuperscript{4} By saying this I do not intend to argue that it is the only important fact about us, but it is the most important one. Why is this? Because it is the end of every other fact about us: “it has the capacity, in a way no other aspect of us does, to absorb every other fact, to bring every other aspect of our lives under its sway” (May 4). The fact that death has the ability to negate every other element of our lives is what makes it the most important fact about us.

Of course, simply being a creature that dies is not uncommon in the world—animals and plants also perish in time—but what makes us unique as human beings is the fact that we are mortal and we know we are mortal. We have the opportunity to reflect on our finitude and create a meaningful life out of the fact that we have a limited amount of time in this life. Importantly, we are

\textsuperscript{4} I think it is important to remark that I am discussing the most important fact about us, as in once we already exist. One might argue that the most important fact about us is the fact that we come into existence—that we are born, i.e., our natality not our fatality—but merely being born or simply being alive is not necessarily creating a life worth living.
aware of our pending death throughout our entire lives, not merely at the end of it. Although when faced with sudden death or a near death experience this awareness is much more intense than most other days of our lives, death would play a less significant role in our life were we not conscious about “the trajectory of our life and its ongoing vulnerability to death,” (May 7) as well as in the structure of how we go about our lives. May plainly puts Heidegger’s theory well when he states:

We live a life always in the shadow of the fact that we will die. What we do, how we do it, the attitude we take towards it, happens against the background knowledge that each of us is mortal. Once again, this does not mean that everything in life is reducible to death. There are many important facts about human lives. Rather, it means that, among those important facts, our mortality holds a special place. (May 10-11)

So it is not merely the moment or days leading up to our death that are significant for us as human beings; it is living our entire lives with the knowledge and understanding that we have only a finite amount of time in this world as this particular being. Because of this important fact, living and learning would benefit from nurturing our mortal sensibilities. This project is the first step towards imagining that end through what I will call an education-towards-death.

**Arriving at this project**

I have always been one for trying to combine unlikely things—ideas, people, places, feelings. I have often ruminated about death but considered it too dark a subject to delve into until it was the subject of a Philosophy of Education
class I took. Death in this context was used to demonstrate the importance of living—an unlikely partnership that would start to give me the guidance necessary to explore how the topic of death had very little to do with dying and a lot to do with living.

My interest in the subject grew beyond the scope of the course but I kept coming up short in my research into how death and dying could sit within philosophy of education. Once I started combing through the discourse surrounding death I was overwhelmed with the amount of material every discipline had but I was surprised to find very few educators and educational researchers and theorists grappled with the topic and even fewer of them were looking beyond the single event of dying—like doctors, nurses, psychologists, etc. do—into the stakes of considering a lifetime defined by mortality and an educational philosophy that acknowledges or supports this.

Perhaps death and education is an odd pairing at first glance, but consider it from the educational perspective of John Dewey (1859-1952), an American psychologist, philosopher, educator, social critic and political activist. Dewey believes that philosophy of education is philosophy for life. If our mortality is the most important fact about our lives and education is a concern for life then what more significant topic could we encounter in education? As I will note again in greater detail later, philosophy is perhaps best equipped to deal with questions of death and “philosophy of education is the most fundamental branch of philosophy

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5 Although Dewey never spoke directly about death or our mortality, I do believe that he would support an education-towards-death because it is in line with his belief that philosophy of education is philosophy for life. See Dewey’s The School and Society, The Child and the Curriculum and Experience and Education for more on this point.
because all others, in some sense, depend on it” (Noddings, 2012, 25).

Therefore establishing an education-towards-death first requires a philosophy, to which we will turn to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Once we establish the Being of Heidegger’s work and the centrality of death and care to life, we will turn to Nel Noddings’ discussion of caring and care in school. Noddings is Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, Emerita, at Stanford University and she has written extensively on the ethics of care. Her work provides a potential avenue for putting Heidegger’s theory of Being into practice. Combined, Heidegger’s care and Noddings’ caring, set the foundation for an education-towards-death. With their work in mind, and in light of some insights from those who have worked with individuals near death, I set out four potential means of operationalizing an education-towards-death. This is done with the realization that everything, including writing, educating and living, is a process, never a product.⁶

**Audience**

As a person deeply interested in the field of education, I write primarily for those who are also interested in the domain. Although this thesis is a preliminary step in what I believe will be a life-long project, I have teacher candidates in mind—specifically those with philosophy as a teaching area. Liberal arts educators and philosophy teachers may be more sympathetic towards this text and more informed about the history leading up to my questions, so here some basic philosophical understandings will be taken for granted but it is my hope that

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⁶ I owe this bit of wisdom and guidance to a woman I deeply admire and had the pleasure of working with during my undergraduate education, Erin Delathouwer.
I am as accessible as possible so that anyone who wants to find a use for this thesis, or any part of it, can.

Methodology

At no point throughout this thesis is it my intention to dictate the way in which one ought to live or die. In fact, that would be diametrically opposed to the kind of education for which I am advocating. For this reason I will share not only philosophical arguments, but also personal narratives, and fictional literature. I believe using a combination of philosophy, autoethnography, and fictional texts allows for a deeper analysis of the ideas being presented and different avenues for arriving near the same conclusion without imposing a rigid prescription. There is no one right way to live or die, just as there is no one right way to interpret life and death. Literature, as well as life, is an art—full of ambiguity, uncertainty and interpretation. Fictional texts can hold hidden messages that can be easier to relate to and digest than analytical philosophy. I want to explore mortality in the context of philosophy of education, but there is no way to claim a universal truth about the subject. With all things, I hope that some small part of what I write will be made useful to someone, but I do not proclaim to be an expert on anyone else’s life or death. My basic intention is to join the conversation of those discussing the significance of our mortality and elucidate their value in defining our own life and living it authentically. I believe that the value of living and

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7 Some feel the use of fiction requires justification in a philosophical project. As Martha Nussbaum illustrates in her book *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* “…there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it — views, especially, that emphasize the world’s surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty — that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose” (3).
learning in the light of our mortality, as care and through caring, are some of the most important tools we have for creating a life truly worth living and therefore we should consider ways of cultivating these experiences before our last few breaths.

**Thesis Overview**

In the pages that follow I will focus on building up to and eventually explicating an education-towards-death. To this end, the first chapter of this project, Thinking About Death, will look at why we are discussing mortality instead of death as death; why philosophy is best situated to deal with the topic; and what makes Heidegger’s discussion of death unique and especially relevant to educators. The second chapter, *Death and Care in Philosophy of Education*, I combine central aspects of Heidegger’s theory of Being—namely death, care, and authenticity—with Noddings’ theory of care in schools. Together, Heidegger and Noddings form the philosophical foundation for an education-towards-death. In the final chapter I establish a definition of education-towards-death and four means of operationalizing the theory: mindfulness; emotional engagement; deeper engagement with others; and defining and living our own personally meaningful life. This chapter draws on insights from Bonnie Ware’s work as an end of life companion to highlight the significance of incorporating an education-towards-death into the classroom. If Socrates was correct that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” then death and dying, as a means to genuinely question who we are and how we live our lives, are important topics for philosophy of education. Death is inevitable but it seems as though life is optional; we all must
die but we all do not necessarily live. Perhaps through an education-towards-death we can learn to truly be alive.
I. THINKING ABOUT DEATH

"The tragedy of life is not death…but what we let die inside of us while we live."—Norman Cousins

Different disciplines approach the subject of death in a variety of ways and often for different disciplinary purposes. Historians, for example, are more interested in tracing attitudes about and practices surrounding death and dying, than say theologians who are more interested in answering questions about the afterlife and how to secure passage there. Similarly, if you asked a historian what it means to die well you would probably get a response concerning a specific geo-socio-time norm whereas a theologian would probably respond with a different answer concerning ethics or destiny. Each discipline’s questions reflect the main purpose for that field of study to engage with death at all. The historian may be interested in death for the purpose of creating a methodological narrative of death attitudes and practices in a particular region, but this differs from the theologian who studies death in hopes of better understanding how one ought to live in this life to secure a place in the next. Of course there are more than historians and theologians who engage with death: anthropologists, journalists, psychologists, sociologists, medical professionals, grieving family members, and even children express interest in the subject, but all with a unique approaches and primary considerations.

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8 For more on this point see Lewis R. Aiken’s Dying, Death, and Bereavement (2009).
9 See Philippe Ares’ The Hour of Our Death (1982) or Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present (1975) as a great example of this.
10 For a complete overview of literature on death and dying see John F. Szabo’s Death and Dying: An Annotated Bibliography of the Thanatological Literature (2010)
Parallel to disciplinary lenses, most discussions on death are inherently multidisciplinary.\textsuperscript{11} By multidisciplinary I mean “multiple disciplinary approaches to varying degrees on the same continuum” (Choi & Pak, 2006, 359).\textsuperscript{12} Because specific types of questions concerning death will call for a variety of multi, inter, and trans disciplinary degrees, this is what I refer to when say multidisciplinary.

At the core of the multidisciplinary investigations of death is philosophy. Philosophical thinking can be described as “speculative, practical, and critical thinking that aims for an understanding with knowledge based upon clear ideas and defensible answers” (Barry, 5). In other words, philosophical thinking is engaging with fundamental questions of existence in a reflective and creative way. As Vincent Barry remarks in his book, \textit{Philosophical Thinking About Death and Dying}: “Conceptually, much that is not philosophy bears directly on philosophical analysis of death and dying” (xvi). It may be useful to consider an example to illustrate how questions of death and dying are inherently multidisciplinary and at their core philosophical in nature. It is useful here to briefly review how the field of medicine defines death and how that definition relies on legal, historical and bio-ethical considerations as well as philosophical thinking.

\textbf{Medical Definitions of Death}

“…Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty…”—Hippocratic Oath

\textsuperscript{11} For more on this point see Death, Society, and Human Experience or Vincent Barry’s \textit{Philosophical Thinking About Death and Dying} (2007).
\textsuperscript{12} Choi and Pak use the term “multiple disciplinary” to describe this but I chose “multidisciplinary” for grammatical purposes. The terms are defined identically.
Four main theories exist on how to define and determine biological death in the medical literature: cardiac death; whole brain death; higher brain function death; and brainstem death. While all of these definitions assume the integrated functioning of an organism is required for life, they all conceptualize this loss at different times. As University of Alberta’s director of critical care, Dr. David Zygun states: “The challenge is that death is a process, and when it’s a process, taking it to one specific time is very difficult.”

Although difficult, the medical profession needs some sort of guidelines to help navigate the sometime tricky terrain of helping or hindering. How death is defined has major implications for what is considered appropriate treatment of patients and helps direct our thinking about bioethical issues. Depending on how death is defined the same patient could face very different treatments, from life-sustaining measures to the appearance of harm. For example, if someone suffers a bad car accident and is considered brain dead then their organs would be harvested for transplant. However, if the same patient were at a different hospital that only recognized cardiac death, they would not be declared dead and would be unable to donate organs. Definitions of death inform how we approach other contentious biological and medical procedures, technologies, and treatments like abortion, genetic engineering, human and fetal research, cloning, care for the terminally ill and euthanasia. In other words, the stakes are high when denoting death.

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The traditional definition of death is “The cessation of life; the ceasing to exist; defined by physicians as a total stoppage of the circulation of blood and a cessation of the animal and vital function consequent thereon, such as respiration, pulsation, etc.” (Block et al. 1997, 488). This definition is also called clinical death—when circulation and respiration permanently cease—and served well until the 1960s when biotechnology breakthroughs (e.g., mechanical respirators and electronic pacemakers) and advances in transplant surgery (i.e., the desire for blood-circulating organs from patients with dead brains) called for something else.

By the early 1980s, a second valid standard of death was accepted: “irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, both cerebellum and brainstem” (Barry 18). This new approach, known as “whole brain death” or simply “brain death,” did not completely eclipse the heart-lung approach. Both formulations are still contentiously used throughout North America today. Depending on the state or province, and sometimes even the city, the standard for declaring death differs. For instance, in Alberta “the Foothills hospital in Calgary accepts only brain death, while the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton recognizes both brain and cardiac death” (McKeown, CBC, 2014). A difference of 300km could therefore be the difference between life and death.

One of the controversies surrounding the brain death theory, which contributes to its lack of universal acceptance, is that the whole-brain death formulation does not go far enough. Some ask why is it that all brain function must be lost before declaring death and not merely higher brain functions, such
as consciousness? “If adopted, a higher-brain criterion could make the irreversible loss of functioning in the cerebral cortex the primary physiological standard for defining death, since it is the cerebral cortex wherein lies the capacity for conscious life, commonly viewed as the hallmark of personhood” (Barry, 2007, p.19). Importantly, this standard of death could be met prior to the whole-brain death.

Another candidate for how to define death is the brainstem formulation. Because a permanently non-functioning brainstem would seize consciousness and heart-lung function, proponents of this approach believe it offers a better alternative to the aforementioned approaches alone. Not everyone agrees though.

Interestingly, heart-lung, whole-brain, and brainstem formulations of death are biological concepts. This means loss of life is determined when what is lost is essential to them as a living organism (i.e., respiration and circulation, all brain activity, or brainstem function). In contrast, the higher-brain formulation of death is a psycho-social concept. This means loss of life is determined when what is lost is essential to an individual’s personhood (i.e., consciousness or cognition). This differentiation calls into question the fundamental conception of death itself: is it psycho-social, biological, or some combination of both?

Bioethicists, like David DeGrazia, Robert Veatch and Martin Benjamin, have considered these questions and the implication of their answers at length.¹⁴ Bioethical issues including abortion, embryo and stem cell research, euthanasia

and assisted suicide could be solved with a psycho-social conception of death. However, under the same conception of death, the mentally ill may not be considered persons and therefore their treatment, or even disposal, could be rationalized despite being unrealistic, cruel or even unethical. It would seem as though even the psycho-social approach is not infallible.

The seemingly simple question of how to define death is actually highly contentious and holds serious implications. I do not intend to solve this debate here, but by briefly outlining one of the largest conversations regarding death and laying out the four major formulations of how to define it, we begin to uncover the philosophical roots of the question and how it is multidisciplinary in nature. Death is the end of life; *but what life are we talking about—our biological organismic life or our psycho-social conscious life? Which, if either, takes precedence and when? How do we know? What are the ramifications of deciding? Who gets to decide?* Many philosophical questions arise when we try to define the parameters of death. In a couple sections we will take a look at how we will define death in this thesis through the use of one particular philosopher.

**Philosophy of Death**

Questions concerning death and dying are multidisciplinary by nature and, often, at their core philosophical in nature. At the very least, questions concerning death and dying often benefit from philosophical inquiry to help navigate towards meaningful answers. As we began to see with a brief look at one of the major discussions about death—how to define it—philosophy is uniquely situated to help us assess theories, defend positions, outline terms, and
evaluate arguments. This is not to say that philosophy is the sole referent for all things death related, but it is a good starting point. Even philosophy itself, however, approaches death in a variety of ways.

Some of the earliest written philosophy we have engages with matters of death. In Plato's *Phaedo*, written in approximately 360 B.C.E., Socrates discusses how the purpose of philosophy is to prepare one for death (61c - 69e) and claims that “…one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death...” (64a). Similarly in the *Apology*, Socrates states

To fear death, gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know. No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils. And surely it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know. (29a-b)

Socrates thoughts on why death ought not to be feared are echoed in Epicurus’ writing in his *Letter to Menoeceus* where he explains why death ought not to be feared because it is not a harm that we can experience: “Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not.”¹⁵ In other words, Epicurus does not believe that we should have anxiety or fear of our death because while we are

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alive we do not have to face death and when we die we are not alive to be affected by it.

Death continues to be of interest to philosophers throughout the centuries. In fact, philosophy scholars are still debating some of the earliest writings on the topic, from people like Epicurus, today. Questions concerning death and dying in philosophy have been vast and some highly contested: What constitutes death? Is all death a misfortune? To what extent, if at all, might death harm us? Is death always bad for us? Is immortality desirable? Do we live on after death? How much control over our own death should we have? Is euthanasia or suicide moral? are some of the major questions under discussion, with answers that are just as vast as the questions. While each query could compose a thesis in itself, I would like to focus on a conversation in philosophy that often goes unheard of: the ontology of death. I am primarily interested in the questions concerning what it means to be a finite being aware of our own mortality? While the aforementioned questions concerning death are thought-provoking, and do indeed dominate the conversations about death and

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16 The topic of death in philosophy is vast and would require many more pages than I am permitted to discuss in its entirety. For that reason, the discussion of death in philosophy is abbreviated and condensed, and should not be considered exhaustive.  
17 See Luper (2009); May (2009); Warren (2004); Rosenbaum (1986); Williams (1973); NW De Witt (1954).  
19 For comparitivism and welfare accounts see J.S.Mill (1863); Rawls (1971); Parfit (1984); Overvold (1980); Scanlon (1998); Keller (2004); Portmore (2007); Draper (1999).  
20 See Levenbook (2013); Unamuno (1913); Epicurus (1966); Lucretius (1951); Nagel (1970); Quinn (1984); Feldman (1991); Kamm (1998).  
21 See Nagel (1970); Silverstein (1980); Feit (2002); Yourgrau (1987); Lamont (1998); Pitcher (1984); Grey (1999).  
22 See Descartes (1641); Hume (1896).  
23 See Aquinas (1273); Donne (1608); Durkheim (1897); Hume (1783); Kant (1910); Beauchamp (1996).
dying in philosophy, it is the ontological and existential questions concerning our mortality that are most rich in value for our every day lives.

Philosophers questions about death do not always consider death’s effects on how we live or learn, tending instead to be mental exercises in abstraction. As an alternative to this trend, I attempt to lay the foundations for an education practice with death in mind. Therefore, when I ask what does it mean to be a mortal aware of our mortality? I am asking what is at stake in our lives and in education when we ruminate over our mortality and live our lives continually with the awareness that we will one day cease to exist, as we know it.

Few philosophers have seriously grappled with this question, but one name stands out emphatically: Martin Heidegger. With his book, Being in Time, Heidegger moved away from the traditional conversation on death and dying to consider matters of mortality and life. In doing so, he widened the parameters of death discussions in philosophy to be about more than the process or act of dying to the every day living with death. In this way, Heidegger offers a compelling philosophical attitude toward death, or perhaps more accurately on mortality, that has real consequence for how we live and therefore also on how we learn.

While these can be interesting questions and even perhaps important questions for various fields of study, they are not necessarily important in or for our daily lives. For an example of how integrating the ontology of Heidegger can be see Jonathan Neufeld’s The (In)vocation of Learning: Heidegger’s Education in Thinking. Ironically Heidegger’s important philosophy of mortality is couched in some of the most difficult verbiage one could encounter. For this reason, I rely heavily on paraphrasing his ideas and using the helpful plain language of philosophers Richard Polt and Todd May to decode Being in Time, along with some notes from Magda King’s and Piotr Hoffman.
Heidegger and Facing Up to Mortality

“What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to ‘know’—that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange, as distant, as ‘outside us’.”—Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 1974, p. 301

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was a German philosopher who is best known for his phenomenological and existential works, namely his magnum opus Being and Time. Many hold Being and Time to be one of the most significant and influential texts in the philosophy canon. As such, there is a wealth of information to digest between the pages and in the vast analysis and commentary on the world. Since this project focuses on education-towards-death, my examination of Being and Time will be limited to the sections and terms that lend themselves to this task. In order to understand the ontological-existential-educational significance of death according to Heidegger, we first must turn to the starting point of the book and his explication of what it means to be a human being. Death and Being, for Heidegger, are intimately shaped by one another so we must grasp both in order to grasp either. This section will begin with Heidegger’s central question in Being and Time; then explicate the role of care, the world, and others for Being; discuss how we are thrown into the world, how we are attuned to it, how we can be authentic or inauthentic and finally review the part death plays in the whole thing. What will be made clear by the end is that our death is the impetus for us to create a life worth living.

The central question under investigation in Being and Time is the meaning of Being. This is a question Heidegger believes Western philosophy has

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27 Originally Sein und Zeit was written in German. I will be using Joan Stambaugh’s translation with the recognition that there may be something lost in translation.
forgotten about since the time of Plato and Aristotle (1996, p.1). Being for Heidegger, like many of the terms he operationalizes in his text, is defined in a nontraditional and very particular manner. Heidegger is interested in what it means to be human so he differentiates entities (Seiende) from existence (Sein). When he asks what it means for something to be in the first place, it is an ontological question, not a metaphysical one. Sometimes Heidegger refers to this distinction as the “ontological difference” when comparing Being and beings (Polt, 1999, p. 28-9). Beings—like you or me—are an entry point to discuss Being—existence—but we should be careful in distinguishing these terms because Heidegger’s project is not concerned with what makes me me or you you, rather what makes humans human. To help navigate between the two I will capitalize Being when discussing existence and use lower case being when discussing particular entities.29

If Heidegger’s investigation concerns Being and he is particularly concerned with the Being of humans, then what makes human existence unique? Heidegger introduces the term Da-sein to distinguish a way of Being that characterizes human beings.30 Da-sein derives from the German verb to be (sein) and the adverb for place (da) and therefore translates as being-here or being-there (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.35; Polt, 1999, p.29). “Here” or “there” for Heidegger does not simply mean we are situated in a specific place but that we also “inhabit a world [and] we are capably engaged in a meaningful context” (Polt, 1999, p.30).

29 A helpful way to distinguish the two terms is to recall that Being—as in existence—cannot be counted; there is not my Being and your Being, only one Being. Beings—as entities—on the other hand can be counted. Another means of clarification can be used if one substitutes the word existence for Being in a sentence.
30 Like Being, there are not many Da-seins, only one.
In other words, human existence is unique from all other entities—like chairs or desks—“because for us the world is understandable” (Polt, 1999, p.30). Moreover, the question of Being has an “ontological priority” for us, according to Heidegger, because “it is inescapably relevant to all human beings given the kind of entities we are” (Polt, 1999, p.33). In turn, human existence is characterized by the fact that we are the kind of beings from whom Being is an issue (Polt, 1999, p.34). Da-sein is an ontological understanding of human Being where we are disclosed as actors (i.e., activities or processes; verbs not simply nouns) who have the capacity to understand the world and who are interested in asking about existence in the first place.

Division I of Being in Time—The Preparatory Fundamental Analysis of Da-sein—examines how we are in the world by analyzing Da-sein “as it is initially and for the most part—in its average everydayness” (1996, p.15). Heidegger orients his analysis of Da-sein to everydayness because this is the way of Being that is most familiar to us, yet repeatedly ignored. Everydayness is characterized by Heidegger as routine, being captivated by the world, and following the

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31 As Polt notes, Heidegger distinguishes between ontology (a philosophical investigation of Being); ontological (pertaining to Being and requiring philosophy); and ontical (pertaining to particular facts about entities without regard to their Being—does not require philosophy). These distinctions are not particularly essential to this project.

32 Disclosedness is a significant and complex word in Being and Time. As I understand it, disclosedness of Being contrasts with discovering Being in so far as we cannot control coming to know Being, we have to let it show itself. This may seem passive and inconsistent with the definition of human existence as engagement and action but I reconcile this with my own use of meditation. When I clear my mind—and Heidegger also uses “clearing” to describe disclosedness—I must be very conscious of all my thoughts and feelings, attuned to everything that is going on. If I don’t accept what is going on and try instead to control it all too much I cannot let go or come to a place of calm understanding. I believe this is close to what Heidegger is trying to convey with disclosedness: we have to be conscious and attuned to the world and make a clearing in order for Da-sein to disclose itself.
crowd. Heidegger believes it is actually very difficult for humans to understand Da-sein because we cannot step outside ourselves and examine our Being, nor do we necessarily engage in philosophical investigations of Being at all. As Heidegger states, “Da-sein is ontically ‘nearest’ to itself, ontologically farthest away; but pre-ontologically certainly not foreign to itself” (1996, p.14).

Accordingly, we have a tendency to misinterpret Da-sein because we tend to compare ourselves to the things we encounter around us instead of understanding our existence as unique from the Being of things. We forget we are not passive observers but engaged actors throughout our lives (Polt, 1999, p.45). Similarly, people are faced with a considerable inventory of prior self-interpretations that do not satisfyingly describe Being. As Heidegger describes:

> Da-sein not only has the inclination to be entangled in the world in which it is and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light; at the same time Da-sein is also entangled in a tradition which it more or less explicitly grasps. This tradition deprives Da-sein of its own leadership in questioning and choosing. (1996, p.18)

Being heavily enmeshed in a world that already provides ample theories on existence (among other inquiries) allows us to be passive parrots and our possibilities unrealized.  

In order to help illuminate human existence further, Division II of Being and Time—Da-sein and Temporality—expands on Being by re-interpreting

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33 Heidegger terms “the source of public opinion, the views and voices of the crowd” as “They” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.207).

34 Heidegger terms this everyday propensity as “falling prey”. Verfallen, in German, is also translated as “fallenness” and “falling”.

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everyday human existence in terms of temporality. Here, time is conceived nontraditionally as non-successive. Primordial time, as opposed to world-time, is an existential characterization of time that makes up our being-here because time, at its most basic level “the future is not later than the having-been, and the having-been is not earlier than the present” (Heidegger, 1996, p.321). Our “temporality temporalizes itself as a future that makes present, in the process of having-been” (Heidegger, 1996, p.321). In other words, I am what I am because of my past and what I plan for my future. I can say, for example, that I am a teacher because I have taught and I will continue to teach in the future. If I did not account for what I was and could not project my future possibilities onto myself than it would be difficult to explain who I am. Similarly, Being is hard to elucidate if we do not account for what was and what will be.

Time, for Heidegger, “must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of being” (Heidegger, 1996, p.15). Our “being-here,” our Da-sein, makes sense as a horizon because it is what “our ongoing projection of possibilities is projected upon” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.214). Being necessarily has a past and future in order to have a present. Moreover, it is Heidegger’s concept of primordial time that grounds authentic existence. The anticipatory resoluteness of if being-towards-death allows for the possibility of living authentically (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.215). This is where Heidegger’s project comes into deeper conversation with my own.

Thrownness, attunement, understanding, and fallenness work together to shape human existence. “We are thrown from the past, which attunes us to the
world; we understand this world in terms of possibilities that we project into the future; we fall into the world and become fascinated by the entities present in it” (Polt, 1999, p.65). We do not have a choice of being born or being finite—we are thrown into existence as a being-towards-death. The world, and entities within the world, affect us in different ways and we orient ourselves through different moods that attune us to the world. Our moods therefore have an existential significance “because they tell us, more fundamentally than anything else, that we are” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.133). Knowing we are thrown into the world and are attuned to it are part of what make up our ability to understand the capability of Being. This understanding, while always underlining human existence, can be authentic or inauthentic. When we understand ourselves primarily on the basis of the world we are falling prey: “seduced (tempted, tranquilized (sedated), alienated, and ensnared by the They” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.72). When our understanding springs from our own self “we understand by taking a stand so to speak—by seizing upon some way of existing and acting” (Polt, 1999, p.68). In other words we can only authentically understand when we confront our thrownness—including, and especially, our mortality because death is the most distinctive instance of thrownness for Heidegger.

Let us recap Being and Time thus far. Heidegger’s project is about coming clear on who we are as human beings—a task that is very difficult and requires philosophical thinking. The question of Being is built into our very existence because of who we are as humans. Heidegger believes we are situated in the world with a temporality—a past, present, and future. We are engaged actors in
our lives and because “Da-sein is always its possibility” we can either be in the world authentically or inauthentically (Heidegger, 1996, p.39). Bound up with our authenticity is our consciousness—to our thrownness, attunement, understanding, fallenness, and, in particular, our mortality. *Why is this so? What does our death have to do with how we live?* Let us consider Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych* here to help us lay the foundation for Heidegger’s theory.  

Tolstoy’s novella concerns the life of a 45-year-old lawyer who has spent the majority of his life occupied by mundane affairs and climbing the social ladder. He “felt that everyone, everyone without exception, even the most self-satisfied people, everyone was under this thumb” (Tolstoy, 2008, p.19). He married “the most desirable, cleverest, most radiant girl” of his social scene in order to do well by himself and “at the same time he did what high society found proper” (Tolstoy, 2008, p.22). His marriage grew querulous and demanding through children and promotional moves, but Ilych avoids his family by shifting his life’s center of gravity closer to the office and cordonning himself off. One day “an unexpected and unpleasant circumstance shattered the calm of his life” (Tolstoy, 2008, p.27). While hanging curtains in his new home, Ilych falls. A pain in his side begins to grow alongside his irritability towards his family. Eventually Ilych visits a physician who declares his condition terminal. Ilych attempts to cure his malady with every possible remedy, but ultimately becomes unable to work due to the intensity of the pain. Now Ilych is bed ridden, forced to face his mortality and reconsider his life. Throughout his long and painful death, Ilych

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35 Heidegger himself refers to Tolstoy’s novella in Being and Time’s Division II, Section 1. There is no doubt that Heidegger was influenced by the text.
wrestles with whether or not he has lived a good life. At first he is convinced he has lived rightly and is angry with those around him who do not seem to acknowledge what he is going through. But closer to the end of life, he comes to see the artificialness of his life up to this point:

...in his imagination he began going over the best moments of his life.

But—strange thing—all these glad moments seemed quite different now from how they had registered at the time...everything that had seemed at the time a pleasure now turned before his eyes into something meager, even disgusting. The further from childhood and the closer to the present, the more trivial and dubious the pleasures became. (Tolstoy, 2008, p.87)

Ilych reconsiders every choice he has made: law school, his spouse, his moribund professional life, and his obsession with money. For Ilych, “the further on in years, the more deadening it became. In perfectly measured steps I went downhill imagining it was up...maybe I didn’t live as I should’ve? The thought leapt to his mind. But how could that be, when I did everything as I was supposed to...” (Tolstoy, 2008, p.88). Scared and angry, Ilych finds his only comfort in the care and understanding of his servant Gerasim who watches over him. Ilych comes to see Gerasim’s life as authentic—marked by his attunement and his ability to be with another without falling away from himself—and understanding this to be the reason Gerasim does not fear death like he does. Ilych comes to understand “those scarcely detected impulses to struggle against what the people of highest social rank considered good, those feeble tendencies
that he barely noticed and immediately suppressed, might in fact be what was real, and everything else what was false” (Tolstoy, 2008, p.97). Moved by this epiphany, Ilych sees his life and the world around him in a new light. No longer fearful of death and no longer holding onto hate and anger, Ilych feels pity for his family who does not have this conscience of being and hopes his death will free them from their inauthentic existence, as it did for him.

Tolstoy’s piece is a cautionary tale of the consequences for living without meaning, or in Heidegger’s language, a cautionary tale about the consequences of living with a “constant tranquilization about death” and “the tendency toward falling prey” (1996, p.235). These consequences occur when we live in the everyday convention, comfort, and conformity of society. Ilych’s life, prior to knowledge of his malady, is a good characterization of what Heidegger calls everydayness. Ilych was absorbed in the world around him and was falling prey to the They. This is a standard occurrence for humans as we are with others from the outset, indeed, so much so that, for the most part, we do not distinguish ourselves from others (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.37). Our world is a shared world and we are inescapably social beings; therefore a central part of our Being is being-with others (Mitsein). Being-here-with (when we combine the fact that we are in this world, Da-sein, and we are with others) has an existential-ontological meaning and is not based on several subjects being physically together, but by the fact that humans are essentially here and with (Heidegger, 1996, p.113). As Heidegger states, in no case is “Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a ‘world-in-
itself so that it just beholds what it encounters” (1996, p.196). A person not tied to a past or a world is not actually a person at all, for Heidegger. Our fallenness is pervasive because it is a direct result of being thrown into the world.

Another common example of falling prey is mindless social media browsing. Reading posts, watching short video clips, liking photos, and not deeply engaging with any one particular item since we are scrolling down so quickly is a kind of falling prey. We can get absorbed in this fairly superficial behaviour for short bursts or long periods of time (perhaps even when avoiding writing), but we can often catch ourselves snapping out of the routine and return to something more productive or the reason we were on the computer to begin with. As Polt points out in a similar example, “although I have been ‘brought up to date’ on what people are talking about, I have the nagging, irritating feeling of having wasted my time, and I cannot say that I have learned anything of consequence” (1999, p.75). Social media browsing seems like a fairly harmless activity but what if we took the same idea and applied it to our entire lives—what if everything we routinely did was commonplace and inconsequential? Heidegger believes everyday behaviour is much like the aforementioned social media behaviour because

We are guided by what people ordinarily do, say, and believe. In our eagerness to keep up to date, we do not take the time to explore anything thoroughly for ourselves. We use routines and passing
interest to avoid committing ourselves to clear choices about who we are and what we are doing. (Polt, 1999, p.75-6)\textsuperscript{36} Fallenness is not only necessary for our routine functioning but we also “tend to indulge in falling even when we have opportunity for a non-routine, profound, but disconcerting experience” (Polt, 1999, p.77). This is because we feel “at home” in our everyday falling; falling feels comfortable and safe. Our routines and responsibilities allow us to remain in a kind of ontological slumber. We see evidence of this with Ilych’s preoccupation with mundane affairs and social ladder climbing and his avoidance of authentic Being.

While Heidegger paints a fairly bleak picture of everyday existence as “superficial, ambiguous, and evasive” he does note that “any authentic grasp of things that temporarily overcomes falling must develop from everyday superficiality and ambiguity—it cannot simply step outside of everydayness and reach a pure state of consciousness, completely unpolluted by our everyday attitudes and judgments” (Polt, 1999, p.76). So the world we are thrown into and the people we fall prey to are inescapable, part of what makes us who we are as human beings, and the potential source of our inauthenticity.

While our typical everyday mode of existing includes falling prey, not all moments are typical and everyday. Angst, the mood of anxiety, is one such unique instance of non-typical and non-everydayness.\textsuperscript{37} Anxiety, according to

\textsuperscript{36} Of course this is not always a characteristic of our social media use, as there may be alternatives to the above mentioned example, but it is most certainly a likelihood for some.\textsuperscript{37} King translates the word as dread instead of angst, but both are distinct from fear. He states “fear of…” always discovers some definite threat approaching from a definite direction in an already disclosed neighborhood. The whereof of fear, the fearsome, has the character of some handy thing or real thing or another Da-sein approaching from the world. But in disowned existence, it is from himself that Da-sein turns away. The threat cannot come from beings within
Heidegger, “is a moment of meaning-less confusion, as the everyday perspective has it—but it is ‘meaningless’ not in the sense that it is trivial, but in the sense that it involves a deep crisis of meaning” (Polt, 1999, p.77). Anxiety can hit us when we see the world we occupy as lacking relevance or purpose or when we sense, like Ilych close to death, “the slipping away or nihilation of all entities” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.15). The questions that Ilych asked on his deathbed—*All right, but what is it all for? Maybe I didn’t live as I should’ve? For what?*—are anxiety filled questions about the experience of the meaninglessness of existence. His life appears irrelevant, inconsequential and insignificant. If our everyday falling makes us feel at home in the world, anxiety makes us feel “alienated, homeless [and] unsettled (*unheimlich*, literally ‘not at home’)” (Polt, 1999, p.77). Angst is the state in which we found Ilych when he came face to face with death. He saw his familiar life in an unfamiliar light which caused him to self-examine and re-evaluate. Angst problematized Ilych’s life for himself and forced him to confront his Being. Through his anxiety he eventually found “an opportunity to reconfigure and reclaim” his everyday existence more authentically (Polt, 1999, p.78). Unfortunately for Ilych, this call to conscience came only in his last few days.

As Polt notes, “Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety shows just how disturbing it is to face up to the human condition,” which he comes to call “care” (1999, p.76). As noted before, Being matters for human beings and this, at its most

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38 Tolstoy, 2008, p.88
basic, is what care means for Heidegger. The ontological-existential sense of care being discussed should not be confused with the traditional sense of caring—as maintenance or protection of someone or something—but should be understood instead as continually being care and therefore having concerns (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.43). One of our concerns is our own Being because, as stated previously, we are the type of beings for which Being matters and it makes a difference to us. As Hoffman states:

...my life matters to me—indeed must matter to me—only because I am aware that I don’t have it ‘forever’ and ‘once for all’; life matters only because I am aware that it can be snatched away from me by the power of death. And so care is Dasein’s basic state only because Dasein is, and understands itself as being, a mortal creature. (1993, p.200)

In other words, Da-sein’s essential basic state of care is dependent on understanding finitude. Death moves us to concern about our life precisely because our basic state is care; and, at the same time, care is the basic state of Being because we are threatened by death. Care and the sense of one’s mortality are thus two sides of the same coin and essential to one another in human existence.39

What Ilych cared about the most on his death bed says something about who he really is and how he really wanted to live his life, despite what the

39 An interesting point from Polt that might help with clarification on care states that Heidegger’s discourse of care “is an implicit criticism of all philosophies of detachment. He holds that there is no way to avoid being rooted in a past and faced with a future. Human beings can never become timeless, placeless, and radically indifferent” (1999, p.79).
beginning of the novella revealed. In this way, the certainty of death was
liberating for Ilych because it freed him from life’s trivialities. Facing mortality
meant he was able to separate the wheat from the chaff in his life and,
unfortunately for Ilych, his reluctance to face up to death sooner meant his life
lacked the kind of substance he would have had had he lived more authentically.
For this reason, temporality and consciousness play an important role in living
authentically for Heidegger.

Recall that Da-sein is characterized as existing in such a way that Being
matters and is disclosed to us. There are different ways of Being that can be
authentic or inauthentic. Human beings are uniquely aware of themselves as
having a future—a “process of becoming something of their own making” (Barry,
2007, p.62). The success of this self-creation project depends on the choices a
person makes amongst all the possibilities once they are able to untangle
themselves from the They. Through the “voice of conscience”—a special moment
of insight that alerts us to the past and future dimensions of our Being—this
potentiality is attested (Heidegger, 1996, p.248). Here “conscience calls the self
of Da-sein forth from its lostness in the they” (Heidegger, 1996, p.253). This call
happens within, not outside of our being; the call comes “from me and yet over
me” (Heidegger, 1996, p.254). When our Being—our fallen way—is alerted to its
inauthenticity and reminded of its care, our Being has the opportunity to choose a
more authentic way.40 In other words, we have a choice of how to be in the world

40 Another account of the call of conscience come from Polt: “In the call of conscience, then, Da-
sein as care is silently calling Da-sein as the fallen they-self, alerting inauthentic Da-sein to the
indebtedness and responsibility that are part of care itself” (Polt, 1999, p.89). The two Da-seins
under discussion here are not two separate people or things: “the authentic and the inauthentic
and the call of conscience helps us realize an authentic way of doing so. For Ivan Ilych this call came only on his deathbed when he faced his mortality. Up until that point, he lived an inauthentic existence. Unfortunately this reality is not one unique to Ivan Ilych.\(^{41}\)

If we do not live in the awareness of the finitude of our possibilities then we cannot choose in the light of this finitude and therefore cannot live authentically. Death for Heidegger is the realization that “possibilities are always limited by the possibility of the impossibility of existing” (Polt, 1999, p.86).\(^{42}\) Death is distinguished here from what Heidegger calls demise—the actual event in which a human body ceases to function (1996, p.229-30).\(^{43}\) Unlike demise, we live with death every day as “the ever-present certainty of the uncertainty of our existence” (Barry, 2007, p.63). Mortality would probably be a more suitable word to use here given Heidegger’s existential definition of death. Mortality, like Heidegger’s “being-towards-death”\(^{44}\) is a mode of Being—a constant possibility, not merely a one-time event. Our finitude is part of our Being; not just the self are not separate entities at all but different ways of Being for a simple entity” (Polt, 1999, p.90).

\(^{41}\) Many people report similar experiences on their deathbed—more on this in Chapter III.

\(^{42}\) Although death is the end of Dasein and its possibilities, Heidegger does not intend to say that through death we are completed or somehow made whole—like through a grand finale at an opera or the culminating conclusion of a good book. “Death is not an accomplishment. It is not a goal. It is nothing more than a stoppage of our lives” and therefore the end of all our future possibilities (May, 2009, p.25). Heidegger uses the ripening of a fruit to contrast how Dasein “is always already its not-yet as long as it is” (Heidegger, 1999, p.227). When a fruit ripens it becomes most what it is moving towards—it reaches its peak characterization of the fruit that it is seeking to become. In other words the fruit, be it a banana or an apple, becomes actualized as through it’s ripening. Dasein does not work in this way. For Dasein “always already exists in such a way that its not-yet belong to it” (Heidegger, 1996, p.226). The not-yet that belongs to our human existence is our death because it shapes our present.

\(^{43}\) Nor should it be confused with the deceased (Verstorbene) or the perishing (Verenden) of something alive (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.52).

\(^{44}\) Heidegger has a few variations of the term being-towards-death, including being-towards-the-end and being-at-an-end. They all signify the same description however, that is, the end of being-in-the-world (234).
cessation of it because we do not know when we will die despite knowing for sure that it will come. This means that we live our entire lives in the face of our fragility, we do not simply face it at the end of life. Because of this, death is a constant, definitive, and undetermined possibility—always with us, accompanying every moment of our lives.

According to Heidegger, this inevitable and uncertain possibility is also “always essentially my own” (1996, p.223). My life is my own precisely because no one else can live it, nor can anyone else face my death for me; death necessarily faces me alone (Heidegger, 1996, p.262). Death, as an individual possibility, hangs over everything we do, fundamentally shaping who we are. We could easily imagine that if Ilych could have bypassed his death he would have and the end of his life would not have been so illuminating. So, while death is always immanent\(^{45}\), its reality is not always equally pending, nor is our recognition of death always conscious or at the forefront of our minds. In fact, most of us would rather ignore thinking about death, making “sure of a constant tranquillization about death” (Heidegger, 1996, p.235). When we talk about death and dying as something that happens to people in general but not something that happens to you, or me then dying is levelled down to an ambiguous event that does not really concern us nor something that happens to anyone in particular (Heidegger, 1996, p.234). This evasion of death is so pervasive that we often try to convince the dying that they will escape death, like Ilych’s family did with him, in order to remain in the everyday tranquillization of death. In other words, the

\(^{45}\) Heidegger’s term on pg. 232. He also describes death as “the ownmost nonrelational possibility not to be bypassed” or “an eminent imminence.”
They typically “does not permit the courage to have Angst about death” (Heidegger, 1996, p.235). So, against all odds, humans have to be vulnerable to death and what it means to be here authentically.

In order to be here authentically, humans have to anticipate their death; we have to run ahead into (Vorlaufen in) the possibility of the absence of possibilities. As Dahlstrom describes, “Anticipating this defining possibility discloses the finality and finitude of existence, enabling us to become free for it. With this freedom for death comes a freedom to understand and choose among finite, factual possibilities authentically” (2013, p.53). Moreover, anticipating death also functions as a check against being with others inauthentically.

Heidegger explains this as follows:

*Anticipation reveals to Da-sein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern taking care of things, but to be itself in passionate anxious freedom toward death which is free of the illusions of the they, factual, and certain of itself.* (Heidegger, 1996, p.245)

In other words, the existential project of Being is made visible through an authentic being-toward-death. Human existence is therefore delineated and made significant because we die. Facing up to our mortality—living in the light of death—is therefore accepting our finitude of one’s possibilities and choosing in the light of this finitude (Polt, 1999, p.87).
In summation, death for Heidegger is not to be bypassed, is certain, and is indefinite with regard to its certainty. In other words, our death is something we cannot escape although we cannot predict exactly when this certainty will occur. This means that we spend our entire lives in the fragility of our mortality. Moreover, this is something we care about because of the kinds of beings that we are. Certainly something that is so essential to our Being and in our life has educative import. What Heidegger offers us in his illustration of Being, is a basis from which we can develop an education-towards-death.\footnote{46 \textit{What would it mean for teachers and students to teach and learn through the acknowledgment of and dwelling with our mortality? What if teachers could help students live in the light of death? What if teachers could help students live more authentically? How do we learn from death prior to the end of life? The next chapter will explore these questions and how Heidegger’s views of life and death set the foundation for an education based on care and caring.}} What would it mean for teachers and students to teach and learn through the acknowledgment of and dwelling with our mortality? What if teachers could help students live in the light of death? What if teachers could help students live more authentically? How do we learn from death prior to the end of life? The next chapter will explore these questions and how Heidegger’s views of life and death set the foundation for an education based on care and caring.

\footnote{46 “Education-towards-death” is a play on Heidegger’s notion of authenticity as “being-towards-death.”}
II. Death and Care in Philosophy of Education

“Students who are loved at home, come to school to learn, and students who aren’t, come to school to be loved.”—Nicholas Ferroni

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children.”—John Dewey

In the previous chapter I explored how questions concerning death and dying are multidisciplinary by nature and at their core philosophical. This being said, not all philosophers approach death in the same way. One such philosopher stands unique from others because he moved the conversation on death and dying into the realm of ontology. Heidegger’s Being and Time offers a compelling ontological-existential attitude toward death that has major ramifications for how we live and learn. This chapter takes up Heidegger’s sketch of Being—in particular his views on death, care, and authenticity—and shows how, together with Nel Noddings’ (2005) theory of care in schools, it sets the foundation for an ontological-existential ethic for education. While Noddings and Heidegger discussions of care are unique from one another, I argue that if we find Heidegger’s work on Being worthy of consideration in the classroom then Noddings offers us a vehicle for practicing our care through caring relations. Care, in the Heideggerian sense, could be the impetus for caring relations, and Noddings’ ethics of care is one possible means of dealing with the emotional engagement required for an education-towards-death calls for.47 Through a

47 The move from Heidegger’s existential-ontology to philosophy of education may seem a stretch without considering the pioneering work of Maxine Greene (1917-2014) concerning existentialism and education. Greene work for nearly fifty years at Teachers College, Columbia University (where she was the sole woman in the philosophy of education department) eventually becoming William F. Russell Professor Emerita in the Foundations of Education (Weber, 2014). While she is perhaps best known for her work in aesthetic education, Greene broke new ground with her book Existential Encounters for Teachers in 1967 when she was one of the first philosophers of education to write an entire book addressing the relationship between existentialism and
review of the historical context Noddings worked in, a distinction between Heidegger and Noddings’ views on care, an outline of what caring relations mean, and an example of the Saskatchewan context, I will build up to an education-towards-death.

**Noddings’ Historical Context**

As Heidegger transformed the conversation of death in philosophy by working from an ontological-existential standpoint, Noddings transformed the conversation of education by working from an ethic of care. Her work has “become a key reference point for those wanting to reaffirm the ethical and moral foundations of teaching, schooling and education more broadly” (Smith, 2004). Now Lee Jacks Professor of Education Emerita at Stanford University, Noddings was a paved the road for women in academia as she was one of few women appointed as a faculty member in 1977. As Megan Boler has stated to in personal correspondence, “She was a feminist ahead of her time.” Her reach went beyond the field of moral education and feminism though to influence an extensive amount of fields, including:

- Care ethics\footnote{For more on subsequent contributors to care ethics, see Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto.}
- Phenomenology\footnote{For more on subsequent contributors to care ethics, see Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto.}

educational theory and practice (Kohli, 2014, p.357). She later developed a philosophy of education informed by existentialism in her book *Teacher as Stranger: Educational Philosophy for the Modern Age* (1973), where she emphasizes doing philosophy, going beyond, seeking wide-awareness, choosing, and becoming (Kohli, 2014, p.357). Given her work, Greene would undoubtedly have much to say about an education-towards-death, but I choose to join in conversation with Noddings’ work because it emphasizes the emotional engagement—in a way that Greene does not—which I believe essential to bridge education and death in education-towards-death.
Noddings’s work has been taken up in practice in policy and she continues to be the highest impact of any living philosopher of education.

Born in January 19, 1929, Noddings attributes much of her influence to a supportive childhood in Irvington, New Jersey (Provenzo, 2008, p.79). She graduated from Montclair State Teachers College with a B.A. in 1949, the same year she wed her still husband James Noddings. She taught junior high school for four years and then spent three years raising her family, which eventually included ten children—five biological and five adopted. From 1957-69 she was a high school math instructor, department chair and eventually assistant principal in Woodbury, New Jersey (Provenzo, 2008, p.79). In 1964 she earned an M.A. in mathematics from Rutgers and eventually he changed her focus to the broader

49 For example, see Chamberlin’s Toward a Phenomenology of Education (1969) or Conroy’s A Pathway for Interpretive Phenomenology (2008)
50 For example see Gay’s Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice (2010)
51 For example see Greene’s Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change (1995)
52 For example see Sergiovanni’s Building Community in Schools (1994).
53 For example see Hargreaves’ The Emotional Practice of Teaching (1998).
54 For example, see Noss and Hoye’s Windows on Mathematical Meanings: Learning Cultures and Computers (1996).
55 For example see Steffe and Gale’s Constructivism in Education (1995).
56 For example, see Dossey and Keegan’s Holistic Nursing (2012)
realm of educational theory and philosophy for her Ph.D. which she earned from Stanford University in 1973. Her dissertation focused on constructivism as a base for a theory of education, which is an idea that still runs through much of her work in education.

After completing her Ph.D. Noddings was a faculty member of Pennsylvania State University and then director of the University of Chicago’s Laboratory School. As Bresler et al. note, the position must have been “irresistible given the school’s past association with John Dewey, the pre-eminent American pragmatist whose progressive views have and continue to influence Noddings’ own work” (2001, p.210). After a brief year at the lab school, Noddings joined the education faculty at Stanford University in 1977 where she remained until 1998, twenty-one years later. From 1992-1998 she was the Lee L. Jacks Professor of Child Education. Once retired from Stanford University, Noddings taught at the Teachers College of Columbia University until 2000 and in 2001 she held the A. Lindsay O’Connor Professorship of American Institutions at Colgate University followed by the Libra Professorship at the University of Southern Maine (Smith, 2004).

With an educational career spanning more than six decades, Noddings’ extensive influence is partially evident in her publication prowess. To date, Noddings is the author of nineteen books, co-author of four books, has written extensive book chapters and has published over two hundred articles. She has contributed to the academic fields of ethics, philosophy of education, educational policy, mathematics education, religious education, social policy, and peace
education (Phillips, 2014, p.580). Her work has been translated into eleven different languages, and she has been honoured as a model teacher and for her scholarship.\(^{57}\) She has received six honorary doctorates to date and was elected President of the National Academy of Education and of the Philosophy of Education Society (Phillips, 2014, p.580). Her seminal and heavily cited book\(^{58}\), *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) pioneered her as a leading feminine ethicist and philosopher of education.

One of the many major contributions of Noddings’ scholarship was—in line with some of the direction of second-wave feminism as the historical context in which she was developing an ethic of care—how the ethics of care challenges the fundamental dominant values of patriarchy and education. An emphasis on “care” is necessarily an invocation of gender norms and rules, and to place care at the centre of an ethics is to reverse longstanding gendered norms that overvalue reason and rationality that have dominated much of higher education and educational philosophies. Noddings’ emphasis on care in schools is “an argument against the persistent undervaluing of skills, attitudes, and capacities traditionally associated with women” (1995, p.366). This last point is argued alongside other feminist philosophers of education such as Jane Roland Martin who argued that while “[w]omen’s lack of success or low rate of participation in fields long dominated by men is seen as a problem to be treaded by educational

\(^{57}\) This includes “three Awards for Teaching Excellence from Stanford, a Medal for Distinguished Service from Teachers College, Columbia University, and the American Educational Research Association Lifetime Achievement Award” (Amrein-Beardsley, 2010).

\(^{58}\) As of writing this, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* is cited 7640 times according to Google Scholar. Her second most cited work, and my primary source for this thesis, is *The Challenge to Care in Schools, 2\(^{nd}\) Ed.* With 4331 citations.
means...researchers do not seem to see a problem in men’s low rate of participation in nursing, elementary school teaching, or full-time parenting” (Noddings, 1995, p.366). According to Martin, schools should share responsibility “for those educative functions of home that are now at risk of extinction” (1995, p.356). Martin believes that at the turn of the 20th century, schools can no longer expect children to come in with a basic moral education—she calls this the “great domestic vacuum in the lives of children”—so schools need to be “a moral equivalent of home” (1995, p.356). In turn schoolhouses, where the factory model of education is insensitive to the conditions of students, become “schoolhomes” where care, concern, and connection are emphasized equally to reading, writing and arithmetic (Martin, 1995, p.357). While Martin and Noddings certainly overlap in their desire for a new education paradigm that puts care at the core, the importance of care in teaching has been documented across the field of education.

When it comes to education, Noddings is primarily concerned that in the pursuit of academic success schools have “largely ignored massive social changes” like “work patterns, in residential stability, in styles of housing, in sexual habits, in dress, in manners, in language, in music, in entertainment, and—perhaps most important of all—in family arrangements” (Noddings, 1995, p.365).

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59 For more on this see Martin’s Reclaiming a Conversation (1985).
60 Martin is careful to note that this domestic vacuum is not exclusively due to women, but “is the exodus of both sexes” as domestic and work life has shifted since the industrial revolution (1995, p.356).
61 For more on care in early childhood educational settings see Bredekamp and Copple (1997), for elementary schools see Charney (1991), for secondary schools see Noddings (1992), for higher education see Thayer-Bacon and Bason (1996), for caring in the teaching of mathematics see Robicheaux (1996), science see Sickle and Spector (1996), social studies see Alter (1995), language arts see Lamme and McKinley (1992) and educational technology see Damarin (1994).
By failing to address these massive social changes in any kind of comprehensive way, Noddings holds that the school does not adequately meet the educational needs of today’s students (1995, p.365). In her theory of care in education, Noddings proposes that “our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” and in lieu of our current priority of the relentless and hapless drive for academic success. In order to fulfil this goal she suggests departing from the traditional organization of schools around standard disciplines in order to expel “an ideology of control that forces all students to study a particular, narrowly prescribed curriculum devoid of content they might truly care about” and to replace it with “greater respect for a wonderful range of human capacities now largely ignored in schools” through centres of care (Noddings, 1995, p.366). The next few chapters will outline more specifically her theory of care and caring in schools.

Noddings attributes her work to being influenced by her friends, her children, her teachers, and key philosophers, including John Dewey, Aristotle,

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62 We could question the legitimacy of Noddings’ main education aim here and ask why these characteristics? Who is Noddings to decide what are the right values to be taught in educational contexts? While I do believe that Noddings offers this aim of education as a suggestion, not as a dictated prescription. Evidence can be found on this point with how Noddings’ sets up her argument in The Challenge to Care in Schools as a thought experiment and her theory as one answer to the thought experiment. Some may question if teaching values or character education is the role of schools, but regardless of the overtness, teachers are always teaching values. As Richard Weissbourd stated, “Schools and teachers don’t get to choose whether they teach values. Schools and teachers are always affecting values by, for example, what they decide to praise and punish, how fairly they balance different students' needs, how they define students' obligations to each other. The question isn't whether schools teach values, it's whether they choose to be deliberate about it” [as quoted in Katherine Casey and Francesca Kaplan Grossman’s Teaching Values: Let’s End our Misguided Approach (2013)]. For more on the defense of character education see Michael Davis’s What’s Wrong with Character Education? (2003).
and Martin Buber. While Noddings’ early work contributed primarily to mathematics education, throughout her career philosophy and ethics became the focus of her research and academic work, which made significant contributions to several fields. For example, “Noddings’ philosophical analysis of caring and evil have made a significant contribution to ethics, phenomenology and feminist scholarship” (Breslet et al, 2001, p.212). Her work emphasizing the use of philosophy to inform educational practice, and her work in moral education is the reason she is brought into the conversation on death and education here.

Along with Noddings’ supporters come her critics. There are six major criticisms against care ethics, including arguments that is it:

- A slave morality
- Empirically flawed
- Theoretically indistinct
- Parochial
- Essentialist, and
- Ambiguous

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63 While these are her primary philosophical influences, Noddings was also influenced by Socrates, Plato, Froebel, and Held. For more on this see Flinder’s “Nel Noddings” in Palmer’s *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education. From Piaget to the Present* (2001).

64 For more on subsequent contributors to care ethics, see Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto.


70 See Rachels (1999), and Held (1995).
While a full examination of these arguments would warrant a paper of its own, some of the more convincing criticisms will be taken up as I further outline Noddings’ theory of care and caring in schools.

**Care and Caring**

Care for Heidegger, as we saw in the previous chapter, is “the very Being of human life” because it shares a deep reciprocity with the fact that we die (Noddings, 2005, p.15). Our death matters because we care and we care because we know we are finite. Just as we cannot escape our mortality and must live each day in its light, “we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of life” (Noddings, 2005, p.15). While Heidegger insisted his use of the term care was nonconventional—as a more abstract, ontological state that describes the basic structure of the human self—it is possible to argue “that his writings on care do have existential moral significance” as well (Reich, 1995). Noddings, an American feminist, educator, and philosopher, picked up on Heidegger’s potential import to an ethics of care—alongside other insights on care from those such as Carol Gilligan—and she developed a comprehensive theory highlighting care’s relational aspect.

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71 Carol Gilligan’s work led to a whole new field of thought in ethics known as feminist ethics or ethics of care. Noddings is one proponent and the one most directly associated with education in the field of ethics of care. Gilligan’s *In a Difference Voice* (1982) led the movement and describes “a morality based on the recognition of needs, relation, and response” emphasizing women’s refusal “to leave themselves, their loved ones, and connections our of their moral reasoning” (Noddings, 2005, p.21). This ethic of relation puts emphasis “on living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations—not on decision making in moments of high moral conflict, nor on justification” (Noddings, 2005, p.21).
Care is a highly contested concept, especially as an ethic, and not everyone will agree that Heidegger and Noddings are discussing the same idea. Noddings herself seems to realize that her interest with care as it manifests in a caring relation is distinct from Heidegger’s ontological-existential discussion of care as part of our Being (Noddings, 2005, p.15). I shall endeavour to illustrate, however, that there is significant overlap between their work.

Heidegger argues that our Being is care insofar as we have concerns. We have concerns because our life matters to us and it matters because we are aware that we will not be here forever and will one day die. As Hoffman notes, “care is Dasein’s basic state only because Dasein is, and understands itself as being, a mortal creature” (1993, p.2000). One way our concerns about our life can manifest is by taking care of what matters to us—our selves, others, animals, the environment, ideas, etc. This is where Heidegger’s work seems compatible with Noddings’. Although both discuss care distinctly, I suggest that if we find Heidegger’s work on Being worthy of consideration in the classroom then Noddings’ offers us a practical means of enacting our care through caring relations—especially when we look at caring for self.

Noddings, in her books *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to*

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72 Discussions of care are often associated with women, and for good reason. Caretaking has often been the domain of women—children, the sick, the disabled, elderly, and the dying. Caretaking has long been devalued and feminized (or perhaps feminized and then devalued), but that does not mean that men do not have the capacity or inclination to care. See Kittay’s *Love’s Labour* (1999) for more on this point.
Education (1992 and the second edition in 2005), and Starting at Home: Care and Social policy (2002), claims that “the desire to be cared for is almost certainly a human characteristic. Not everyone wants to be cuddled or fussed over. But everyone wants to be received, to elicit a response that is congruent with an underlying need or desire” (2005, p.17). This belief is not held exclusively by Noddings: indeed many theorists across various disciplines agree on this including Brené Brown, research professor at the University of Houston’s Graduate College of Social Work. Brown’s research attests that we are “wired for connection. It’s in our biology. From the time we are born, we need connection to thrive emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually” (2010, p.19). When we state with the understanding that everyone cares in the Heideggerian sense and everyone wants to be cared for in Noddings’ sense, then it is possible to see the significant of organizing life and learning around an ethic of care.

Noddings asserts that while people can be guided by an ethic of care, this ethic stems from natural caring—“a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it” (2002, p.2). Natural caring is “a longing for goodness that

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73 I primarily use the second edition of this book that was published in 2005.
74 For a neuroscience perspective see Banks (2001); psychology see Goleman (2006).
75 It is not without contention that I note biological characteristics of human beings. Some may have trouble with the invocation of innate interpretations of our desire to connect but there is considerable research behind the theory—especially when considering an infant and young child’s connection to their parents (Ainsworth 1967; 1969) Attachment behaviour—which shares much in common with the kind of connection Brown & Goleman discuss—has also been found to be vital to the survival of the human species according to Bowlby (1973).
76 Because “natural caring” is often associated with maternal experiences, it is worth noting two of the major criticisms against care ethics, which is that it is essentialist [Spelman (1988), Tronto (1994), and Hoagland (1991)] and that it valorises the oppression of women in a kind of slave morality [Puka (1990); Card (1990); Davion (1993)]. Noddings is cautious to note that natural care is not exclusively the realm of women, insisting that men can care too. Moreover, Noddings’ argues throughout much of her work that the education she envisions through an ethic of care
arises out of the experience of memory of being cared for” and is likened to a moral attitude (Flinders, 2001, p.211). The hope is that ethical caring will lead to natural caring over time. With this in mind, it is not surprising that care theory starts with an ideal home and then moves outwards—“learning first what it means to be cared for then to care for intimate others, and finally to care about those we cannot care for directly” (Noddings, 2002, p.31). In this sense, care requires a caring relation.

According to Noddings, “A caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared for” (2005, p.15). Both parties must contribute to the caring relation and agree that there is in fact a caring relation happening in order for the connection or encounter to be properly called such.77 Noddings explains that the state of consciousness of carer (or one-caring) is “characterised by engrossment and motivational displacement” (2005, p.17). By engrossment she means “an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for” and by motivational displacement “the sense that our motive energy is flowing toward others and their projects” (Noddings, 2005, p.15 and 16). Together, engrossment and motivational

put a very high valuation on the traditional occupations of women...[since]...care for children, the aged, and the ill must be shared by all capable adults, not just women, and everyone should understand that these activities bring special rewards as well as burdens” (Noddings, 1995, p.366). In this passage Noddings does not claim that women exclusively care because they are women, but implies that the domain of care is one where women have been disproportionately placed in a patriarchal society that devalues caring. I hold that it is possible to read Noddings without necessarily falling into essentialism.

77 As Noddings points out, some critics may worry that this “account puts a tremendous burden on the carer and very little on the recipient of care. But we must keep in mind that the basic caring relation is an encounter. My description of a caring relation does not entail that carer and cared-for are permanent labels for individuals. Mature relationships are characterized by mutuality. They are made up of strings of encounters in which the parties exchange places; both members are carers and cared-for as opportunities arise...[and] even when the second party in a relation cannot assume the status of carer, there is a genuine form of reciprocity that is essential to the relation” (2005, p.16-7).
displacement means “we are seized by the needs of another” (Noddings, 2005, p.16). Perhaps an obvious example here is that of a parent and a crying babe. Regardless of what is going on—withholding emergency or danger—a caring parent will drop everything and attend to their child. Others have referred to this experience as attention or mindfulness but this also closely resembles Heidegger’s notion of attunement, being-with, and care. With this in mind, it is important to consider that we can, and do, care for not just other people but also “care for ideas, for nonhuman life, for objects” and for ourselves (Noddings, 2005, p.18). Let us now turn to how Noddings bridges her ethics of care and education.

**Care in School**

In her book, *The Challenge of Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, Noddings offers us “an extensive thought experiment” where we are asked to

pretend that we have a large heterogeneous family to raise and educate. Our children have different ethnic heritages, widely different intellectual capacities, different physical strengths, and different interests. We want to respect their legitimate differences. At the same time, we think there are some things they all should learn and some

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78 I say parent deliberately here instead of mother or father because too often care is exclusively seen as the domain of women. Not only do I disagree that men do not care, but there are also problems with essentializing all women as “carers”. An ethics of care may have sprung from feminist concerns, but it does not reside there exclusively. Moreover, feminism does not mean exclusively feminine, female, or woman.

79 For example, see Iris Murdoch (1970)

80 For example, see Jon Kabat-Zinn and Myla Kabat-Zinn (1997)
other things to which they should all be exposed so that they can make well-informed choices. (2005, p. xxvi)

The thought experiment is hoped to bridge the care that happens at home to the care that could—or should—exist in schools. Homes are the site of our first educational encounters and are our primary educators. With this in mind, Noddings believes that “schools should, as far as possible, use the sort of methods found in the best homes to educate” (Noddings, 2002, p.289).\(^\text{81}\) This idea dates back to at least John Dewey’s The School and Society (1902) where he states, “What the best parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unloving; acted upon, it destroys our democracy” (p.3). It is important to note that Noddings’ theory of care in education shares Dewey’s aim and democratic context.

When Noddings considers the kind of people she wants her children to be, she identifies four primary characteristics: competent, caring, loving, and lovable. So education for Noddings has the general aim “to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (Noddings, 2005, p.xxvi). We may not agree on this list—I know I would at least like to add authentic—but Noddings recognized her characteristics may not suit everyone. Her thought experiment leaves open the possibility of multiple ideas on what we want for our large families and the kind of education we would want for them (Noddings, 2005, p.xvi).

\(^{81}\) Unfortunately not all homes have healthy or abundant forms of care present, but this is not an argument against advocating for care in schools; it is another argument for it. If not all children are exposed to caring relationships at home, schools may be the next best place to model this behaviour if we wish to develop adults capable of care.
p.45). Heuristically, she states that she must—and in fact we must—keep in mind that a practical translation of what she says must depend on dialogue. “The question, ‘What kind of education would I want for them?’ must be supplemented by the question, ‘What kind of education would you want for them?’” (Noddings, 2005, p.45). The pluralism in our responses is part of why we must consider this educational inquiry in a democratic context. Nodding states “it is important for families to have a choice between broadly different approaches to education” in order to remain flexible and responsive (2005, p.xvii-xviii). Moreover, different approaches to education works towards being responsive to teachers, allowing them “to do their best work according to their own legitimate philosophy” (Noddings, 2005, p.xvii). Organizing schools around an ethic of care would enhance, according to Noddings, both traditional and progressive approaches to education. For Noddings, learning to care “defines genuine education” where either approach could flourish (2005, p.xiii). The question of how should we educate our children then, is partly defined by the understanding that not all of them are the same—they should, as Dewey stated, be taught by what best matches their needs, capacities, and interests—and by the fact that they live in a democracy—where we have to consider a pluralism of values and where education is a public good.

In outlining the characteristics of care in schools, Noddings notes that “[m]oral education from the perspective of an ethic of care has four major

\footnote{Noddings discusses the swinging pendulum in education—between the “too discipline-centered, traditional, and teacher centered” of traditional education and the “more flexible, present-oriented, and child-centered ways” of progressive educators (2005, p.xiv). While she often finds herself situated more in the progressive came, Noddings believes “At present, we live in a tyranny of opposing purposes” and “it serves none of us well” (2005, p.xiv).}
components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation” (2005, p.22). The vital component in caring is modeling because we cannot simply tell our students to care (as we would to say principles of mathematical reasoning); instead we need to “show them how to care by creating caring relations with them” (Noddings, 2005, p.22). Moreover, as Noddings notes, modeling is vital because the “capacity to care may be dependent on adequate experience in being cared for” (2005, p.22). We are reminded here that an ethic of care derives from natural caring that is found in the home.

Dialogue is the second essential component of an ethic of care because it “provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring” and it “connects us to each other and helps to maintain caring relations” while contributing “to a habit of mind—that of seeking adequate information on which to make decisions,” (Noddings, 2005, p.23). Noddings defines dialogue similarly to Paulo Freire (1970) as an open-ended engagement without an outcome predetermined from the outset.

Practice is the third component of moral education according to Noddings because “[a]ttitudes and mentalities are shaped, at least in part, by experience” (2005, p.23). By providing opportunities for students to approach moral life prepared to care we allow them the space to develop the skills in caregiving (Noddings, 2005, p.23-4). The fourth component of moral education from the perspective of caring is confirmation. Drawing from Martin Buber’s work, Noddings describes confirmation as “an act of affirming and encouraging the best

83 Modeling as a vital component rings true of authenticity as well according to Kreber et al. who note that “authentic teachers encourage authenticity through care” by modeling the behaviour (2007, p.29).
in others. When we confirm someone, we spot a better self and encourage its development” (2005, p.25). Essential to spotting a “better self” in another is knowing them well enough to see what they are trying to become. This requires a “relation of trust” to ground the confirmation and continuity to allow for the time required to know the cared-for (Noddings, 2005, p.25-6).

Together, continuity, confirmation, practice, dialogue, and modeling help shape what care looks like in schools. Through these core components, Noddings believes that caring relationships can be fostered and maintained in schools, which will provide students a basis in moral education. Caring, for Noddings, “is the very bedrock of all successful education” and she holds that “contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light” (2005, p.27). When we consider how caring relations are a practical means of enacting the care we have for our life, we can see how establishing an education based off caring is critical for creating the space where students can have their needs met, engage their capacities, and explore their interests. This is critical for an education-towards-death because it is what allows us to teach, learn, and live authentically.

The basic characteristics of schools, on Noddings account, should be both responsive and accountable: responsive to the needs, capabilities, and interests of children, parents, and teachers, and accountable “for the achievement of their stated purposes” (Noddings, 2005, p.xx). And those who are more roughly situated in the progressive camp “ask much more of our schools than acceptable test scores on basic subjects. We look for the development of democratic character, critical thinking, and caring. We will hold our schools responsible not
just for outcomes (we know these will vary), but for the opportunities and choices they offer” (Noddings 2005, p.xx). This notion that there is more than reading and arithmetic at stake in our schools is evident in some policy documents throughout Canada. We turn now to Saskatchewan as an example of why an ethic of care is a desirable educational endeavour.

The Saskatchewan Context

Those not sympathetic towards existentialism in education or care ethics may think that an education-towards-death is abstract or even futile but by discussing some of Saskatchewan’s renewed curriculum, I hope to demonstrate how an education-towards-death correlate to the goals and essential learnings outlined by the Ministry of Education. In this way, an education-towards-death seems at least plausible in the Saskatchewan context.

There are twenty-eight school divisions in Saskatchewan and I would wager that no two classes—even two of the same grade in the same division—are the same. This is largely because of the diversity in Saskatchewan and the unique individuals that that comprise each class. So why is it that they are all subjected to the same standards and curriculum? Despite the different individuals in every class, the education that students receive is “heavily

84 The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education notes that “foundational to the Cross-curricular Competencies are indigenous epistemologies” (2010, p.23). Further elaboration on this point would be critical for an education-towards-death to be adequately grounded in the Saskatchewan (if not Canadian) context, where so many of our Aboriginal peoples have been cheated out of an equitable education. While I cannot explore this idea in an adequate way here, readers should note the import Indigenous epistemologies could have on education-towards-death.

85 Looking at the most recent Census data from 2011, we can see a wealth of ethnic origins (German, English, Scottish, Canadian, Irish, Ukrainian, French, North American Indian, Norwegian and Polish among them), languages (English, German, Cree, French, Ukrainian, Tagalog, Dene among the top), education, incomes, housing, living arrangements, and family structures. See http://www.stats.gov.sk.ca/pop/ for more details.
conditioned by sets of standards and objectives determined quite independently of individual learners, and indeed, their teachers” (Bonnett, 2009, p.358). A one-size-fits-all model of schooling does nothing to support our most vulnerable students nor does it help the existential flourishing of anyone. Instead of treating students like complex beings, full of existential longing, we level them off to the same common denominator—as if to allow the ensnarement of the “They” that Heidegger warned us against.

Indeed there is a large conversation going on in education about the desirability of standardization, but our focus here is on how we can take into consideration the plurality of individual capabilities, interests, and values and establish an education that puts our mortality and care at its core. Noddings’ care in education offers us a good place to start and there seems to be implicit support for such a move in Saskatchewan when we consider the renewed curriculum that came out in 2010. Outlined in the renewal documents are three broad areas of learning that “reflect the desired attributes for Saskatchewan’s PreK-12 students” and include sense of self, community and place; lifelong learners; and engaged citizens (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p.22). The broad areas of learning replaces the former “Goals of Education for Saskatchewan” (1985). These Broad Areas of Learning work in conjunction with the Cross-Curricular Competencies outlined by the Ministry of Education and

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86 For more on this see Portelli & Solomon (2001), Eisner (1995) and Swartz (1996).
87 For more details of the renewal see https://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/curricula/English/Renewed_Curricula.pdf
88 The stated goals of education in Saskatchewan were basic skills, life-long learning, understanding and relating to others, self concept development, positive life style, spiritual development, career and consumer decisions, membership in society, and growing with change. For more details on these see http://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/curricula/English/Goals_of_Education_1985.pdf
are “intended to embrace the Common Essential Learnings and support student achievement of subject area outcomes and, ultimately, the provincial Goals of Education (as expressed through the Broad Areas of Learning). These competencies will ‘strengthen and enrich students’ present learning and future lives’ (Saskatchewan Education, 1988, p.11)” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p.23).

The four cross-curricular competencies include thinking; identity and interdependence; literacies; and social responsibility. Each cross-competency has three K-12 goals: for thinking it is to think and learn contextually, creatively, and critically. For identity and interdependence it is to understand, value, and care for oneself (intellectually, emotionally, physically, spiritually) understand; value and care for others; and understand and value social, economic, and environmental interdependence and sustainability. For literacies the goals are to construct knowledge related to various literacies, explore and interpret the world using various literacies, and express understanding and communicate meaning using various literacies. And finally, the goals to develop social responsibility are to use moral reasoning processes, engage in communitarian\textsuperscript{89} thinking and dialogue, and take social action. Combined, the Broad Areas of Learning and the Cross Curricular Competencies appear compatible with Noddings’ view of education that should promote democratic character, critical thinking, and caring. They also work to help root an education-towards-death by establishing a sense

\textsuperscript{89} The Cross-curricular Competencies document stats that “Communitarian thinking is the ability to ‘think with’ others, learn from others, and support the thinking of others” (September 24, 2010).
of self, understanding, valuing and caring for oneself and others as key components of education-towards-death.

**Contextualizing an Education-towards-Death in Authentic Education**

At this point it should be clear that death, care, caring, and authenticity are all essential to an education-towards-death, at least according to the educational philosophy outlined above. The fact that we will certainly die but its time and place is indeterminate means we live in the constant state of our possibility being an impossibility. In other words, we are finite and live our entire lives in this finitude. This understanding works to create concerns for us because we are the types of beings that care about being. Since we are social beings and we exist in pluralism—especially when we consider schools—one way we can enact our care is through caring relations.\(^{90}\) By putting care at the core of education we are able to respond to the needs of students (teachers, parents, and staff). Two of the most fundamental needs students have, according to Noddings and extrapolating from Heidegger, are to be cared for and to live with personal meaning. I argue that an education-towards-death exemplifies the kind of care and meaningfulness that students require in order to live authentically—that is, in the light of death.\(^{91}\) Because one of the primary goals of an education-towards-

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\(^{90}\) I define pluralism here as cultural pluralism where smaller groups within a larger society are able to maintain their unique cultural identities.

\(^{91}\) It is worth re-iterating here that the discourse on authenticity in philosophy is highly contested. As I discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Bialystok outlines four philosophical accounts of authenticity—the Romantic, existentialist, virtue and autonomy description—and argues that none of them are satisfying despite how convincing individual instances of intuitive authenticity remain. She ends her paper by saying that the referent for an adequate account of authenticity is more psychological, or perhaps phenomenological than it is metaphysical. For the purposes of this thesis, authenticity is when your actions are in line with your beliefs and values. In this way, authenticity is something only you can assess for yourself (or perhaps maybe someone who is
death is authenticity, it is best suited in the education field of authentic teaching.

In fact, I will argue that an education-towards-death contributes to the field of authentic teaching by filling a gap in the literature with regards to the significant connection between authenticity and death.

Authenticity in teaching is a highly contested topic, which is not surprising given the multiplicity of definitions of authenticity in the literature (Kreber et al, 2007). Philosophers, including, but not limited to, the ancient Greeks,92 the Romantics,93 the Existentialists94 and their critics95, have been discussing authenticity implicitly and explicitly through the centuries, but in recent years the notion of authenticity has entered “the disciplinary discourse of academics in the field of education” (Kreber, 2010, p.178).96 Specifically, British97 and North American98 academics in adult and higher education and those in organizational and school leadership99 have discussed the value and significance of authenticity “to engage in higher and more worthwhile forms of teaching, learning, and leading” (Kreber, 2010, p.178).100

Despite the different approaches to authenticity in education there are common held beliefs that authenticity makes “individuals more whole, more

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92 See Nehamas (1998)
93 Most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau
94 See the works of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Heidegger
95 For example, see Adorno (1973).
96 In The Components of Authentic Learning (2006), Rule argues that authentic learning started to surface in the last 1980s but explicit discussions on authenticity in education entails only started to happen at the turn of the 21st century.
100 For further elaboration on authenticity in education see the comparative review of the literature in Kreber et al 2007.
integrated, more fully human, more aware, more content with their personal and professional lives, their actions more clearly linked to purpose, ‘empowered,’ better able to engage in community with others, and so forth” (Kreber et al, 2007, p.24). While these sound like worthwhile outcomes, I do not believe the literature on authenticity in education has adequately rooted authenticity. This leaves the concept “vaguely understood and ill defined” which leaves out “a persuasive rationale for why we should be concerned with the phenomenon in the first place” (Kreber et al, 2007, p.25). I argue that through Heidegger’s ontology and the help of Noddings’ care, we can help root authenticity in education to something meaningful in our lives—that is, care and our mortality.

Kreber holds there is a “responsibility of both individuals and society in working towards and allowing for authenticity” (Kreber, 2010, p.179). If we understand authenticity as living in the light of our death then an education-towards-death fills this responsibility in schools by teaching and learning in the light of death. An education-towards-death, or teaching and learning in the light of our death entails having a consciousness of our mortality, and engagement of our lives where we foster our concerns, an ability to distinguish meaningful actions from our fallenness, and a caring disposition. Key to this philosophy is our mortality because a conception of authenticity in education that does not take stock of our mortality allows teachers and students to remain in a “constant tranquilization about death” and does not adequately disrupt “the tendency toward falling prey” (Heidegger, 1996, p.235). Like living in the light of death, teaching and learning in the light of death is no small feat. Through an education-
towards-death we are asked to examine and disrupt the convention, comfort, and conformity characterizing our everydayness, because if we remain absorbed in the They, we are unable to realize our authentic capability of being (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.28). This does not necessarily entail the radical individualism or fascism that Theodor Adorno believes it would as “it is not impossible to conceptualize the ideal of authenticity existing alongside the idea of pluralism” (Bialystok, 2009, p.146). Instead, what living in the light of death provides a wake up call and a sense of clarity that either affirms you are living life in a way that is personally significant or that you want to recalibrate priorities and how your limited time is being spent. The tragedy on the beach I described in the introduction is an example of such a wake-up call. The next chapter will outline in more detail this facet of an education-towards-death.

Following the components Noddings outlines for an ethic of care, an education-towards-death is characterized by four major parts: modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Kreber et al conclude “a central assumption running through some of the literature is that if authenticity were adopted as a worthwhile goal with respect to learners...[then]...it would be critical that educators be authentic themselves” (2007, p.25). This would require teachers to come to terms with the inevitable fact of their own mortality. As Cynthia Dillard notes in her Book, On Spiritual Strivings, As teachers and researchers, ought we not be researching, teaching and writing “as if we were dying”? Such a standard of rigor would

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101 Adorno offers a scathing critique of Heidegger in The Jargon of Authenticity (1964) that was shares with others in the Frankfurt School, including Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Marcuse (Bialystok, 2009).
require that we be ever vigilant in examining and tending to our body, mind, and spirit everyday—and that we be absolutely cognizant of our short time on this planet...Such practice would clearly help us to transform the ways we act, talk, and interact with others. (2006, p.73)

Part of this vigilant examining is asking us, as teachers, to “the fact that not only our lives but also our working lives as educators...are finite” (Kreber et al, 2007, p.33). Since our working lives as educators will end at some point an education-towards-death prompts us to ask what this career is really about. What kind of person and teacher do we want to be? What do we want to become? Through an education-towards-death we choose authenticity over everydayness as teachers and we commit to helping students do the same. Through caring relationships, authentic teachers are able to encourage care and authenticity in students (Kreber et al., 2007, p.29).

The remaining components of an education-towards-death continue in correspondence to Noddings’ components of care. Dialogue allows for teachers to learn about the concerns, interests, needs, and capabilities of students, while providing them with agency to take responsibility for their own thoughts and learning process through reasoning. Practice provides opportunities for students to gain experience with considering their mortality, caring, and being authentic. And confirmation lets students know that you see their potential and best selves, while demonstrating that care for them and their growth towards authenticity. By establishing caring relations, students are able to confront their mortality and attune themselves authentically to the world. Recall that caring is one mode of
the kind of care Heidegger discussed, and we care in large part because we are finite beings aware of our finitude. In a way, caring always comes back to death because our “[b]eing towards death is grounded in care, and the call of conscience is the call of care” (Dahlstrom, 2013, p.43). So too then does our mortality always root our authenticity.
III. AN EDUCATION-TOWARDS-DEATH

“It is up to me now to choose how to live out the months that remain to me. I have to live in the richest, deepest, most productive way I can.”—Oliver Sacks

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life…”

—Henry David Thoreau

Our mortality teaches us important lessons, not least of which are care and authenticity. Because death is inevitable but we do not know when we will die, we live continually in the possibility of our impossibility. Through our mortality we are imbued with the choice whether or not to create a life worth living. Some near the end of life share deep convictions on what a life worth living means—regardless of whether they peacefully look back on their fulfilling life or if they are consumed by regret. Death has a way of clarifying life for us. As such, death serves as a wake up call to many. We learn valuable lessons when someone close to us is dying or has a near death experience; however, the loudest alarm bell tends to be our own death or near death experience because, as Heidegger noted, our death is our “ownmost.” There is no way another person can take over the experience for any of us, nor are we able to separate ourselves from it. Whenever death knocks—whether we are ready or not—we are forced to acknowledge our own mortality, and our life, with a great sense of urgency. Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies in life is to wait until our deathbed to face our finitude and consider what it all really means.
The following pages will define education-towards-death and outline four sites where it might be found: through the practice of mindfulness, emotional engagement, deeper engagement with others, and defining and living our own personally meaningful lives. These four sites do not guarantee an education-towards-death is being achieved, but, I argue, they do provide the opportunity for living closer to the light of death. These four suggested sites correspond to the four philosophical roots of an education-towards-death. Mindfulness is linked to death, authenticity, and the need to become conscience of our Being. Emotional engagement is tied with care, caring, and how we are attuned to the world and have concerns about our life. Deeper engagement with others is bound up with care, caring, and our social existence. Defining and living our own personally meaningful life is most closely tied to authenticity and our mortality, but all four sites are related in some way to the four concepts of death, care, caring, and authenticity because the concepts are so intimately related to one another in an education-towards-death.

Seeing as those nearest to death are most likely to be in the light of death as they are brought face to face with mortality, I turn to Bronnie Ware’s *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing* to help illustrate the examples I offer of sites of an education-towards-death. Ware spent a portion of her life working in palliative care as an end of life companion in Australia. She turned her experiences into a best-selling memoir that discusses what she calls a “work from the heart” that turned into her life’s work. As the book title suggests, Ware discusses the top five regrets of the dying (2011):
• The desire to have had the courage to express feelings;
• The desire to have stayed in touch with friends and loved ones better; the wish that they had not spent so much time working;
• The desire to have allowed oneself to be happy; and
• The wish to have lived a life true to themselves instead of worrying so much about the opinions of others.

The stories and insights these people had on their deathbeds help ground an education-towards-death because they express the lived experience of dying, care, caring, and authenticity. Although some of Ware’s clients were at peace on their deathbed—full of contentment due to a life well lived—the majority of those dying under her care shared these prevailing regrets, albeit to different degrees. Faced with death, Ware’s clients were forced to develop clarity on their lives—whether they found regret or fulfilment was largely a matter of whether or not they lived in the light of death prior to being on their deathbed. We do not have to wait until our last few days to engage with death however—we can do it now and we can even do it in our classrooms. As Ware describes

Our society has shut death out, almost as a denial of its existence. This denial leaves both the dying person and the family or friends totally unprepared for something that is inevitable. We are all going to die. But rather than acknowledge the existence of death, we try to hide it. It is as if we are trying to convince ourselves that ‘out of sight, out of mind’ really works. But it doesn’t, because we carry on trying to validate ourselves through our material life and associated fearful behaviour instead. If we are
able to face our own inevitable death with honest acceptance, before we have reached that time, then we shift our priorities well before it is too late. This gives us the opportunity to then put our energies into directions of true value. Once we acknowledge that limited time is remaining—although we don’t know if that is years, weeks, or hours—we are less driven by ego or by what other people think of us. Instead, we are more driven by what our hearts truly want. This acknowledgement of our inevitable, approaching death, offers us the opportunity to find greater purpose and satisfaction in the time we have remaining. (2011, p.17-18)

Unbeknownst to her, Ware’s theory on life and death echoes much of Heidegger’s analysis eighty-five years earlier. In the above passage we hear of the dangers of living in an ontological slumber or what Heidegger calls a “constant tranquilization about death.” By avoiding the “call to consciousness” we allow ourselves to be absorbed in the world without creating a life that is personally meaningful. As we will see with stories from Ware’s clients, death has the ability to provide a clarity about our lives that can prompt grave recalibration. The hope is that through living like we are being-towards-death and teaching from an education-towards-death we do not restrict our awareness to the end of life. Alongside Ware, I will also draw on Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler’s Life Lessons: Two Experts on Death and Dying Teach Us About the Mysteries of Life and Living.

Kübler-Ross (1926-2004) was a psychiatrist, professor at the University of Chicago, and a pioneer in death studies. David Kessler, author, public speaker,
and death and grieving expert, worked closely with Kübler-Ross for a decade and was with her at the end of her life. They co-wrote two books together and the one I draw primarily from takes “the lessons from the edge of life and give[s] them to people who still have lots of time to make changes and to enjoy the results” (2002, p. 223). These lessons include the importance of relationships, living in the present moment, happiness as a state of mind we must continually choose and how authenticity is key to a fulfilling life. These conclusions are similar to Ware’s conclusions and others working with those close to death.¹⁰²

Of note before beginning to sketch education-towards-death, is that there appears to be a lack of literature on death in the field of philosophy of education as it relates ontologically. While there are a few philosophers who take up Heidegger and education¹⁰³, the concentration is not on how to operationalize death in education, which I believe warrants serious consideration in the classroom. So while some philosophers of education take up Heidegger, they do not adequately take up our being-towards-death.

Philosophy, more broadly conceived than philosophy of education, has much to say on the topic of death.¹⁰⁴ As I noted in the first chapter, discourse around death is inherently multidisciplinary and at the same time philosophical in

¹⁰² For more examples, see Brizzi’s 100 Days of Happiness (2015) or Clark III’s Dying: A Father and Son Talk about Life, Regrets and Making up Lost Time (2014),
¹⁰³ For example, see Iain Thomson’s work Heidegger’s Perfectionist Philosophy of Education in Being and Time (2005) or Heidegger on Ontological Education, or: How We Become Who We Are (2001); Michael A. Peter’s book, Heidegger, Education, and Modernity (2002); and John Quay’s Education, Experience and Existence: Engaging Dewey, Peirce and Heidegger (2013)
nature. While discussions of death are ripe in philosophy, the conversation remains primarily concerned with analysing the nature of death; the potential evil, harm or misfortune of death; or debates the ethics of killing, suicide, euthanasia, and abortion. In most of the philosophy literature on death, education is almost never mentioned.

The field of thanatology (from the Greek thanatos, for death) is the interdisciplinary study of death, dying and their related issues (Kastenbaum, 2012, p.472). Despite having a long unofficial history, death education emerged in the 1960s as one branch of thanatology (Kastenbaum, 2012, p.466). Death education is primarily concerned with the practices, attitudes, common questions, and grief. What are missing from death education however is a serious consideration of an ontological perspective on death and a means of living as being-towards-death. In other words, while the field of death education deals with death and education, it leaves out a serious consideration of any kind of existential-ontology.

In his article, A Perspective on the Current State of Death Education, Hannelore Wass discusses how “although the contemporary study of death, dying, and bereavement is remarkable in scope and rage, the knowledge accumulated has not substantially affected the curricula” (2004, p.297). While the literature is shared amongst sympathetic readers in related fields, there seems to be integration resistance at the institutional level. The barriers, according to

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Wass “essentially consist of the failure to acknowledge the need for death education and, closely related, a lack of commitment, primarily of resources” (2004, p.298). Along with more integration, Wass calls for an attendance to the personal dimension of death education, data on death educators, and data on neglected groups that continually face death, like police officers, and firefighters.

The final place I tried to find a philosophy of education that deals meaningfully with death was practitioner education. As another branch of thanatology, practitioner education offers assistance for grief counsellors, doctors, nurses, psychologists, palliative care workers, and their students.106 Needless to say there was little engagement with death at the philosophical level and no engagement with integrating death into the classroom as an ontological consideration.

While there is literature on death education more broadly conceived, it primarily resides as managing death in the medical field, as bereavement in psychology, death issues (e.g., euthanasia and suicide) in ethics and law, and death practices, attitudes, and rituals in religion, sociology, and history.107 Philosophy of education, death education, and thanatology practitioner education do not offer any significant overlap of existential-ontology offered by Heidegger and pedagogy for integrating our being-towards-death into the classroom. The

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107 See John F. Szabo’s Death and Dying: An Annotated Bibliography of the Thanatological Literature (2010) for a recent and thorough overview of and introduction to the literature.
Defining Education-towards-Death

Imagine that you are a teacher and all of your students were terminally ill. How would you treat them? Would you be a little kinder? More patient? What content would you prioritize? Would it be any different from a different group of students? Why? We are all always in the process of dying because we all live continually with the potential to die at any moment. An education-towards-death prioritizes this knowledge and makes it part of our daily practice.

Kathleen G. Davis is a paediatric classroom teacher whose article, *Educational Needs of the Terminally Ill Student*, discusses what students who are terminally ill require in their education. Just as Noddings urged us to think beyond traditional disciplinary lines, Davis states “[f]ar beyond imparting knowledge and basic instruction, school provides the arena for meeting a child’s needs in areas of socialization, achieving success, and the identification of him-or herself as an important member of society. These areas are of the utmost importance to the terminally ill children, as well as their healthy peers” (1989, p.235). Professor Trisha Ainsa, from the Teacher Education Department at the University of Texas, confirms that there “are basic human needs that exist at all times but…are particularly important during the dying process” (1981, p.398). These basic needs are (1981):

- The need to know that he or she is dying
- The need for meaningful communication

education-towards-death that I put forward is intended to begin building on the existing literature include an existential-ontological perspective.
• The need to live to the end with dignity
• The need to be listened to without anger and with acceptance
• The need for hope
• The need to know that he or she is a valuable person
• The need not to be forgotten
• The need to maintain self-esteem

The first point, that students need to know that they are dying, is where education-towards-death begins. Talking about death with students is therefore a critical step in an education-towards-death. Death is often considered taboo in the classroom and then hidden, but this does a disservice to students because it creates a culture of fear. Ainsa points out that a large part of why death in our society is difficult is because it is unfamiliar and this routine sheltering from death and dying has created unnecessary fear (1981, p.397). Moreover, when kept in ignorance, students are unable to move to a place of acceptance of their finitude.\textsuperscript{108}

Other needs of the terminally ill child—meaningful communication, being listened to without anger and with acceptance, and knowing that they are a valuable people—are represented through Noddings’ ethic of care, including in particular the components of care of dialogue and confirmation. Students should be able to engage in meaningful conversation about death and dying, and they

\textsuperscript{108} Elizabeth Kübler Ross discusses five psychological stages humans go through in order to cope with their death: denial and isolation; anger-rage-envy and resentment; bargaining; depression; and acceptance (1976). Ainsa argues that when we shelter people from death they are unable to make it past the first stage of denial and isolation, thereby never coming to an acceptance of death (1981, p.397-8).
should feel that they have been cared for throughout their education. And it is not just the terminally ill child that has these needs, but all children.

Davis’ review of the literature confirmed that while the educational needs of the terminally ill student is a subject that has not yet been explored in depth, it is also true that the research that has been done has “historically been done by the medical community” not the education community (1989, p.245). This is a surprising gap in the education literature that an education-towards-death can hopefully begin to fill.

An education-towards-death leads to something in particular—a sense of clarity on the shortness of life and of the things/people who are personally significant; a waking point that either affirms you are living life in a way that is personally significant or that you want to recalibrate priorities and how your finite time in being spent. The dying are our best teachers in this regard because they have come to gain this clarity and that lead to either affirmation or deep regret. The most common regret of the dying is that they did not have this clarity and affirmation or recalibration until they were really close to dying. They advocate that we should learn the lessons of the dying sooner. I argue that an education-towards-death is a way to come to clarity on our lives before our last few days.

In order to avoid deathbed regrets—like the ones Ivan Ilych faced and those outlined by Ware—and to create a life worth living, we must make room to engage with death before it is too late. An education-towards-death offers this opportunity in schools by bringing our mortality to the core of what we teach and learn. Along with our mortality, care, caring, and authenticity encapsulate the four
core concepts that root an education-towards-death. Together, they form the
dasis from which we can live, teach, and learn in the light of our death. An
education-towards-death is therefore a theory, a philosophy of education. But
theory without a practice is not very useful. What would living and learning with
mortality at the core look like? How can we make our mortality educative in our
daily lives? Starting from the working definition of education-towards-death as a
clarifier and possible recalibrator for students to live authentic lives, this chapter
will outline four means of incorporating an education-towards-death in the
classroom. It is important to note that is in fact only one way of operationalizing
the idea because it would not be true to the existential tradition that Heidegger is
working within to prescribe a narrow set of practices. Nor would it do justice to
Noddings’ theory of care to suggest a limited range of acceptable behaviours for
enacting an education-towards-death, because, as she notes, “the living other is
more important than any theory and my theory must be subordinate to the caring

Ainsa notes that “[t]he development of a mature concept of death is a slow
process which parallels the child’s growth and development” and suggests that
dead education be structured around the age and maturity of students (1981,
p.398). Extrapolating from Ainsa’s suggestions for the terminally ill child,
literature, writing, role playing, magic circle discussions, play therapy, and art
therapy can be used in an age-appropriate manner to help create mindfulness of
death and dying, an outlet to engage emotions meaningfully, a way to build
caring relationships with others, and a means of finding and living a personally meaningful life (1981).

**Mindfulness: Awareness & Focus**

“To live is the rarest thing in the world.
Most people exist, that is all.”—Oscar Wilde

“If we are not fully ourselves, truly in the present moment, we miss everything.”—Thich Nhat Hanh

Anyone who has sat in a waiting room or next to someone who is dying knows that time stands still. We become painfully awake and present in the moment and to the situation at hand. This feeling is similar to that of mindfulness: “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception” (Thera 1972, 5). With roots in contemplative traditions, including Buddhism, mindfulness has exploded in scientific literature in the past century, usually including four major elements in its discussion: awareness, sustained attention, focus on present moment and nonjudgmental acceptance. For the purposes of an education-towards-death, awareness and focus on the present moment are the concentration here.

The practice of mindfulness means paying attention deliberately and in the present moment. Mindfulness is a kind of consciousness about ourselves, the world we inhabit, and other inhabitants around us. In Heidegger’s terms, it is the acknowledgement of our thrownness and our attunement to the world (our Being-here). It is the kind of calm and stillness, to use Brown’s terminology, that we require in order to make the kind of clearing necessary for existence to disclose itself to us. There is extensive literature citing the benefits of mindfulness.

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including, but not limited to the procurement of self-esteem, reduction of anxiety, increased emotional intelligence including clarity about one’s emotional states;\textsuperscript{110} increased openness and receptivity to new experiences;\textsuperscript{111} stress reduction, increased empathy, increased working memory capacity and attention;\textsuperscript{112} de-automization of life and overall improvement of well-being.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, by adding clarity and vividness to experience, mindfulness can “contribute to well-being and happiness in a direct way” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p.823).\textsuperscript{114} While there are multiple ways to become mindful, through an education-towards-death, mindfulness can be spurred to raise our level of consciousness about our Being. Reciprocally, mindfulness can also help spur an education-towards-death and help us engage with death, and life, more meaningfully.

Deikman (1982) and Martin (1997) have discussed mindfulness as open or receptive awareness and attention—a consciousness that is primarily concerned with the quality of said consciousness. For example, when we are speaking with a loved one, we can be highly attentive in the conversation and aware of the subtle undertones existing beneath. We can really listen without the distraction of the outside world and dwell in the conversation with and for another. What if more of our conversations were like this? Would it not be fulfilling to have more conversation like this and less of the superficial sort?

Philosopher and psychologist William James would agree. As a person deeply interested in the field of consciousness, James stated, “Compared to what we

\textsuperscript{110} See Sakivey et al. (1995)
\textsuperscript{111} See Costa & McCrae (1992)
\textsuperscript{112} See Safran & Segal (1990)
\textsuperscript{113} See LeBel & Dube (2001), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Deci & Ryan (1985).
\textsuperscript{114} Also see Brazier, D. (1995) and Martin (1997)
ought to be, we are only half awake” (1924, p.237). In other words, we are unable to be authentically attuned to the world because of our preoccupation with our everydayness and the They. James’ early understanding of consciousness is being proven again and again as psychologists study mindfulness and de-automatization.\textsuperscript{115} Where some people may be missing one or more components of mindfulness can result in “mindless behaviour” or in less “awake” states of habitual or automatic functioning, mindfulness captures a quality of consciousness that is characterized by clarity and vividness of current experience (Langer & Piper 1987). Because mindfulness has the capacity to help individuals disengage from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behaviour patterns, it plays a key role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behaviours which has long been associated with well-being enhancement (Ryan & Deci, 2008; Tart 1994). As Kubler-Ross and Kessler state, “when we’re not living in the moment, we don’t really see each other or ourselves. And if we’re not living in the moment, we can’t find happiness” (2002, p.123). Therefore, by cultivating mindfulness through our dealings with death we are able to bring awareness to the facets of life that have been alienated, ignored, or distorted, and disengage or de-automize from these inauthentic behaviours. In doing so, we create the space to live our life deliberately. If something as simple as a paper cut can force us to acknowledge our fragility in a more intentional way then imagine if we could harness this understanding of our finitude in a mindful way and cultivate our life around it. Education-towards-death provides the space to slow down, take stock

\textsuperscript{115} For examples see the following: Langer (1989); Moore & Malinowski (2009); Kang, Gruber & Gray (2013); Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz (1978); Bargh & Chartrand (1999).
of our life and decide how best to proceed in the light of our fragility. One of Ware’s clients, Anthony, is an example of the potential dangers of living life assimilated to the They.

Anthony came from a high profile family in the business world and spent his life up until his thirties indulging in fast cars, expensive escorts, and causing havoc (Ware, 2011, p.48). Coming from the wealthy suburbs, Anthony felt immense pressure to live up to his family’s elaborate lifestyle and had established very little self-worth in the process. This led to a lot of reckless behaviour and one such dangerous prank left him with severely damaged organs and limbs. While multiple operations were performed in hopes of saving his life, it was clear he would not be able to recover from the extensive damages over the years. Ware spent time with Anthony during his last few weeks in the hospital and she saw how damaging his mindless behaviour was. As she states, “we are all fairly malleable, bendable creatures really. While we have the choice to think for ourselves and have free will to live the way our hearts guide us, our environment has huge effect on us all, particularly until we start choosing life from a more conscious perspective” (2011, p.50). We could say that Anthony’s life was a series of going through the motions and not really choosing for himself but according to what was expected of him to the point of never establishing his own personal meaning. In a way, Anthony forgot to care about his existence because he never faced his mortality. Had he been more mindful—or had mindfulness modelled, discussed and confirmed—perhaps he would have cultivated a deeper sense of care. Maybe if he learned through an education-
towards-death he would have been able to avoid an unfulfilled life.

Working from an education-towards-death, we are called from our everydayness, and falling prey to the They, to be authentically engaged in the world. The awareness and focus that arises from being mindful helps us de-automize our life, acknowledge the continual possibility of our impossibility, and live in the light of our finitude. This means being mindful of the daily dance we usually perform and choosing our own beat to move to. For these reasons, an education-towards-death supports, and is supported by, mindful exercises in the classroom. This could include breathing techniques, sensory walks, and journaling.  

**Emotional Engagement**

“Nothing is as uncomfortable, dangerous, and hurtful as believing that I’m standing on the outside of my life looking in and wondering what it would be like if I had the courage to show up and let myself be seen.” — Brené Brown

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” — Aristotle

When we stop the automization of life, we have an opportunity to become more aware of ourselves and part of this recognition involves becoming aware of our attunement to the world—our moods. One of the top regrets of the dying that Ware discusses in her book is the wish to have had the courage to express their emotions. Fear of rejection or being denied love and belonging held back Jozsef, for example, from letting his family get close to him: “I was too scared to let my

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feelings show. So I worked and worked and kept the family at a distance. They didn’t deserve to be so alone. Now I wish they really knew me” (Ware, 2011, p.105). Jozsef’s situation was similar to that of Ilych’s that was described in Chapter I. Pride, apathy, and fear seem to hold many back from showing their authentic selves. Another reminder that living in the light of death can be very challenging if we omit caring relationships. It is my argument that by disclosing our Being through emotional engagement we would be fostering an education-towards-death because it involved care, caring, and authenticity. Moreover, an education-towards-death often involves engaging with our emotions as we move through fear and angst.

Traditionally, education is associated with the mind and hence with reason and rationality, and quite frequently divorced entirely from consideration of our physical, emotional, and even spiritual selves. But, as Dahlstrom notes in his analysis of mood in Heidegger’s work, “It is far closer to the truth to say ‘I feel, therefore I am’ than to say ‘I think, therefore I am,’ not only because moods precede knowing and willing, but also because they tell us, more fundamentally than anything else does, that we are” (2013, p.133). In other words, we are always in a mood, always attuned to the world in some way, and always feeling something. Therefore if we are to take care of ourselves, as Noddings suggests as essential to the project of care in schools, then we are called to consider our whole selves—emotions included.

It is difficult to enter into caring relationships with others, which is key in an education-towards-death, when we are not honest with one another. If students
are to be truly cared-for then we must know them well enough to confirm them. When students hold back parts of themselves we, as teachers, cannot properly do our job as carers. Let us consider Jozsef’s story again here.

Jozsef was ninety-four when Ware was hired to help take care of him. His family had opted not to tell Jozsef he was dying, although he knew his health was deteriorating. A culture of detachment and silence existed amongst Jozsef’s family and only Ware seemed willing to engage in meaningful dialogue with him about life and death. He shared with Ware that he deeply regretted not prioritizing his relationships with his children and for never letting them really know him. By keeping his children at a distance, he never modelled care for them and now, when he needed to be cared-for, his children were unable to be there for him—they did not know who their father was and what he needed.

Death brings a sense of urgent clarification of our lives. In facing his death Jozsef became more honest with himself and those around him. When we are honest with ourselves we can be more honest with other people. When we are honest with others, we are more likely to be surrounded by people who truly care about and for us because they know who we really are. As Ware states: “Assuming others know how you feel or will always be there are high risks to take when they could be dead in an hour. So could any of us. Taking people for granted is a high price to pay” (2011, p.133). Learning to express ourselves before we are on our death bed will help increase the likelihood that we live authentic lives. An education-towards-death promotes this kind of emotional engagement by modelling care, caring, and authenticity. In a way, an education-
towards-death allows us to practice dying in a sense throughout our lifetime, rather than merely before our last few days. No one really knows when death will come, but we do no know for certain that it will come eventually. So, as Ware suggests, we must seize the time we have: “Tell people you love them. Tell them you appreciate them. If they can’t accept your honesty or react in a different way to how you hoped, it doesn’t matter. What matters is you have told them” (Ware, 2011, p.117). Fear, after all, does not stop death; it stops life.\footnote{117}

For these reasons, an education-towards-death supports, and is supported by, emotional engagement in the classroom. This could include not being dismissive of emotions as they arise, creating the space for students to express thoughts and feelings in a variety of mediums, and doing reflective exercises.\footnote{118}

\textbf{Deeper Engagement with Others}

“\textit{Looking around me, I see that we—as people in other times and places—have a great capacity to care for one another, especially in the moments of birthing, accidents, and dying.”—Ivan Illich}

Another way to operationalize an education-towards-death, and one we see most clearly through caring relationships, is deeper engagement with others. As Heidegger stated about human existence, we are essentially Being-with. That is, we are always engaged with others as we inhabit this world with other beings...
and we are never without a socio-historical position. Considering this state, we have the choice of what degree to become part of the They, absorbed in our everydayness, or to define ourselves in relations to others without becoming shadows of them. Most of us have experienced a variety of different relationships where we felt different degrees of care and understanding. When we establish caring relationships—or if we are lucky enough to be born into those relationships—we unfortunately do not always prioritize or cultivate those ties. This leads to one of the top regrets that Ware discusses in her book—the desire to have been in touch with friends better. As one of Ware’s clients, Dorris, states, “You imagine your friends will always be there. But life moves on, and suddenly you find yourself with no one in the world who understands you or who knows anything about your history” (2011, p.138). Allowing ourselves to get caught up in our everyday routine, in the constant tranquilization about death, we sometimes neglect what arguably may be our most important aspect of life, our being-with. Given the ever-increasing pace of many contemporary lives, neglecting to cultivate relationships has become a commonplace symptom of modernity, as many scholars have now convincingly documented.\footnote{For example, see Putnam’s \textit{Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community} (2001).} When we do not engage meaningfully with others, by either being consumed by others (falling prey) or by not adequately nurturing caring relationships, we deny a facet of our Being and in effect will have a hard time living in the light of death. Ware discusses the pain of loneliness through her work with Doris.
Ware met Doris in a nursing home. Doris had been living there for just over four months and had found herself without any meaningful connections. She explained to Ware that over the years she lost touch with friends and family and now finds herself horribly lonely. As Ware states, “[i]f there is no one available who understands you, or accepts you as who you are, loneliness an very readily present its agonising head” (2011, p.139). Because Ware had experience dealing with the kind of disconnectedness that Doris was experiencing, Ware helped her reconnect with some of her friends, although some had already passed before she was able to do so. Doris could not believe she waited so long to nurture her relationships and was upset that she was unable to say goodbye to some of the people that meant a lot to her at one point in her life.

Unfortunately, Doris’ story was not uncommon for Ware in her palliative care work. Meaningful connection, or caring relationships appeared to be vital for Ware’s clients to believe they had lived a fulfilling life (2011, p.135-66). This idea corresponds to Noddings’ theory of care. In Noddings’ work, she characterizes the need to be cared for, in some way, as desirable for all people and therefore a desirable place to begin conceiving an ethical life. Through caring relationships, we have a mode of putting our concerns about our Being into action. In the classroom, caring relationships are a way of establishing deeper engagement with and between students.

Through these meaningful relationships, we will learn more about ourselves. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler note, “in the grand scheme of things, every relationship is potentially important, for even the most trivial encounter with
a passing stranger can teach us a great deal about ourselves” (2002, p.62). An education-towards-death prioritizes mindfulness, emotional engagement, and deeper engagement with others because we when we put our mortality at the core of what we live and learn we are more aware, more deliberate, and more caring.

For these reasons, an education-towards-death supports, and is supported by, deeper engagement with others in the classroom. This could include collaborative learning, experiential learning through volunteerism, and building learning communities. 120

Finding and Living a Personally Meaningful Life

“To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.”—E.E. Cummings

“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don’t let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”—Steve Jobs

As we saw in the lives of Anthony, Jozsef, and Doris, being close to death encourages honesty. Who am I? What is important to me? Where do I find happiness? What makes me glad to be alive? These are the kinds of questions that seem to help us define lives worth living and the answers sometimes come easiest near the end of life. In Ware’s experience, two of the top five regrets of the dying are wishing they had had the courage to be happy and that they had had the courage to live a life true to themselves. Ware cites a few reasons her

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120 For more on deeper engagement with others in the classroom see Etmanski, Hall and Dawson’s Learning and Teaching Community-Based Research: Linking Pedagogy to Practice (2014); Barkley and Major’s Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty (2014); or Garrison’s Thinking Collaboratively: Learning in a Community of Inquiry (2015).
clients felt this way: fear, investing too much in other people’s ideas of a life worth living, and not knowing or accepting themselves. As she states,

Dying people have so many questions, things that could have been asked much earlier in their life had they considered that they would one day die, as we all will. If asked earlier, these questions about matters much deeper would allow people to find their answers and their own peace sooner. They would then not have to live in denial about their approaching death out of pure fear and terror, as was often the case. (Ware, 2011, p.175)

Through an education-towards-death, and the kind of mindfulness, emotional engagement, and deeper engagement with others that I have been advocating, I believe that teachers can help students find ways to know themselves better and define their lives in a way that is personally meaningful.

One of the common ways that Ware saw her clients hinder their happiness was through an over-investment in work. One of Ware’s clients, John, discussed with her the pain of realizing he invested too much time and energy in work throughout his life: “I liked the work enough, sure. And I definitely loved the status, though what’s the point of that now? I gave less time to what truly kept me going through life: Margaret and my family, my dear Margaret” (Ware, 2011, p.74). Margaret died three months before John was due to retire. His retirement was plagued with guilt and regret because he waiting too long to invest in his family. As he states:
‘I think I was scared. Yes, I was. I was petrified. My role had come to define me in a way. Of course now as I sit here dying, I see that just being a good person is more than enough in life. Why so we depend so much on the material world to validate us?...There’s nothing wrong in wanting a better life. Don’t get me wrong…It’s just that the chase for more, and the need to be recognised through our achievements and belongings, can hinder us from the real things, like time with those we love, time doing things we love ourselves, and balance. It’s probably all about balance really, isn’t it?’ (Ware, 2011, p.74-5)

Why do we wait until we are dying to work out our priorities like this? Why do we put so much emphasis on work, money, and status instead of creativity, play, and our own versions of success? And what role should educators play to cultivate the values and meaning that can accompany education-towards-death?

According to Ware and Kübler-Ross and Kessler's experiences, the reminiscing that takes place on deathbeds is about vacations, sports, time with family and friends—never about how much they took life so seriously. “We have never had one person look at us and say, ‘If only I could have worked an extra day a week’ or ‘If only there were nine work hours a day instead of eight, I would have had a happier life” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2002, p.158). While work accomplishments can give us a sense of pride, they need to be balanced with high points in our personal lives in order to feel complete. In other words, if we want to live authentically, we cannot just concentrate on one aspect of our lives.
Of course, the context of palliative care is different from that of formal classrooms, but as we saw in the Defining Educations-towards-Death section with Davis and Ainsa’s work teaching terminally ill children, there are life altering reasons to consider bridging the two domains in order to learn from death prior to being on our deathbed. If it is true that of all the regrets and lessons shared with Ware in palliative care “the regret of not having lived a life true to themselves was the most common one of all” and was “the one that cause the most frustration, as the client’s realisation came too late” then this is the crux of an education-towards-death (Ware, 2011, p.39). At its most basic, authenticity is about understanding our Being and living in the light of death. While there are certainly common threads between the lives of all human beings, each person has particular concerns, interests, needs, and capacities that are worthy of care. As teachers, we are called to recognize the shared humanity and individual concerns, interests, needs, and capacities of each student so that we may adequately care for them. In doing so we help them engage in their lives and death prior to it being thrust upon us. Through an education-towards-death we challenge teachers and students to examine their lives as if they were constantly dying—because we are.\(^{121}\)

For these reasons, an education-towards-death supports, and is supported by, finding and living personal meaning. This could include inquiry-

\(^{121}\) It should be noted here again that my primary unit of analysis is the individual. There are many other benefits to examining death and dying that have not been mentioned here (e.g., breaking down taboo subjects, rescinds education/non-education, private/public, intellectual/emotional binaries, pragmatic—we all have to face the death of loved ones and eventually our own death—praxis—challenges the professionalization of death and in turn challenges capitalism/neoliberalism/consumer education, etc.) not because they are forgotten but because they are beyond the scope of this paper.
based learning strategies, self-assessment opportunities, and working through personality or learning type assessments.  

**Learning from Death Prior to Dying**

“He who isn’t busy being born is busy dying.”—Bob Dylan

An education-towards-death means acknowledging our shared ontology of being-towards death while taking into consideration care, caring, and authenticity. With these four concepts in mind, I have defined education-towards-death and outlined four sites that could help support it in the classroom: mindfulness, emotional engagement, deeper engagement with others, and defining and living a personal meaningful life. Through stories shared by Ware about her clients’ experiences close to death, we can see the potential value in living life in the light of death instead of waiting until we are on our deathbeds to engage with death if we want to live fulfilling lives. By outlining a potential method for applying an education-towards-death has been outlined it is important to remind the reader that this was only one possibility. The project may look different if conceived of by another, but by laying out these possibilities, I hope to invite more dialogue on death in education and authenticity in learning.  

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122 For more on defining and living personally meaningful lives in the classroom see Berger and Rugen’s *Leaders of Their Own Learning: Transforming Schools Through Student-Engaged Assessment* (2014); Ritchhart, Church and Morrison’s *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners* (2011); or Marriner and Roadtrip Nations *Finding the Open Road: A Guide to Self-Construction Rather than Mass Production* (2005).

123 There is indeed much more dialogue needed to effectively put education-towards-death into the class. I have bracketed some serious questions that although warrant serious query, were out of the scope of this thesis. Some of those questions include: *Who decided the right values to be taught in schools? How does an ethics of care not re-inscribe gender binaries and norms? How do we begin to take account of social hierarchies of power in education-towards-death?*
DEATH AND DYING FOR LIVING: CONCLUDING REMARKS

“You can’t do anything about the length of your life, but you can do something about its width and depth”—Evan Esar

“The clock ticks for every one of us. It is your own choice how you spend your remaining days.”—Bronnie Ware

This thesis has sought to illustrate an education-towards-death can be developed drawing on the philosophical foundation of Heidegger’s existential ontology and Noddings’ ethics of care. From their works, death, care, caring, and authenticity reveal themselves to be the four roots of the desirability to live, teach, and learn in the light of death. Keeping in the mind Noddings’ components of care—modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation—I offered four potential sites where an education-towards-death might be manifested in the classroom. Through Ware’s work in palliative care, I found mindfulness, emotional engagement, deeper engagement with others, and defining and living a personally meaningful life to be possible means of operationalizing an education-towards-death. If we desire the kinds of schools and classrooms that take into consideration our shared finitude, care about our lives, and caring relations then an education-towards-death could be a good place to start conceiving of what it might look like in practice. My hope is that education-towards death serves as the beginning to a road map, urging for new directions in education and the filling of the gap in death education.
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