“A Phenomenological Study of Loving Kindness Practice in Education Settings”

By

Keith Brown

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL)

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

© Copyright by Keith William Brown (2016)
“A Phenomenological Study of Loving Kindness Practice in Education Settings”
Keith William Brown
Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL)
University of Toronto
2016

Abstract:
This study uses Phenomenological research methods to explore the ways in which four teachers recited Loving Kindness Meditation for a three week period, particularly focusing on their students during the course of practice. Through personal reflection, journaling and interviews, the teachers describe how Loving Kindness Meditation affected their emotional life as teachers, their experiences of students and classroom dynamics, and the challenges experienced when reciting Loving Kindness Meditation to students. The study reveals a tendency for teachers to adopt a more yielding, less controlling orientation toward student encounters as their practice of Loving Kindness Meditation progressed. The study also hints at problematic limits to over-reliance on meditative imagery, redefining Eros in teacher-student dynamics as a surrender of idealistic expectations of student reciprocation. Future research could more deeply unpack the psychodynamic impacts of Loving Kindness on caregiver identities.

Key Words: Meditation, Loving Kindness, teacher emotional life, Eros, imagery, Phenomenology
Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge and kindly thank Professors John P. (Jack) Miller and Heather Sykes for their guidance and suggestions throughout the research, design and writing of this thesis. Professors Miller and Sykes have played an enormous part in shaping the author’s personal development as a researcher, methodologist, and theorist, in the past three years.

The author is also indebted to the four teacher participants, who kindly volunteered their time to make Loving Kindness Meditation a part of their busy and hectic lives as teachers.

The original idea for this thesis would not have come to fruition without the initial love and support of Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association of Ontario (DDMBA Ontario), the spiritual community through which the author has learned meditation and developed an interest in meditative practices over the past ten years. The author expresses his deepest gratitude for the community and volunteers for their ongoing dedication to learning and teaching Buddhist and meditative practices to the Greater Toronto Area.
Contents

Introduction: Making Wishes......................................................................................................................... 1
Researcher Background ....................................................................................................................................... 4
Problem Statement and Study Rationale................................................................................................................ 5
Research Question and Sub-Questions.................................................................................................................. 10
Literature Review.................................................................................................................................................. 10
  I) What Is Loving Kindness? .............................................................................................................................. 11
  II) How Loving Kindness is Practiced ................................................................................................................. 13
  III) Buddhist vs. Secular Understandings of Loving Kindness ............................................................................ 16
  IV) Relationship to Other Mindfulness Practices .............................................................................................. 18
  V) Loving Kindness vs “Non-Loving” Dispositions ........................................................................................... 20
  VI) A Note on Terminology ............................................................................................................................... 21
  VII) Loving Kindness Meditation Research ..................................................................................................... 23
  VIII) Loving Kindness as a “Social Object” ......................................................................................................... 27
Summary of Key Themes in Loving Kindness Meditation Practice and Research .............................................. 29
Methodology......................................................................................................................................................... 31
  Rationale for Using Phenomenology ................................................................................................................ 31
  Teacher Recruitment ......................................................................................................................................... 34
  Practice Instructions ......................................................................................................................................... 34
  Interpretive, Qualitative Research Paradigm .................................................................................................... 36
  Phenomenological Method ................................................................................................................................ 37
    a) Open Description ......................................................................................................................................... 37
    b) Investigation of Essences .............................................................................................................................. 38
    c) Phenomenological Reduction ...................................................................................................................... 40
    d) Data Collection and Analysis Steps ........................................................................................................... 42
Participant Backgrounds ..................................................................................................................................... 43
Findings................................................................................................................................................................. 45
  I) Composite Textural Description of the Teachers’ Lived Experience of Loving Kindness Meditation ...................................................... 45
  II. Composite Textural-Structural Description .................................................................................................. 47
1. Diminished striving for perfectionism as a teacher.......................................................... 51
2. Encountering the limits of visualizing all students ....................................................... 57
3. Cultivating An Embodied Presence with Students .......................................................... 63
4. Being Surprised by the Unique Qualities of Students .................................................. 67
5. Accommodating Tension and Conflict .......................................................................... 71
6. Surrendering Expectations of the Classroom Experience ............................................ 75

Discussion.......................................................................................................................... 79

I Two “Orientations” of Loving Kindness Practice ............................................................... 80
1. An “Expansive Orientation” of Loving Kindness Meditation ........................................... 80
2. A ‘Yielding’ Orientation of Loving Kindness Meditation .................................................. 89

II Loving Kindness Meditation and Teacher Care ............................................................... 101

III Situating the Findings with Contemplative Traditions .................................................. 104

IV Situating the Findings with Teacher’s Reflective Practice ........................................... 108

V Situating the Findings with Other Research ................................................................ 110

Summary of Key Findings ................................................................................................ 115

Limitations ....................................................................................................................... 118

Recommended Future Study ............................................................................................ 124

Perpetuating Wishes: What I Learned from the Teachers and the Practice ...................... 129

References ....................................................................................................................... 133

Appendix A: Consent Form ............................................................................................... 142
Appendix B: Invitation Letter .............................................................................................. 144
Appendix C: Promotional Flyer .......................................................................................... 145
Appendix D: Study Instructions To Participants ................................................................ 146
Appendix E: Schematic Diagram of Data Analysis Steps .................................................. 148
Introduction: Making Wishes

On a cold January morning in Toronto, 2015, I step out of the snow and into a warm Chan (Chinese Zen) Buddhist meditation hall. I am surrounded by volunteers who are preparing for a Memorial service to commemorate our Shifu (spiritual teacher’s) passing in 2009. Some are moving boxes. Others prepare tables for people to sit in the reading room and dining hall. We count the number of candles to make sure that each participant will receive one during the ceremony.

Soon, I make my way upstairs with one of the dedicated volunteers, trying to figure out how to arrange tables. We lay out a table where people can lay their candle after making an inward wish and vow. Initially, we intend to have people to face the altar where the Buddha statue sits. We plan to arrange for the facilitator at each table to pass the candlelight to the others in their table. But we’re not sure where everyone will face when we light candles for them. If they face the table, it will be easier for participants to place the candle down if their hands get too tired. Facing each other reminds the participants of how they connect and fellowship with each other as Buddhist practitioners. But if we arrange for everyone to face each other, not everyone will be able to face the altar, where they are reminded of the visual embodiment of their teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. We face the paradox of where we face, as we prepare the candle lighting ceremony.

Since the ceremony would only last for twenty minutes, we finally conclude that people would be able to hold their candles for that time period, without needing the table support. In the end, we decide to arrange for everyone to face the altar and make a personal vow for themselves and their loved ones. But the direction we face is always a contingent moment that is subject to change from one ceremony to the next.

Much of the planning for this event touches upon the question of to what or to whom one faces when one recites vows, intentions or prayers. In which direction is the prayer recited? Does prayer go to
an enlightened being, a divinity, or does it go directly to those around us? Who benefits from prayers? Is it the person praying, the person prayed for, or both? And to whom do we pay tribute in our prayers?

In Buddhist traditions, lighting a candle represents a vow that practitioners make to themselves and to others: a promise to carry forward a desire to promote compassionate acts in some form or another, as inspired by a particular teacher, or teachings. One prominent Taiwanese monastic teacher and nun, Ven. Master Cheng Yen (2001), remarks:

Every performer is someone else’s benefactor and supporter: we light up the lamps in our own hearts, and we also light up the lamps in other people’s hearts. Do not overlook the light emitted by any small lamp or candle, because when tens of thousands of these tiny lamps are put together, they can bring infinite brightness to the world (p.212)

This vow is also deeply connected with stories about how teachers and students connect, as well as the transmission of wisdom and learning across generations. In the tradition which I follow, it is known as “passing the lamp of wisdom” (Heau, 2013). In Buddhist traditions, a teacher embodies the wisdom of understanding interconnectedness and awakening others to “a deep ontological awareness, a wisdom-intuition (Prajna)” (Merton, 1968, p.48). After a teacher has been certified as attaining a certain level of wisdom, she is able to set a living example of wisdom. But that example is only a reflection of what all sentient beings possess.

Lighting the candle from person to person is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, it symbolizes the transmission of a wish from one being to another. On the other hand, some have suggested that it represents an inner light that is already inherent to the minds of all beings. Sakyong Mipham (2013), for example, refers to the Tibetan practice of Shambhala as “a communal belief in humanity’s inherent wisdom”, which allows the spiritual practitioner to “relax with our world and see its sacred quality.” (p.18) Buddhists maintain that to see with a pure mind is to see that all beings have enlightened wisdom, and thus there is no ‘light’ that actually transmits from one being to another (ibid). While one can refer to wisdom as ‘transmitted’ from teacher to student, a contrasting metaphor might be to ‘spark’ an already existing source of light in the student’s heart. One may even question whether there is anything that is being transferred from teacher to student, when the potential already exists among both. Perhaps a
more apt metaphor would be a mirror. The act of transmitting a vow to others blurs the distinction between teacher and learner.

Perhaps more significantly, lighting a candle represents the wish, the promise, and the vow to commit to a life of compassion. It’s a decision that people make to see everything they do as interrelated with others in some way or another. It is also the decision to tread delicately and examine the contours of how thoughts affect what is seen, and how actions affect how others sit with oneself. Lighting the candle signifies the intention to begin, but also the way in which beginnings are already fulfilled in every moment. Intention can furnish a space for endless scope, interconnection and influence.

My spiritual teacher’s intention to spread Buddhist teachings (Dharma) survives even after his passing. My intention to help others continues into their lives, even after I have disappeared. Their intentions, hopefully, continue into mine. In this way, hearts and minds influence other hearts and minds in inexplicable ways.

Intentions survive into future generations.

***

This brief vignette introduces my research study on how a particular meditative practice called Loving-Kindness (Metta in Pali) affects teachers’ feelings and orientation toward their students and classrooms. Using phenomenology as a research method (Moran, 2000; Hycner, 1985; Detmer, 2013), this study explores the challenges teachers experience when they recite a narrative of unconditional love. In addition, this study reflects upon how Loving Kindness Meditation connects to the lived experience of the spaces in which they teach. It will attempt to describe the inner life of teachers who use Loving Kindness Meditation as a way of reflecting on and potentially embodying loving kindness in their classrooms.

This study hinges on the notion of orientation. Just as I had conferred with volunteers on where people face during the vow offering, my study also concerns where wishing kindness to others faces, in a teacher’s experience of students and classrooms. Throughout the research process and journey, I focus on
the role of Loving Kindness Meditation as a social and spiritual orienting tool (Ahmed, 2006) for teachers to potentially connect with themselves, their students, and their classroom experiences.

The teachers who were part of my study come from many walks of life. This study does not assume teacher’s background in Buddhism or in any specific religious or spiritual denomination. John P. Miller (2014) remarks that “[A]though this practice comes from the Buddhist tradition, I believe it is universal in nature.” (p.52) Loving Kindness Meditation is a universal wish for all beings to be well, happy and peaceful.

In the course of conducting this study, I had the opportunity to be deeply moved by teachers, as they embarked on a practice that transformed them in several ways. I am indebted to them as my own teachers, and as people who shared their wisdom with me while doing this practice. My hope is to fully and richly capture in a small way how this practice unfolded for the teachers, and what this means for their experiences of students and classrooms.

**Researcher Background**

Throughout this study, I was aware of my position in relation to Loving Kindness Meditation and how I arrived at it. I am a Canadian-born, Caucasian male who speaks a colonizing language, English. I have had the privilege to learn and practice Buddhism from a Taiwanese-based organization in Toronto since 2006. Though I have had exposure to several Buddhist texts translated into English from Mandarin or Traditional Chinese, I lack the education or exposure in Pali or Sanskrit to have encountered Loving Kindness Meditation in its original forms.

I was first introduced to mindfulness practices by way of Chan (Chinese Zen) Buddhism, and since then have facilitated meditation classes in a campus student group. Since that time, I have also been involved in chanting and Buddhist study classes, where I am learning various symbolic meanings of traditional Buddhist practices and scriptures. My interest in Buddhist prayer first began through learning devotional ceremonies such as Great Compassionate Repentance, which is based on the Great Compassion Dharani (Hsüan Hua, 1976). After each meditation class, I lead practitioners in a Buddhist
prayer, called “Transfer of Merit”. This prayer is recited in the belief that what practitioners gain from meditative practice can be transferred to other beings (Sheng Yen, 2007, p.50). Practitioners recite dedications “for peace in the world”, “the joy and contentment of all beings”, and “the freedom and ease of body and mind”, among other verses. One important aspect of performing this recitation is that it reminds practitioners to connect meditation with their everyday encounters with others.

Reciting prayer after a meditation has always felt empowering for me personally. There is a sense that, with the calm of meditation, I truly have something to give to others. This practice has also increased my confidence that I could be kinder, even toward strangers.

While Buddhists acknowledge the importance of directing vows to others beings, I questioned how this principle might relate to a secular teacher’s mindfulness practices. As a facilitator of a regular group meditation class, I often wonder how my intentions are ‘shared’ with other practitioners. I have frequently felt that my mind state had some effect on the way the meditation session plays out, though I could never quite describe or articulate that experience. I have also been interested to learn how making a vow to others or reciting a dedication affects the teachers’ experience of others. Of special interest for me is how to translate the principles of emotional vows into a secular setting, without necessarily promoting Buddhism or any other particular spirituality. Rather than abandoning the Buddhist path, however, my research has been a continuous dialogue between a tradition to which I devote a good deal of my time and energies, and a growing movement toward a more secular form of this path. I hope to be able to discover and shed light on linkages between these intertwining paths, throughout my study.

Problem Statement and Study Rationale

Kate Pickert (2014, p.42) refers to the “Mindful Revolution” as a time when more professionals in North America are tuning into contemplative, meditative practices. Through mindfulness practices, more people are seeking a way of being more present and emotionally grounded in their work and personal lives (Reid & Evers, 2004). Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (2012) aptly characterizes mindfulness as a pro-active approach to relieving suffering and stress in modern life, when he writes:
What does being mindful mean? It means, first of all, that we stop and observe deeply what is happening in the present moment. If we do this, we can see the suffering that is inside us and around us. We can practice looking deeply with concentration in order to see the causes of this suffering. We need to understand suffering in order to know what kind of action we can take to relieve it. (p.4)

Hanh positions mindfulness as a tool to look deeply into everyday suffering to determine how to accept, engage in and deal with it. Mindfulness often uses specific objects such as watching the breath (Sheng Yen, 2015, p.104) to calm the mind, so that the mind can gain undivided attention to present experience.

Mindfulness has often been promoted as a way to relieve physiological stress and gain personal control over compulsions and addictions (Wallace & Benson, 1976). The promise of “stress relief” appeals to caring professions, where caregivers are often pressured to uphold demanding standards, while simultaneously being emotionally nurturing toward the cared-for. Teachers in particular continue to face mounting pressures to meet standardized testing requirements in schools (Carpenter, Weber, & Schugurensky, 2012, p.149). Barbara Larrivee (2012) sites many sources of teacher stress, among the most significant being “excessive workload leading to lack of spontaneity and creativity”; “perpetual changes and expectations that are in constant flux with school reform efforts”; “conflict between school policy and one’s own professional beliefs that can compromise a teacher’s integrity”, and “quantity replacing quality as the job becomes more bureaucratic than professional” (p.7) In his study on staff burnout for care workers, Cary Cherniss (1980) identifies the more subtle expectation that “professional status guarantees a high level of personal autonomy and control in one’s work” (p.154). For Cherniss, two major factors that prevent staff burnout in the caring professions are, “competently and successfully performing a task that contributes to the goal of enhanced well-being for clients clearly will enhance psychological success”, as well as “ability to control the work environment…if the worker is able to predict and control these obstacles, psychological success will not be threatened and may even be enhanced.” (p.56) According to this view, teacher burnout might stem from expecting or demanding control over complex situations.

Recent research suggests that mindfulness practices can offer a more flexible, less control-based approach (Langer, 1989) to handling teacher burnout, rather than simply exerting more efforts or
discipline over students. Deborah Shoeberlein theorizes that teacher burnout happens when “there is a net loss—when the costs outweigh the benefits, with the energy going out greatly outpacing the energy coming in and leaving a teacher feeling that he/she has little or nothing left to give” (in Larrivee, 2012, p.14). Shoeberlein recommends various mindfulness techniques in the classroom to cope with the pressures of teaching, including awareness of feelings (Shoeberlein, 2009, p.28), labelling thoughts without attaching to them (p.27) and using breathing to anchor awareness in the present moment (p.184). Shoeberlein describes teacher burnout in terms of a balanced exchange of energies between teacher and students. Somewhat like Cherniss, she positions caregiving as a delicate balance between giving and anticipating a reasonable outcome in the classroom environment. This “homeostatic” model of care assumes that teachers are able to fully give themselves only when care is reciprocated through a feedback of caring and cared-for (Noddings, 1984, p.48).

While mindfulness is at times associated with austere personal practices of self-control (Wright, 2001, p.96), it offers a very different orientation from trying to influence the environment to create a certain kind of relationship or controlled reaction. In contrast with stress-reduction methods that emphasize improving self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977), mindfulness practices tend to emphasize pure awareness and letting go of excessive needs to be ‘in control’ of classroom situations. Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as “the ability to pay attention, moment-to-moment, to the unfolding of one’s experiences.” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003,p.145)

Studies have shown mindfulness to be effective for grounding teachers in their bodies and reducing stress overall. One way to foster mindfulness is through meditation, a kind of focused exercise in cultivating awareness that is often done in one place, using a single object of contemplation such as breathing or walking (Miller, 2000, p. 53-54). Geoffrey Soloway, et al. (2008) conducted a study highlighting the stress-reducing benefits of meditative practices on teachers and other service providers. In their study, Soloway et al. note:

…participants revealed that the course had positive personal and professional outcomes, as it helped them to stay in the moment and to let go of the past. This, in turn, improved their self-care practices and their relationships (p.78, italics mine)
This study used “body scan, sitting meditation, and a brief three-minute breathing exercise” (p.73) to greater cultivate present-moment attention. But still other kinds of meditation appear to focus on more specific objects of contemplation or focus. Loving Kindness Meditation is one kind of meditation that incorporates verses on wishing wellness, happiness and peace to self and others. Rather than simply cultivating bare attention to body and breath, Loving Kindness Meditation uses what Miller (2014) refers to “connecting with the heart” (p.51) to create a specific experience of other beings.

Loving Kindness Meditation often uses verses from a text as a point of focus and repeated recitation. As a meditative practice, however, it has the potential to be contemplative in the sense that “[W]hen we contemplate something, the boundary between ourselves and whatever we are contemplating disappears” (Miller, 2006, p.76). Miller suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation is “ultimately, a meditation on how we are connected to people, animals, life, and all creation.” (p.51) He raises the possibility that certain forms of meditation may serve to create or enhance direct pathways to love, care and concern between teachers and their students. Such a possibility could potentially shift away from a ‘stress-reduction’ model of trying to control stressful emotions (White & Fadiman, 1976) and toward exploring how teachers broaden their sense of interconnectedness with students and teaching environments.

Loving Kindness Meditation also has a potential to enhance social experiences, including such commonplace occurrences as waiting in line, or interacting with strangers in daily life (Miller, 2014, p.51). My study continues along these lines by posing the question of what teachers experience as they inwardly recite Loving-Kindness verses to their students, as part of a daily Loving Kindness Meditation practice. Using a phenomenological research methodology, my study attempts to provide rich descriptions of the teachers’ subjective experiences, as well as to arrive at thematic and structural descriptions of the experience of reciting loving kindness with students in mind.

Researchers are just beginning to acknowledge the nature of teacher affect and how emotions of love, care and affection can influence a teacher’s experiences in classrooms. Schutz & Lee (2014)
attribute high novice teacher attrition rates to the fact that “some are simply ill equipped to deal with the emotional transactions involved in their profession” (p.170). They note that emotions play a contributing role in how teachers structure their identities as teachers early on. Many researchers are seeking to understand what kinds of emotions are most conducive to managing the stress of teacher-student relationships and dynamics. While some studies emphasize developing compassionate practices in the classroom (Mamgain, 2010; Smith, 2013), recent studies are also paying more attention to the emotional lives of teachers. Andy Hargreaves (1998) connects good teaching with what he refers to as “positive emotion”, when he reflects:

> Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one’s subject, being efficient, having the correct competencies, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy (p.835)

Mindfulness techniques are also being used to cultivate specific ‘positive’ emotions that are considered essential to good teaching, such as “pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy”. Yet, current thinking offers very different, sometimes contrasting glimpses of what positive teacher ‘affect’ toward students might look like. Deborah Britzmann (2010) evokes the image of teacher’s love as a binding, erotic force that is actively mending and healing students. She suggests that teachers

> are called upon to mend broken hearts, lend words to contain the swirl of inchoate feelings, unscramble the mixed message that sends hurt feelings reeling backward, and, even when asked for advice on love or when they meet demands for love, do work to hold adolescent loneliness in their minds. Eros is this fleeting call for empathy and understanding. (p.327)

While Britzmann’s account emphasizes the active and mending elements of unifying teachers and students, Sharon Todd (2003) evokes a somewhat different feeling of honoring difference and uncertainty, in her account of teacher Eros. While innovating upon philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of love as a fine risk, she notes:

> a fine risk would run the danger of communicative ambiguity, the fineness to be found in the approach to the other that necessarily lies behind the communication… A fine risk is equated with leading a life that ventures forth into an unknown (and unknowable) encounter with an other. (p.33)
These differing views of teacher affect toward students raise puzzling questions about the kinds of experiences teachers would have when they inwardly recite loving or warm phrases to their students. Would loving kindness in the classroom take the form of calls to active outreach and understanding, as Britzmann suggests? Or is there perhaps a heightened sensitivity to risk and the unknown parts of communication to which Todd’s description refers? Would Loving Kindness Meditation lead to more abandon, or more hesitancy, or perhaps a mixture of these or other experiences? Studying teacher responses to Loving Kindness Meditation could contribute to a deeper understanding of how teacher’s emotions affect their experiences of students. Such a study might also explore the extent of a teacher’s “reach” as they introduce specific affects into their teaching life.

**Research Question and Sub-Questions**

In this study, I explore the effect of Loving Kindness Meditation on a teacher’s felt experience of teaching and students. The principal question is, “What do teachers experience when they recite Loving Kindness Meditation on their own, in particular to their students?” Rather than observing interactions between teachers and students, this study will focus on the specific experiences that might arise internally when teachers create an intention or wish of well-being for their students. I am particularly interested in exploring potential tensions that occur between the felt intention to connect of the recitation and the lived, felt experience of teaching and being in a classroom or educational setting. In order to do so, I have broken this study down into 3 general questions:

1. What happens internally, emotionally and personally when teachers recite a meditation that is directed toward the well-being of students?
2. How does reciting Loving Kindness Meditation affect the teacher’s experience of a classroom?
3. When might teachers feel tension, difficulties or disconnect between the intention of Loving Kindness Meditation, and the lived experience of teaching in a classroom?

**Literature Review**
I) What Is Loving Kindness?

In Buddhist traditions, loving kindness (Pali, *metta*) is one of four “boundless qualities” (*brahma-viharas*), or attitudinal states that can be cultivated in meditative practices. The other three boundless qualities are equanimity (*upekka*), compassion (*karuna*) and sympathetic joy (*mudita*) (Salzberg, 1995, p.2; Sheng Yen & Stevenson, 2001). Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche (2006) distinguishes loving kindness from compassion (*karuna*). Whereas compassion refers to “the sincere wish to alleviate the suffering of another”, loving kindness is defined as:

…the wish for another person both to be happy and to have the causes for happiness. It is the wish for another person’s well-being. You not only want others to feel happier momentarily, you also want them to enjoy the causes for ongoing happiness. (p.22)

For Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, loving kindness *contrasts* with compassion. While compassion addresses the causes of *suffering*, loving kindness aims to prolong the sources of *happiness*. It is thought that loving kindness tends to focus on generating uplifting or joyful emotional states. However, Sharon Salzberg (1995) notes that the other three *brahma-viharas* “grow out of metta [loving kindness], which supports these states.” (p.8) Salzberg maintains that loving kindness can form the basis for which equanimity, sympathetic joy and compassion can emerge toward self and others.

Some researchers sharply distinguish loving kindness from compassion in terms of specific qualities which they intend to cultivate. In their study on the role of meditative interventions in mental health settings, for example, Hoffman, et al. (2011) note that compassion meditation focuses on “techniques to cultivate compassion, or deep, genuine sympathy for those stricken by misfortune”, along with “an earnest wish to ease this suffering” (p.1127, italics mine). In contrast, loving kindness “aims to develop an affective state of unconditional kindness to all people” (ibid). Adarkar & Keiser (2007) emphasize the positive, wellness-centered aspect of Loving Kindness Meditation by suggesting that it “develops the habit of…celebrating positive qualities in other people” and “cultivating forgiveness” (p.260). Adarkar & Keiser position loving-kindness as fostering self-actualization and other ‘positive’ states of being. The tendency to *celebrate* positive qualities in others may also lead to a view of
compassion that emphasizes empowering relationships, rather than creating a subtle discourse of
disempowerment or pity toward others (Zembylas, 2013).

Still other contemplative teachers see a continuum between loving kindness and compassionate
can foster “the development of compassion for all beings”, starting with “sensing a basic warmth in our
hearts and then gradually sharing this warmth and compassion with others.” (p.131) The key that seems to
connect the two qualities of loving-kindness and compassion is a sense of connectedness to all beings, or
what Miller (1994/2014) refers to as “a steady attitude of friendliness” and “a meditation on how we are
connected to people, animals, life and all creation” (p.51). In recent studies, Hooria Jazaieri et al (2014)
report that Loving Kindness Meditation has become one part of a larger repertoire of “Compassion
Cultivation Training” (CCT) designed to “focus on enhancing awareness of one’s own suffering and the
suffering of others to support the cultivation of compassion for self and others.” (p.26) It is thought that
wishing others well would lead to a comprehensive desire to care for them and relieve the roots of
suffering. Observing what kinds of emotions emerge from Loving Kindness Meditation may reveal how
it relates to compassion in general.

Though the Loving Kindness Meditation in this present study is Buddhist in origin, the practice
is being actively used in secular communities as a way to cultivate positive emotions toward others.
Classrooms are one recent example. During a conference with H.H. Dalai Lama in 2000, Mark Greenberg
had raised the question of how Loving Kindness Meditation could be adopted in secular education
settings without seeming too religious or sectarian for teachers. Dalai Lama (in Goleman, 2003) replied:

> The cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion is not intrinsically a religious endeavor. It has
really a much more personal pertinence and general applicability. You don’t have to be religious
or buy into a religious doctrine to do it. This is why it is important to develop techniques that are
secular and not simply religious in orientation. (p.220)

While there are different perspectives about what kinds of states of being Loving Kindness Meditation
fosters, nearly all approaches stress a spirit of inclusiveness, acceptance and non-judging as key benefits.
Hofmann, Grossman & Hinton (2011) suggest that the four brahma-viharas could potentially orient
meditative practitioners toward non-judgmental awareness. But they also suggest that without a focus on specific qualities of love and compassion, “negative judgments interfere with sustained mindfulness” (p.1128). They suggest that Loving Kindness Meditation could be one way to counterbalance the emotional force of judgments.

II) How Loving Kindness is Practiced

There is no universal consensus on how loving kindness becomes a meditative practice. Different versions of Loving Kindness verses exist (see, for instance, Salzberg, 1995; Boddhi, 2005). Some are lengthy discourses on compassion attributed to Buddha (Boddhi, 2005, p. 278), while others are invocations directed toward other beings (Manteau-Rao, 2014). Emphasis can be placed on contemplating the whole text of the sutra (Buddhist traditional text), specific verses, or a particular quality. While Sheng Yen & Stevenson (2001) do not refer specifically to recitation of verses, they describe focussing on loving kindness as a quality of the mind which can reflect already existing, wholesome states of being. They distinguish this meditation from others by the way “meditation on the boundless mentalities employs abstract mental attitudes as its object rather than a concrete physical object or sensations.” (p.81) Similarly, Monica Leppma (2012) refers to Loving Kindness Meditation as “a type of mindfulness-based meditation that emphasizes caring and connection with others” (p.197). Among other qualities, a practice of Loving Kindness Meditation “incorporates nonjudgmental attention to the present moment and a focus on cultivating compassion and a sense of connectedness with self and others.” (ibid) Loving Kindness Meditation could refer to a mental quality, an attitude, or a nonjudgmental sense of connection with others.

While Loving Kindness Meditation has been viewed as universal to all beings, it’s notable that it originates with a traditional canon of Buddhist prayers that emphasize mutual interconnectedness of beings (Hanh, 2006). Visualizing other beings and placing oneself in their place is one powerful kind of meditation adopted in Buddhist texts, such as Medieval Buddhist scholar Shantideva’s “Meditations on Exchanging Self and Others”. In his verses, Shantideva (1997) poses the question, “Since I and other
beings both./In wanting happiness, are equal and alike./What difference is there to distinguish us./That I should strive to have my bliss alone?” (p.123) Shantideva offers an analytic approach to why spiritual practitioners pray or make vows for others, by emphasizing the universal needs of all beings. Reflecting on a universal desire for all beings to be happy is one form of shifting away from an emphasis on self, and toward a shifting field of relationships with all beings.

Similarly, loving kindness is one of the qualities frequently mentioned in Buddhist prayers to stress the importance of inter-being, generosity, and gratitude (Sheng Yen, 2007, p.34). One particular translation of the Great Compassionate Repentance Buddhist Service describes a prayer to Avalokitesvara, a being who embodies compassion for all beings:

Great Compassionate Avalokitesvara. I pray to you to illuminate us with your light of wisdom. I will assist all beings through joyous giving. I will awaken and guide the stubborn and obstinate through cooperative respect. I will provide people with expediency through benevolent care. I will provide people with happiness through words of loving-kindness. (Miao Shan, 2006)

In this passage, the stated intention is to gain wisdom from another being and use this same wisdom to guide other beings toward happiness. However, U Thitilla (1956) cautions that Buddhist prayers should not be viewed as a transaction between beings, but rather, as the manifestation of inner wisdom that all beings possess intrinsically. He notes, “There are no prayers in Buddhism. Instead of prayers there are meditations for purifying the mind in order that truth can be realized.” (p.76) According to U Thitilla, Buddhist recitations are intended to purify the mind for enlightenment, rather than to petition for an external result.

Differences in interpretation of how Buddhist prayers work raise questions about where they are oriented in daily practice, as well as to whom if any, prayers and meditations are directed. Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (1996) believes that prayers and invocations are powerful only when they are rooted in heartfelt attentiveness to one’s own being. He straddles a middle ground between praying for others and praying to manifest a heart-wish that doesn’t depend on others:

Whether my students know I love them or not, when I send my energy to them, I am sure it arrives. What matters most is that my heart is open. I only need to touch the source of love in me and send my love in my thoughts and also in my actions. This is a basic form of prayer that can
be practiced not just in church or a meditation hall, but in every act. You touch the deep source of beauty and goodness in yourself and share it. (p.3)

In this passage, Thich Nhat Hanh stresses the importance of single-minded attention in prayer, both common themes in Buddhist teachings. He also stresses the inseparability of beings. Without faith in the inseparability of beings, Hanh maintains, the praying person lacks the ability to form a sincere connection to others. Hanh positions prayer as an intrinsic action of the heart, rather than an extrinsic petition for a specific result. Many of these attitudes toward prayers could equally apply to Loving Kindness Meditation, where the emphasis is on cultivating a sincere wish for others.

Another consideration relates to the scope of Loving Kindness Meditation. How far and how deeply can loving kindness go, and what is the extent of its reach? The Loving Kindness verse used in this study operates in theory on a principle of proximity and expansion. That is, practitioners start by reciting to themselves (“May I be well, happy, and peaceful”) and gradually fan outward to loved ones, friends, and, finally, those to whom one feels neutrality or difficulty. Csaszar & Curry (2013) remark on the expansive aspects of the Loving Kindness verses:

…the practice is typically expanded to include people for whom the meditator feels gratitude, then to family, friends, and other loved ones. Next, the practice is generally expanded to include neutral people (someone neither liked nor disliked by the meditator), then it is expanded to people with whom the meditator has difficulty, and ultimately to all beings or the entire planet. (p.5)

The original uses of Loving Kindness Meditation are described in the Theravadin Buddhist text compiled by Buddhaghosa called the Visuddhimagga (Pali for Path of Purification) (2011). This text mentions Loving Kindness verse as an antidote to negative antipathy toward others, or as a technique for “abandoning ill will” (p.109-110). It further recommends that beginning practitioners should “review the danger in hate and the advantage in patience” (p.291):

Why? Because hate has to be abandoned and patience attained in the development of this meditation subject, and he cannot abandon unseen dangers and attain unknown advantages. (ibid)

The Visuddhimagga counsels monastics, known as ‘bhikkus’, to “embark upon the development of loving-kindness for the purpose of excluding the mind from hate seen as a danger and introducing it to patience known as an advantage.” (ibid). Here, Loving Kindness Meditation is situated as one layer in an
analytic self-reflection process for reversing self-cherishing constructs of the world. This counsel includes letting go of the notion of a permanent self, as well as cautioning against craving and hatred.

This current study uses the Loving Kindness Meditation verse adapted from Miller (2014), with some modifications made to suit the particular purpose of reciting to students. Appendix D outlines the Loving Kindness recitation that was used specifically for this study.

III) Buddhist vs. Secular Understandings of Loving Kindness

Buddhist sources tend to frame Loving Kindness Meditation as one part of a comprehensive path from suffering to liberation, particularly from self-attachments and cravings. This path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path, and includes practices in meditation, as well as giving rise to pure thoughts and actions (U Thuttila, 1956, p.103). One example that is relevant to Loving Kindness Meditation is “right resolve”, which refers to “the determination to renounce worldly pleasure and expunge malice from the mind” (Kelen, 1967, p.84). Walpola Rahula (1959) writes about the aims of Buddhist practices:

…it is no question of pessimism or optimism, but that we must take account of the pleasures of life as well as its pains and sorrows, and also of freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively. Only then is true liberation possible (p.19)

Nearly all Buddhist practices point to developing insight into the roots of suffering, by realizing the impermanent and interdependent nature of phenomena. Thich Nhat Hanh (1976), for example, develops a meditation where people reflect on the impermanence of all concepts and perceptions (p.92-93). Along similar lines, Malcolm Walley (1990) states that Tibetan Buddhist traditions tend to emphasize “the pervasiveness of suffering and adversity in the world” (p.137-138). Their practices aim to reverse the self-cherishing and clinging to ideas that are thought to be the root causes of suffering in Buddhist doctrine. Hence, Loving Kindness Meditation could potentially be used in “the transformation of personal construct systems” (ibid) to reverse an attachment to self. Walley writes:

Such transformations are radical to the extent that habitual patterns of construing the world are actually reversed, as when for example others take on greater significance than self, or when adverse experiences become welcome opportunities to practice patience and loving kindness. (p.133)
Buddhist practice emphasizes using Loving Kindness Meditation to reverse self-cherishing, fear, and desire. But it is not clear exactly how this reversal process takes place. One theory is that replacement involves literally transforming habits into their opposites, such as replacing an angry thought with a joyful one. Buddhist scholars, however, tend to lean toward a subtler approach of cultivating equanimity toward all states of being. Sheng Yen (2005) emphasizes the process of letting go of self-cherishing as a fundamental aim of contemplating kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity:

This mind of impartiality comes from breaking the habits of self-servingly helping others in order to angle for personal gain, and of seeing and judging others in a purely self-referential way. Although bringing happiness to others is the primary motivation of a bodhisattva, our deluded tendency to be jealous of others' success and happiness and to favor one person over another nevertheless makes it impossible for us to truly participate in the world and help all beings impartially. For this reason, a bodhisattva practitioner should not only nurture kindness and compassion, but also cultivate the minds of joy and impartiality (p.35-36).

Sheng Yen stresses balancing the positive emotions of “bringing happiness to others” with a more grounded state of even-mindedness toward others (joy and impartiality). In contrast, some contemporary Western research about Loving Kindness Meditation tends to emphasize the act of creating positive feelings toward others (Corcoran, 2007) as well as controlling or regulating negative emotions. Walsh & Shapiro (2006) remark, “Western definitions emphasize that meditation is a self-regulation strategy with a particular focus on training attention” (p.229).

Western self-psychologies often don’t emphasize a pervasive, existential suffering the way Buddhist traditions do. Furthermore, rather than reversing the self-concept altogether, self-psychologies often focus on adding positive thoughts of loving-kindness in people, without intending to challenge the sense of self. Thus, Western therapies “seek to modify personal construing in order to improve psychological well-being to an acceptable level.” (p.134) Mace (2008) notes that the current trend in cognitive psychology is to replace ‘unwholesome’ attitudes and thoughts with more ‘wholesome’ ones, without challenging the very sense of self-cherishing and clinging that gives rise to aversive thinking and attitudes (p.76-77). This way of looking at contemplative practices tends to treat it as a conceptual, reflective practice rather than probing into the deeper roots of consciousness that give rise to suffering. It also tends to emphasize being able to replace certain ‘undesirable’ states of being with ‘healthier’ states.
This again often plays into a scientific framework of wanting to control some states to achieve specific results, rather than simply observing consciousness as a whole, without judgment.

Differences in attitudes toward Loving Kindness Meditation (e.g. Western psychology and Buddhist traditions), suggest that motivations to practice Loving Kindness Meditation are likely influenced by the traditions, cultures, and contexts in which it is being practiced. These differences also raise the question of what Loving Kindness Meditation actually means for people who recite its lines, and what experiences it most deeply evokes. While there are many stated purposes to Loving Kindness practice, what is it really like to practice it, and what emotions and insights arise from it?

Referring to current studies in mindful therapies, Mace (2008) recommends in depth-case studies as “methods that are appropriate and sensitive to its processes” (p.83). This current study attempts to contribute to case study research and fill some of the gaps in this research, by exploring in-depth narratives from teachers related to Loving Kindness Meditation.

IV) Relationship to Other Mindfulness Practices

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) proposes that Loving Kindness Meditation is different from traditional forms of mindfulness, which stress simple observation, or ‘bare attention’. He explains his hesitation to teach this practice to beginners in meditation:

…it in the instructions for loving-kindness meditation, there is an inevitable sense that you are being invited to engage in doing something, namely invoking particular feelings and thoughts and generating desirable states of mind and heart. This feels very different from and often outright contradictory to simply observing whatever is naturally arising without recruiting one’s thoughts or feelings to any particular end other than wakefulness itself. (p.286)

Kabat-Zinn suggests a perplexing disparity between the stated goals of mindfulness in general and loving-kindness in particular. While mindfulness practices stress “the attitude of non-doing and non-striving” (2005, p. 285), Kabat-Zinn maintains that Loving Kindness Meditation actively recruits particular feelings of good-will for a desired state of being (ibid, p.286). Mace (2008) similarly refers to Loving Kindness Meditation as an act of focusing the mind to a specific quality, when he depicts it as an example of “the deliberate cultivation of positive affects through meditative inner focussing.” (p.72) Both Kabat-
Zinn and Mace maintain that uplifting a particular emotional state, such as affection or generosity, might differ from the practice of ‘bare attention’ that is typical of many mindfulness practices.

These variations in discourse on Loving Kindness Meditation hint at differences in the way practitioners could orient to the practice itself. The Visuddhimaga emphasizes using the attitude of loving kindness to reflect on qualities that should be avoided. Salzberg (1995) also suggests that Loving Kindness practice was originally devised to protect monks against negative spiritual influences (p.20). In contrast, more recent approaches advise practitioners to engage in a specific action to invoke particular feelings, or “generating desirable states of mind and heart.” While the former involves a reflective insight into the sources of suffering, the latter entails actively creating desirable emotions and attitudes to meet new challenges. I believe that more research needs to be conducted to clarify what kinds of experiences give rise to genuine states of compassion and loving-kindness.

Part of the ambiguity surrounding research on Loving Kindness Meditation relates to how states of loving kindness and compassion and understood and experienced. Is loving kindness a quality that arises naturally from bare attention, or does it require a specific, conscious focus on giving rise to loving feelings? Some studies (Kristeller & Johnson, 2005, for instance) shed doubt on the ability for bare attentional practices to give rise to positive states of love or kindness toward others. However, Kabat-Zinn argues that a non-controlling awareness of states of being is precisely the kind of compassion that is being realized through mindfulness alone. He remarks:

…the emphasis we place on mindfulness as an affectionate, openhearted attention, coupled with the welcoming and entertaining of all the visitors to the guesthouse, is itself a gesture of great hospitality and kindness toward oneself, and the suggestion that just sitting with and by and for yourself is a radical act of love captured, I felt, the essence of loving kindness and beneath it, the overriding ethical spirit and intention of the practice to at least do no harm (2005,p.283)

While Kabat-Zinn emphasizes meditation as a state of compassionate non-interference and “affectionate, openhearted attention”. other writers position compassion as a quality that is actively shaped and cultivated. Dale S. Wright (2009) remarks:

For the most part, compassion is something we learn to feel. It is not innate, not a ‘natural’ feeling. For these reasons, we cannot feel compassion simply by deciding to feel it, or by telling ourselves that it is our responsibility to feel it. We do, however, have the capacity to develop
compassion by cultivating our thoughts and emotions in ways that enable it. This is the function of the ‘practice’ of giving. Making generosity of character an explicit aim of self-cultivation, we sculpt our thoughts, emotions, and dispositions in the direct of a particular form of human excellence. (p.30, italics mine)

Both Wright and Kabat-Zinn offer very different metaphors for how compassionate spiritual practices ‘work’ in and through the mind. While Kabat-Zinn leans toward an experience of non-interference and acceptance of the present moment, Wright positions compassionate practices as ways of actively ‘sculpting’ consciousness, a view echoed in the writings of Easwaran (2008) and Ladner (2004). These writers raise questions about what the practice of loving kindness is intended to bring about, as well as what kinds of emotions it emphasizes.

V) Loving Kindness vs “Non-Loving” Dispositions

Discussions about how Loving Kindness Meditation is practiced are complicated by the question of how non-compassionate states of being are treated in the literature. When practicing Loving Kindness Meditation, how are ‘non-compassionate’, ‘non-loving’ emotions treated? In one in-depth study on compassion, Christina Feldman (2005) propounds that aversive states of being (anger, hatred, fear) are in fact being embraced in compassion practice, rather than being cast off or rejected in favor of a ‘positive’ ideal such as happiness or wellness. She uses metaphors of ‘turning toward’ painful emotions to suggest that all states of being are included and embraced when generosity is cultivated:

You do not in reality cultivate compassion, but you can cultivate, through investigation, the qualities that incline your heart toward compassion. You can learn to attend to the moments when you close and contract in the face of suffering, anger, fear, or alienation. In those moments you are asked to question what difference empathy, forgiveness, patience, and tolerance would make. You cultivate your commitment to turn toward your responses of aversion, anger, or intolerance. With mindfulness and investigation, you find in your heart the generosity and understanding that allow you to open rather than close. (pp. 141–142).

Feldman uses the expressions of incline’ and ‘attend to moments when you close and contract’ to evoke metaphors of compassion as an open field of accepting all emotional states. Rather than trying to grasp or ‘hold onto’ a particular state of loving-kindness or compassion, Feldman suggests that compassionate practice involves opening psychic space to accommodate all states of being. Feldman describes a space
where compassion is ‘approached’ but not grasped at the expense of other states of being. She also offers an alternative to spiritual approaches which encourage idealizing specific states of being (Wright, 2009) or compassionate role models (Leighton, 2012).

Still other spiritual teachers caution against treating Loving Kindness Meditation as a way of trying to embody specific idealized models of loving kindness. Kittisaro & Thanissara (2014) remark:

Our teacher Ajahn Sumedho taught us that the seed of metta is the attitude of non-contention, non-fighting, the willingness to allow things to be as they are and welcome them into our hearts. Sometimes if we try and convince ourselves we love everyone, it just feels false, or we end up in denial about all the reactions of resentment and aversion that regularly assail the heart. On the other hand, when we practice this friendly intention with all our thoughts, sensations, and moods—pleasant and unpleasant, beautiful and ugly—we find ourselves in an openhearted abiding that is not disturbed by anything. (p.225-226, italics mine)

Like Feldman, Kittisaro & Thanissara allude to compassion as having an ‘openhearted abiding’ property, frequently resorting to negations rather than affirmations to describe what compassion ‘is’ and ‘does’. They position compassionate practices as refraining from, rather than giving rise to particular emotions. They also hint at tensions which could arise if people use loving kindness in a forceful way.

Many of the controversies surrounding Loving Kindness Meditation relate to the meanings that are generated from doing the practice, and how practitioners orient to the practice. I believe that exploring phenomenological narratives of Loving Kindness Meditation could provide a more holistic sense of how teachers use the practice in their classrooms, and what kinds of emotions and dispositions arise in the teachers.

VI) A Note on Terminology

Questions linger regarding the terminology of Loving Kindness practice. While many researchers are using the term Loving Kindness Meditation to classify Loving Kindness as a meditative practice, other sources refer to Loving Kindness as a prayer or a blessing (Wyatt, 2010). Loving Kindness practice can refer to both a meditative, contemplative practice and an invocation similar to other Buddhist prayers which are intended to give rise to specific states of compassion.
During the course of this study, I refer to Loving Kindness as a meditation, or more generally as a practice, rather than as a prayer. Part of the reason is to avoid creating confusion and misunderstanding among the teachers of the study, all of whom do not necessarily connect with Loving Kindness as part of a Buddhist or religious context. Another reason is that positioning Loving Kindness as a prayer touches upon deep cultural assumptions about what prayer is supposed to do. In their research on the effects of prayer on ‘quality of life’, Poloma & Pendleton (1989) suggest that how and why people pray depends on the way they orient to prayers. The authors identify four orientations to characterize what people do when they pray. While meditative orientations to prayer involve direct contact with a divine or contemplative experience, the petitionary orientation “taps requests to meet specific material needs of self and friends” (p.47). The Ritual orientation to prayer “attempts to measure the recitation of prepared prayers available through reading or from memory”, while the colloquial prayer “incorporates within its conversational style petitionary elements of a less concrete and specific form.” (ibid). Poloma & Pendleton suggest that the effects of prayer on one’s experiences depend on the way prayers are used, as well as the kinds of experiences they attempt to evoke.

Poloma & Pendleton’s research has inspired me to think of Loving Kindness Meditation as situated in a teacher’s framework of assumptions, intentions and purposes. Like prayer, Loving Kindness Meditation incorporates narrative and evokes a sense of purpose or orientation. Unlike mindfulness practices that stress witnessing “the bare facts” of experience (Goleman, 1988, p.20), Loving Kindness Meditation at least ostensibly operates from textually based intentions relating to specific purposes and dispositions. One implication of this difference is that the meditator circles between ‘reading’ a text and embodying it as a specific intention, as opposed to simply observing what arises in mind. Easwarain (reference) claims that prayers and other spiritual passages could play a role in shaping a meditator’s intentions and affect over time. This process could imply shifting meanings that the meditator attributes to the text itself, as well as an evolving fit between reader and text which Ahmed (2014) describes as attunement through the repetition of an encounter (p.70). What could arise from the recitation of loving
kindness is a change in the way text is read and ‘intended’ by the reciter of Loving Kindness Meditation, as well as the reciprocal change in how the meditation practice embodies the verses of loving kindness.

Going into the data collection of this study, however, I chose to position Loving Kindness as a meditative practice that incorporates elements of prayer, such as recitation, without assuming that this practice will necessarily function as a prayer for the teachers. This helped to keep me open to different possibilities regarding how the teachers experienced Loving Kindness Meditation. Later, as I turn to discussion of the findings, I began to relate the teacher’s experiences back to some prayer research, by way of enriching and highlighting key themes.

VII) Loving Kindness Meditation Research

Recent years show a growing academic interest in using contemplative practices, such as meditation, to reduce physical and mental distress (Wallace, 2006; Mason & Hargreaves, 2001). Of particular interest is how meditative and contemplative practices can enhance professional life and reduce workplace stress (Bickford, 2005, p.25). Matthew Fox (1994) suggests bringing back a sacred element to work. However, much of the research on Loving Kindness Meditation attempts to position it as a psychological tool to ameliorate internal stress or negative emotions (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Some have asserted that research into compassionate practices have received less attention than other mindfulness practices (see Shapiro & Sahgal, 2012, p.109). Kristin Neff (2004) maintains that more emphasis has been placed on research in mindfulness practice than on compassion, particularly self-compassion (p.28, 33). Mitroff & Denton (1999) suggest that part of the reason is a perceived inability to accurately measure the effects of more ‘nebulous’ concepts in spiritual life (p.84). O’Connor (2006) also notes the reluctance for researchers to explore teacher emotions on the basis that they cannot be measured, even though they are considered a crucial part of being a good teacher (p.117). This hasn’t stopped some researchers from trying to establish empirical measures for such qualities as kindness and compassion. Ionata et al.(2014), for example, propose a “Kindness Scale” to measure traits associated with kindness. This scale references other tools which purportedly measure optimism, satisfaction and
happiness (p.262). Critiques of this approach to ‘measuring’ kindness tend to focus on the interior, unmeasurable aspect of kindness.

What is more problematic is why kindness is being measured to begin with, and what or whom this might serve. Researchers such as Leppma (2012, p.196) position Loving Kindness Meditation as a tool to regulate client emotions, reduce stress, and even promote chronic pain management (see also Plante, 2012). This research advocates Loving Kindness Meditation as a tool for self-betterment, or what Megan Boler describes as “emotional management”, based on “the demand for social efficiency” (1999, p.67). But Boler cautions that the narrow focus on emotional management risks overlooking the wider contexts which ‘call for’ these interventions in the first place. Who benefits from specific cases of emotional management? Why are some emotions singled out as ‘to be managed’, and not others? Boler notes:

We are in the midst of a shift from a climate of rationality to a climate of the cybernetic system which incorporates emotions. The older liberal conception of the free individual self who “chooses” to follow rules is replaced with the cybernetic self/system whose brain contains a “universally common” neural pathway that functions as the perceptual apparatus necessary to acquire (neoliberal) social skills and rules. (p.76)

I share Megan Boler’s concern that positioning mindfulness practices as meliorating a specific ailment or factor might overlook why it is being used, and what or whom it serves. In measuring the effects of mindfulness practices through single factor improvements, power shifts away from the meditator’s ability to discern her own meanings in the practice itself.

Loving Kindness Meditation research has also positioned the practice as a tool for generating ‘positive’ states of being over time. Barbara Frederickson et al (2008) have suggested that Loving Kindness Meditation reinforces a ‘broaden and build’ model of personal growth, where positive emotions increase inner resourcefulness and the ability to achieve long-range goals. Frederickson et al remark:

Because positive emotions arise in response to diffuse opportunities, rather than narrowly focused threats, positive emotions momentarily broaden people’s attention and thinking, enabling them to draw on higher-level connections and a wider-than-usual range of percepts or ideas. In turn, these broadened outlooks often help people to discover and build consequential personal resources. (p.1045)
Frederickson et al. theorize that the ‘positive’ emotions generated by Loving Kindness Meditation would increase a person’s overall emotional and physical resources, including overall “positive emotions” (p.1047). Hanson (2013) similarly uses a neurological model to argue that lingering on positive emotions increases coping and resilience. He develops a series of exercises to strengthen one’s ability to stay with the effects of positive emotions.

Positioning Loving Kindness Meditation as an object which promises greater, expanded happiness can be problematic. Sara Ahmed (2010) hints that the ‘promised happiness’ of an object never quite arrives:

> Happiness may be preserved as a social promise only through its postponement: so we imagine that the happiness we were promised will eventually come to us, or to those who follow us. Happiness is what makes waiting for something both endurable and desirable—the longer you wait, the more you are promised in return, the greater your expectation of a return. (p.32-33)

Focusing only on one “sought-after” quality in Loving Kindness Meditation overlooks other important processes that arise in mindfulness practices. It also forecloses other possibilities for what the practice might be doing for the individual, as well as the social or emotional tensions that mindfulness practices expose and reflect. I attempt to address these gaps by using case studies, personal reflections, and interview to explore the layers of experiences that Loving Kindness Meditation evokes.

In addition, Frederickson et al.’s study does not explore in sufficient depth the tensions that the practitioners experience when they encounter “negative” emotions. While the study does conclude that Loving Kindness Meditation did not decrease negative emotions over time (p.1058), it doesn’t explore why this is the case. What happens when the intention to experience positive emotion in the narrative of Loving Kindness conflicts with felt emotions in daily situations? As I examined Frederickson et al.’s study, I began to wonder how the participants dealt with tensions they might have experienced during the practice. “Negative” emotions are only briefly touched upon in the research, with passing mention on how they are addressed during the practice itself (p.1046).

Of equal concern is the way mindfulness research often focuses on observable, tangible results, borrowing from medical models of symptom reduction. Many early studies of mindfulness practices
focus on physically measurable aspects. Herbert Benson (1974) documented the effects that different meditation techniques have on factors associated with stress: for example, heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension (p.37-46). Carson et al (2005) have shown that Loving Kindness Meditation can help people with chronic back pain to cope with their symptoms. They position their research as a means of evoking positive states of being and minimizing anger and pain:

The aim of this pilot study was to test the efficacy of a novel, positive emotion-oriented strategy—loving-kindness meditation—in reducing anger and improving the pain and adjustment of patients. (p.288)

In many studies, Loving Kindness Meditation is associated with specific physiological results, rather than turning to the whole subjective experience to reveal its meaning for the practitioner. Wendy Cadge (2009) examines the way contemplative practices, such as prayer, have been reframed to suit a medical model that focuses on measurable physiological changes and results. She cites the examples of using MRI scans to ‘measure’ brain activity of Buddhist meditators and monks (p.301) and “whether prayers offered by strangers influenced the recovery of people undergoing heart surgery” (p.299) Cadge recommends a more subtle discernment of the social contexts in which thinkers frame meditative practices, rather than taking for granted that specific practices are meant to generate measurable results. She notes:

Various assumptions about religion, or the aspect of religion being studied, such as prayer or meditation, underlie and shape these investigations, which are simultaneously created by and reflect investigators’ own religious and medical/scientific contexts and the broader American cultural climate in which they take place. (p.301)

Cadge alerts readers to the possibility that spiritual practices are being used to uphold dominant cultural theories of knowing, rather than looking at the lived experiences of contemplatives.

As an Interpretive study into Loving Kindness Meditation, my current study does not explore the historical and social implications of mindfulness practices in North America, or critique some political undertones of the Mindfulness Movement. Two exceptional examples of post-structural, post-colonial studies of the Mindfulness Movement in North America are Megan Boler’s *Emotion Power* (1999) and Jeff Wilson’s *Mindful America* (2014). The interested reader can refer to these for further exploration.
VIII) Loving Kindness as a “Social Object”

A few studies suggest that Loving Kindness Meditation can be used to promote better social harmony between people. Hutcherson et al (2008) performed an experiment with Loving Kindness Meditation, in which they tried to determine whether participants improved “positivity and social connectedness toward others”(p.721), by having meditators focus on a single person to whom they had ‘neutral’ feelings.

Hutcherson et al. speculate that widening the circle of people to whom loving kindness is directed might increase love and concern for others. They also maintain that a single expansive feeling of love could potentially encompass ‘out-group members.’ This notion parallels modern ideas which suggest that prayer and meditation are forms of ‘energy transfer’ from one state of being to another (Gawain, 2002; McTaggart, 2008; Dossey, 1996). Laura Huxley (1963) has advanced a theory of transferring positive energy to negative situations, which parallels some potential applications of loving kindness practice. She remarks:

The art of living is simply the art of using energy in an intelligent and creative way. The purpose of this recipe is the conversion of energy—its conversion from a neutral power, or from a power that is being used badly, into a beneficient power, directed by intelligence and good will (in White & Fadiman, 1976, p.104).

Huxley advocates a five step process, where a practitioner learns to summon different kinds of energy (creative, destructive and different) and alternate between them by recollecting experiences of all three. She maintains that over time, a person’s perspective of how energy is summoned changes:

With full awareness, know that you are drawing out the good and the bad, the personal elements of each experience, and that you are letting yourself be engulfed by the impersonal flow of fundamental energy. (ibid, p.107)

Huxley subscribes to a notion of using energy to transform emotions by increasing one’s ability to generate different kinds of energies. “Badly used” energy can be converted into “beneficent energy”. Her model is similar to what Ahmed (2012) refers to as a ‘contagious’ model of emotions, where it is thought that good energies have the power to convert or replace negative energies and memories into similar
emotions. They also presumably have the power to spread to other people. Ahmed suggests that this view also forms an implied social theory about the way emotions affect other people and different kinds of experiences. She states, “the concept of affective contagion does tend to treat affect as something that moves smoothly from body to body, sustaining integrity in being passed around.”(p.47)

Huxley asserts that moods can be influenced and spread across different bodies, such as between teachers and their students. But Ahmed warns that a ‘transfer of energy’ model overlooks the individual ways that people orient to shared moods or atmospheres:

The pedagogic encounter is full of angles. How many times have I read students as interested or bored, such that the atmosphere seemed one of interest or boredom….only to find students recall the event quite differently!...We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency, given the hap of what happens; we do not know ‘exactly’ what makes things happen in this way and that. Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively. (p.48)

Ahmed hints at potential discrepancies between an emotion directed at others and the actual effects of that emotion, as it unfolds in a complex social situation. One question that emerges is how much emotion is really ‘transmitted’ to others, and how much is simply imagined to transpire between teacher and student. The desire to extend certain emotions to others might also change the expectations of what prayer or invocation has the power to do in group settings.

Another question raised in the current research is to what degree a specific focus on the quality of compassion or loving kindness is required to foster social connectedness. Kristeller & Johnson (2005) propose a two stage model for how Loving Kindness Meditation works. They suggest that meditating by itself is not sufficient to generate compassion. Instead, another ‘secondary’ process is often needed to bring about a sense of compassion or connection with other beings:

The first stage involves awareness of habitual reactions and disengagement from the usual preoccupation with self-reinforcing, self-defeating, or self-indulgent behaviors and reactions. However, compassion also requires engagement or connection with others. Therefore, a second step in developing compassion or altruism via meditation involves a focused engagement with a universal human capacity for empathy and love. (p.392)

Kristeller & Johnson tend to downplay the role of meditative practice itself in cultivating Loving Kindness. They remark:
Meditative practice is neither necessary nor sufficient to create a sense of compassion toward self or toward others, but it may be that meditation, by systematically providing a tool to suspend engagement in usual thought processes and hence suspension of self-judgement, carries unique value in promoting empathy and compassion. The traditional literature associating meditative practice with spiritual growth suggests that meditation can be a particularly powerful means to actively cultivate universal capacities for love and connectedness. (p.402)

For this present study, I did not assume that the processes of meditation and compassionate focus are separate. Therefore, no effort was made to treat these as distinct processes. Instead, I explore the inner processes as unfolding narratives that function as a whole. However, Kristeller & Johnson’s model is useful because it points to potential connections or disconnections between ‘meditative’ and ‘compassionate’ experiences.

Positioning Loving Kindness Meditation as an object of social harmony could create a potential inner conflict, as teachers struggle to harmonize with specific students to accord with their spiritual practice. Conversely, Loving Kindness Meditation might be thought to be a way of spreading kindness to others, thus exerting a form of influence over students. While Loving Kindness Meditation has the potential of visualizing people in positive ways, it is not clear whether this approach can extend genuine connections between teachers and students. My current study is somewhat limited by the fact that only teachers are being interviewed and submitting reflections. It is difficult to establish what ‘being connected’ would mean from the perspective of the students to whom the teachers are reciting Loving Kindness Meditation.

Summary of Key Themes in Loving Kindness Meditation Practice and Research

The Literature Review hints at potential questions and issues raised in research on Loving Kindness Meditation. This current study is limited to studying teachers, and how Loving Kindness Meditation impacts their experience of students and classrooms. However, it seems useful to identify and summarize problematic areas in the current research and literature on the subject. Below are a few key points from the literature review:
The current research raises questions on what kinds of emotions and states of being are actually fostered and perpetuated through Loving Kindness Meditation practice (Frederickson et al, 2008). Are the states always “positive”? Mace (2008) recommends more in-depth case studies on what kinds of experiences and tensions might unfold during contemplative practices, rather than isolating and measuring specific behaviors or ‘valued’ emotions.

There are issues regarding whether Loving Kindness Meditation involves giving rise to specific emotions and character traits (Ladner, 2004; Wright, 2009) or is a practice of acceptance and bare awareness, similar to other forms of meditation such as vipassana, watching the breath, or body scan (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Kristeller & Johnson (2005) theorize that Loving Kindness Meditation may operate in two distinct stages: one meditative, while the other giving rise to compassionate states of being.

The orientation (Ahmed, 2006) and scope of Loving Kindness Meditation are key questions. To whom or where does Loving Kindness Meditation practice point? How far does it reach? And where does the practitioner direct her or his energy as the practice progresses in time? While some offer a model of energy transfer to explain how recitation-based meditation might work (Huxley, 1963), others stress the importance of turning inward and seeking a more intrinsic connection with one’s heart (Hanh, 1996).

Different cultural traditions place different stress on how Loving Kindness Meditation works. While Buddhist traditions frame Loving Kindness Meditation as a reversal of suffering caused by the ego (self), Western science is exploring Loving Kindness Meditation in terms of ‘adding positive emotions’ to daily life. These two frameworks suggest very different experiences of what Loving Kindness Meditation ‘does’ for people, and how it is experienced over time. I suggest that perspectival differences in
how the practice is experienced could be further explored through interpretive, case study research approaches.

The remaining sections will focus on the current study, methodology and findings. I will later revisit some of the questions related to Loving Kindness Meditation research, in light of the findings of this current study.

**Methodology**

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Loving Kindness Meditation, as they apply to teachers in educational settings. It explores what kinds of emotions and tensions the teachers report as they attempt to recite loving kindness with students and others in mind. Since the focus of phenomenological method is on “revealing meaning rather than arguing on a point or developing abstract theory” (Flood, 2010, p.7), it avoids trying to measure Loving Kindness Meditation quantitatively, in terms of one or two pre-determined variables. Instead, this study starts from the unfolding subjectivity of the participants (ibid) and later situates the narratives in terms of thick description and structural themes, a process referred to as Phenomenological Reduction (Moustakas, 1994, p.90). Clark Moustakas remarks:

> In Phenomenological Reduction we return to the self; we experience things that exist in the world from the vantage point of self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge. Things enter conscious awareness and recede only to return again. Something essential is recovered. (p.95)

Moustakas (1994) and Deal & Grassley (2012, p.473) describe phenomenology as a subjectively-based, meaning-focused form of mutual discovery between researcher and participant (Moustakas,1994, p.15). In this study, I used phenomenological research methods to create comprehensive, thematic accounts of how experiences unfold for the teachers. In doing so, I tried to capture in detail the ways teachers embody the Loving Kindness Meditation.

**Rationale for Using Phenomenology**

Phenomenology was used for this study for several reasons. Firstly, I felt this method to be a good fit to explore the felt meanings that teachers experience as they recite loving kindness, without
assuming that these meanings reduce to one-to-one correlations such as positive emotions (Frederickson, et al, 2008) or shared connections with others (Hutcherson, et al, 2008). Secondly, this method addresses a few research gaps, as identified in the previous Literature Review. These gaps include exploring potential tensions and contradictions teachers might face as they shift from reciting Loving Kindness to their students, to encountering students in their classrooms. I also attempt to explore what kinds of experiences and felt meanings Loving Kindness Meditation furnishes for the teachers.

Van Kaam (1966) notes that phenomenology is ideal in cases where an object has multiple features that make up its experience and characteristics. Thus, he emphasizes capturing “the full meaning and richness of human behavior” (p.15) when approaching specific objects. However, I differ somewhat from Van Kaam’s assertion that phenomenology “sets the stage for more accurate empirical investigations” (p.295). My research leans toward Moustakas (1994), who regards phenomenological studies as “a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions”, and which “provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis” (p.13). Rather than using phenomenology to arrive at fixed ‘essences’ or factors that can be later empirically studied, I use this method to create potential empathic connections toward the participants and their journeys. My focus is less on discovering ‘fixed’ essences, and more toward creating thick description through shared narratives of this experience.

Phenomenology is also useful because it studies how people orient to objects, rather than treating objects as fixed and self-contained (Moustakas, 1994, p.28). Sara Ahmed (2006) writes, “orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others.” (p.3). She goes on to suggest that people approach objects in different ways, depending on their prior experiences, attitudes, and how they are situated in the worlds they inhabit. Orientation, for Ahmed, depends on both the way an object is situated and how people have been shaped prior to and during the object’s approach. This study will explore how the teachers oriented to the practice of Loving Kindness Meditation as time progressed, as well as how it changed their experiences of students.

Loving Kindness Meditation is distinct in the sense that it incorporates elements common to both prayer and meditation. I believe there is great potential in phenomenology to understand the complexity
of using texts to perform meditation. Law & Singleton (2005) have done similar research on what they refer to as ‘messy objects’, phenomena which do not adopt solid, unchanging characteristics. The authors suggest a multi-model approach to conceptualize objects that engage different aspects of being:

It is possible to know complex objects by adopting an epistemological approach—by looking, for instance, for boundary objects. But we are proposing an alternative, and suggesting that, if we want to know certain kinds of (supposedly ‘messy’) realities well, then it is useful to rethink method in quite radical ways. And, to make the same point a little differently, we are saying that we need to think more carefully about the nature of the objects in the world—about what counts as an object. It is our suggestion that objects come in forms that cannot be known within the most obvious versions of common sense, and that in thinking about this it is useful to work on different models for imagining objects. (p.334-335)

Law & Singleton suggest that the meaning of a messy object can change based on the social contexts that subjects bring to the unfolding interaction with the object. But more subtly, they caution against trying to easily delineate the ‘object’ as a single, self-contained entity. This broadens the scope of what could be observed and experienced when meditators recite Loving Kindness Meditation, by not limiting the scope of the experience to predicted states such as love or generosity.

Some phenomenologists who are researching spiritual experiences suggest that recitations can be holistic practices. Reciting prayers or invocations take people beyond language itself and into contemplative, embodied and performative aspects. Norman Wirzba (2005), for example, suggests that attention and regular, daily discipline are crucial parts of what makes prayers and recitations impactful. He further suggests that it’s the intentional, disciplined aspects of prayer which “clears my vision of vestige of the ego so that a humble, compassionate, and just regard for others can occur.” (p.89) Wirzba maintains that prayer functions more importantly as a way of doing and clearing the mind of grasping ego, rather than simply as a literal reading of a text. He remarks:

‘What’ we say (a prayer’s propositional content) matters less than ‘how’ we say it. More specifically, what matters most is how our praying has the practical effect of repositioning us within the world—making us more perceptive, more sympathetic, more charitable—so that we no longer perceive and engage it in the same way as before….the praying act itself, its posture and disposition, is primary…prayer inspires and animates a moral response to the world. (p.90)

Wirzba sees prayer as dependent on way people perform it and are repositioned by it. He shifts away from the literal content of recitation and toward more holistic effects that reciting verse can have.
In my initial instructions to the teachers, I asked teachers to relate *experiences* and *impressions* they had about the practice, rather than going into a theoretical analysis of what they thought of the Loving Kindness text. This helped me to get an impression of the layers of embodied experiences and behaviors that the teachers brought into the practice itself.

**Teacher Recruitment**

The participants in this study are teachers who were recruited mostly as fellow colleagues at OISE (University of Toronto), or as meditation practitioners with a meditation group I co-facilitate in Toronto. Recruitment methods included informal contact with current and former colleagues in the education field, as well as a flyer distributed on campus. All the participants have had some previous acquaintance or familiarity with a contemplative practice, such as meditation, yoga, or other mindfulness practices (see Miller, 2014, p.30-60). Alternately, they may have learned meditation through a previous class in spiritual or contemplative education at a postsecondary level. Some basic familiarity with meditation ensures that the teachers going into this study have some previous understanding or what Miller refers to as the “meditative stance”, which embraces qualities such as openness, letting go, prioritizing being over doing, and accepting the moment (ibid,p.33-34) By engaging specifically in Loving-Kindness Meditation, the participants are coupling the meditative stance and present-moment orientation with a more specific intention to benefit the learners who inhabit their teaching spaces.

**Practice Instructions**

For a three week period, teachers were asked to recite Loving Kindness Meditation daily on their own. The script that they recited was adapted from Miller (2014), and includes an additional line (added by myself) which wishes that the teacher’s students be well, happy and peaceful. The following is the script that the teachers used during the meditation practice:

"May I be well, happy and peaceful."

"May my family be well, happy, and peaceful."
"May my friends be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May my neighbours be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May my colleagues be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May my classroom be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May my students be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May all people that I am having difficulty with or feeling anger toward, be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May all beings in the planet be well, happy, and peaceful."

"May all beings in the universe be well, happy, and peaceful."

At the end of the three week period, the teachers submitted a reflection which outlined their experiences of Loving Kindness Meditation. Teachers were also given the option to write daily journals of their practice, rather than submitting a total reflection at the end.

All four teachers submitted reflections, although one of the teachers also journalized her reflections daily. In the instructions, the teachers were prompted to describe any or all of the following:

a) Sensations, emotions and body experiences that arose during the course of the loving kindness practice period

b) Ways in which the practice might have extended during the day

c) Ways in which teachers felt connected to the Loving Kindness practice

d) Ways in which the Loving Kindness practice helped teachers feel more connected to your students and classroom overall

e) Challenges, tensions, inner doubts or disconnections that were experienced in the process of doing Loving Kindness in general.

After the teachers had submitted their reflections, I developed follow-up interviews to explore specific areas that stood out in terms of the data submitted by the teachers. These semi-structured interviews included questions that delved more deeply into key themes I had observed in the first analysis of the
teacher reflections. I used in-person interview in accordance with Seidman (1998) and Kvale (2009), who both recommend deepening phenomenological analysis of data through at least one follow-up interview.

**Interpretive, Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Working in the Interpretive (Naturalistic) and Qualitative research paradigm, this study attempts to arrive at a contextual description of Loving Kindness Meditation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.39). I use Lincoln & Guba’s key characteristics of Naturalistic Inquiry (p.39-43) to describe the guidelines I used when designing the study:

a) Rather than using structured survey and interview methods, I opt for teachers to write their own reflections after their practice of Loving Kindness Meditation. I attempted to provide minimum prompts to allow the teachers to fully describe their experiences and reactions to the practice, with emphasis on felt (tacit) knowledge over theoretical knowledge (p.40). Semi-structured interviews capture the spontaneous responses of the teachers and ensure a circular process of meaning-making and clarification between researcher and participant. It also creates a powerful tool to help hone in on the deeper meanings conveyed in the written reflections.

b) Purposive sampling (p.40) is used, as opposed to random sampling, to get a small but contextually meaningful understanding of teachers using contemplative practices. For this study, I sought out teachers who have some previous background in meditative practices of some kind, so that it was easier for them to settle into a practice of single-minded concentration on the words of Loving Kindness Meditation.

c) Using qualitative approaches helped keep the investigation broad enough so that it was not concentrated on measuring a single factor, or confirming a predetermined hypothesis. The “emergent foci” (p.42) arise from the emphasis and insights of the teachers themselves, but they also served to illuminate the researcher’s bias and assumptions coming into the study itself.
d) An emergent design (p.41) allowed the research to flow and even branch into divergent themes, without too many preconceptions of what would arise from the study. Plummer (1983) acknowledges that “precariousness and change are persistent facts at all levels of analysis” (p.55). I manage emergent design by keeping my research question as open-ended as possible, allowing teachers to relate the experience of loving kindness to whatever thoughts or impressions came to mind. I also fostered this design approach by minimizing the practice instructions (see Appendix D) so that teachers could get in touch with the parts of practice which most connected to their experiences and feelings. I was aware that too much instruction on what teachers should look for or note in their reflections might pre-define the experience itself. When teachers did seek clarification on what to note in their practice, I tended to encourage teachers to note grounded, felt experiences.

e) Case studies are constructed (Plummer, 1983, p.45) as a key reporting method to illustrate the interlocking aspects of the meditative practice. They are then subject to phenomenological analysis and tentative application based on the emerging, changing realities (p.42), while avoiding sweeping generalizations or trying to find an absolute essence of the experiences themselves. The “Limitations” and “Recommendations” sections of this study are designed to contextualize the findings in terms of an ever-changing landscape of inquiry. The main hope of this present study is to generate meaningful inquiry for future studies in the areas of Loving Kindness Meditation and teacher development.

Phenomenological Method

Kvale (1983) suggests that the three major characteristics of phenomenological method involve “open description, investigation of essences, and the phenomenological reduction” (p.184). In the following sections, I outline my methodology, using Kvale’s explanation as a framework.

a) Open Description
Kvale emphasizes the importance of describing the given experience “as completely and precisely as possible; to describe and not to explain or analyse” in the attempt at “the direct description of experience” (ibid). This corresponds to “Epoche”, a process which Moutakas (1994) describes as “looking, noticing, becoming aware, without imposing our prejudgment on what we see, think, imagine, or feel.” (p.86) Moustakas also emphasises the process of granting every quality of the data an equal value, not emphasizing meaning based on prior reading of the subject (p.87). I used both written reflection and a follow-up interview to allow the teachers to openly describe how they related to Loving Kindness practice during the three week period.

Where possible, I refrained from focusing on specific emotion types for teachers to describe (such as ‘positive’ feelings), opting instead for seeking a free association of emotions and impressions as I was reviewing the data. In addition, I tried to arrive at a thick, richly contextualized description (Lincoln & Guba, p.125) by asking participants what individual verses might have impacted them in the course of doing the practice. Throughout this process, I suspended the notion that Loving Kindness is a singular object or narrative, Instead, I focus on how teachers related to individual parts as well as the totality of the practice itself.

Arriving at an open description meant minimizing imposing a framework on the way this practice is approached. I thus allowed the teachers to define for themselves their particular understanding of loving kindness practice. When providing instructions to the teachers, I refrained as much as possible from using psychological or spiritual terminology to prescribe a specific focus for the teachers.

b) Investigation of Essences

Kvale (1983) describes investigation of essences as:

the transition from the description of separate phenomena to a search for the common essence of the phenomena. …This means varying a given phenomenon freely in its possible forms, and that which remains constant through the different variations, is the essence of the phenomenon. (p.184)
I used meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.193-194; Hycner, p.284-285) to arrive at shared patterns in the ways that teachers narrate and orient to Loving Kindness Meditation. Kvale & Brinkmann describe meaning condensation as:

an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations. Long statements are compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words. Meaning condensation thus involves a reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulations. (p.192)

My analysis involved reading the reflections and interview transcripts several times to notice patterns in the data that remained relatively constant throughout the teacher narratives. Table 1.1 shows a sample meaning condensation excerpted from one of the participants, David:

**Table 1.1 Sample Meaning Condensation Used in the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement from Transcript</th>
<th>Unit of Meaning</th>
<th>Units of Relevant Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initially, I felt confused about what I experienced after the meditation.</td>
<td>R1. Uncertainty as to how to practice meditation in beginning stages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be completely honest (and I’m embarrassed to admit this),</td>
<td>R2. Embarrassed to admit expectations regarding the practice</td>
<td>R2. Embarrassed to admit expectations regarding the practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think a part of me felt that good things would happen to me since I was “wishing” good things to everyone around me (as well as all those who live in this universe)</td>
<td>R3: expects good things to happen due to wishing others well</td>
<td>R3: expects good things to happen due to wishing others well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, I thought the meditation would lead to “positive karma”</td>
<td>R4: expects that the meditation would lead to positive karma (implied: belief in karma affects orientation to practice)</td>
<td>R4: expects that the meditation would lead to positive karma (implied: belief in karma affects orientation to practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and so when I found myself experiencing challenges/stress at work, I think I felt a little more upset.</td>
<td>R5: Expectations lead to more feeling more upset with challenges/stress at work</td>
<td>R5: Expectations lead to more feeling more upset with challenges/stress at work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some methodologists, such as Starks & Trinidad (2007), suggest that phenomenology involves discerning fundamental essences of experiences:

In phenomenology reality is comprehended through embodied experience. Through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event. The truth of the event, as an
abstract entity, is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception; we create meaning through the experience of moving through space and across time. (p.1374)

I agree that the effort of phenomenology involves discerning how an experience is embodied, as opposed to abstract formulations of topics. However, I also agree with Patricia Brennan (2010) that there is no fixed and underlying essence that can be found in the data. Phenomenology can arrive at thick descriptions which capture crucial tensions and moments that are disclosed by the participants themselves. However, I maintain that these meanings are always situated in the midst of unfolding intersubjectivity, including my own. There is no assumption of an underlying ‘natural’ meaning to Loving Kindness which exists independently of the teacher’s social and cultural practices. As Brennan remarks:

[the] human is embodied, situated, finite, and thrown into a particular culture, time, and place. This situated, social, and sentient person dwells in a world of common meanings, habits, practices, meanings, and skills that are socially prior to the individual and are socially disclosed or encountered. These socially situated meanings, habits, practices, and skills are the foci of interpretive phenomenology. Interpretive phenomenology relies on disclosive practices that allow social practices, embodied intentionality, common taken-for-granted background meanings, habits, rituals, practices, and everyday life to show up (i.e., become visible and intelligible).

c) Phenomenological Reduction

Kvale (1983) refers to phenomenological reduction as “a suspension of judgment as to the existence or non-existence of the content of experience. The reduction may be pictured as a ‘bracketing’, an attempt to place the common sense and scientific foreknowledge about the phenomena into parentheses in order to arrive at the essence of the phenomena.” (p.184) Richard Hycner (1985) offers practical suggestions on how researchers achieve phenomenological reduction in listening to transcripts of interviews:

It means suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher's meanings and interpretations and entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed. It means using the matrices of that person's world-view in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying, rather than what the researcher expects that person to say.(p.281)

Hycner recommends repeated listening and reading of transcripts and participant’s reflections to arrive at a general gestalt for each participant narrative, as well as generate themes and general units of meaning. I also follow Hycner’s format of summarizing sentences in reflections and interviews as units of general
meaning (p.283). After this approach, I extrapolate meanings which relate to the central question of how teachers’ experience of Loving Kindness Meditation affects their experiences of students and classrooms (Hycner, p.285). Similar meanings are then clustered together to avoid redundancy (p.287). Themes emerge from related clusters (p.291) and the clusters later form the basis of summary descriptions of each of the teacher participants. Table 1.2 is an excerpted example of how the meaning units of one of the participants, David, was clustered into over-riding themes, at the end of the condensation process:

**Table 1.2 Sample Thematic Clustering of Relevant Meaning Units Used in the Study (David)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Units of Meaning</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R25: recognizing bodily tiredness and allowing body to rest in meditation</td>
<td>I: Turning inward to care for the body and sensations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R27: experiences greater peace of mind and body as the Loving Kindness Meditation progresses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R28: sensations felt throughout the body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R29: soothing sensations in chest, face,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R30: mind relaxed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R31: calmness from the meditation had a direct benefit on the classroom and self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R32: calmness during meditation leads to heightened feelings of patience, relaxation and effectiveness with all in the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R57: greater ability to focus on the words when not disturbed by outside influences (calm environment) (Implied: space needed to cultivate an internal calmness, uninterrupted by the distractions of daily life)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R58: lines of meditation seemed to connect me to the body more quickly than with other kinds of meditation that don’t employ lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R60: sees meditation as not hanging onto particular thoughts (letting go)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R22: intention to recite to loved ones distracts the practice of meditation itself</td>
<td>II a heightened appreciation of students and loved ones through guided imaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R23: visual imagery a key part of practice which often became central (eg. drifting to images of closest friends)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d) **Data Collection and Analysis Steps**

I collected a 1-2 page reflection from each participant after their 3 week period of reciting Loving Kindness Meditation. After gathering the first set of themes from the participants’ reflections, I created memos with questions and key points regarding the themes that emerged from reading the teacher’s reflections. I then conducted follow-up interviews of the participants based on these questions, and the phenomenological reduction procedure was repeated for the interview transcripts. New themes were added where necessary (see Hycner, p.292).

This procedure was then repeated for all the reflections and interviews. I then looked for themes which could be clustered together from all the interviews, as well as exceptional ‘counter-themes’ that were found in only one reflection or interview. A composite summary of all the participants’ key themes is then attempted (p.294). In the last section of this study, I contextualize the key themes in terms of their overall significance or ‘horizon’. This involved examining the effects that orientations toward Loving Kindness had on the teacher’s classroom experiences and experiences of students.

For all the participants, data analysis includes the following stages:

a) Establishing units of relevant meaning in the reflection, and eliminating non-relevant meanings
b) Creating a table of clustered meanings based on similar or related themes
c) Using memos and the clustered meanings from the reflection to design follow-up interview questions
d) Repeating a) and b) for the follow up interviews
e) Forming a Textural-Structural description (Moustakas, 1994, p.133) for the teacher’s experience of Loving Kindness practice, based on the themes established in the narratives

Once the phenomenological method was used for all the teachers’ data, I clustered common themes in all four analyses, and used this clustering as the basis for a composite textural description (p.137-138) of the teachers’ experience of loving kindness. A brief Composite Textural-Structural Description was then used
to gather together key themes in terms of a single framework. This became the basis for the findings presented in this paper. Appendix E outlines a schematic summary of my data analysis and coding.

**Participant Backgrounds**

Although several teachers had been contacted for this study, four teachers in total committed fully to the practice for three weeks, submitted a full reflection, and agreed to a follow-up interview. All teachers’ names are kept anonymous in this study. The following are brief background descriptions of the teachers, Jill, David, Karen and Nicole:

1) **Jill** is a teacher from China who has been teaching in Canada for approximately a year, since September 2013. She is also student at OISE (University of Toronto) who specializes in language learning in intercultural contexts. In particular, she is involved in research and development on how to promote traditional Chinese culture to undergraduate students of different cultures. Jill is currently teaching Mandarin privately to students of various backgrounds, and she aspires to work as a full-time language teacher in a school or learning community in Toronto. Jill’s teaching background includes teaching Mandarin as a second language to non-native adult speakers, teaching English as a second language to Kindergarten and primary school age students, and teaching IELTS and TOEFL preparation to high school and university age students. Going into this study, Jill has been practicing yoga for 8 years, and considers meditation to be an important part of yoga. She mentions also that she had taken John P (Jack) Miller’s course “The Teacher as Contemplative Practitioner”, and had read his previous books as well.

2) **David** has been teaching in Canada for 14 years. He has mostly taught high school students from Grades 10 to 12, but he has also worked for about 3 years as a guidance counsellor in the same high school. He currently teaches Grade 10 Civics, Grade 11 and 12 Economics, and Grade 12 AP Microeconomics. David notes that, prior to doing this study, he used to practice meditation
daily in the mornings before going to work. He also at one point participated in a few events hosted by Dharma Drum Mountain (Ontario) Buddhist Association (DDMBA Ontario) related to group meditation practice. In terms of other exposure to meditation, David has read a few books on meditative practice, and he has also listened to several audio CDs by Jon Kabat-Zinn related to meditation and mindfulness.

3) Karen has been teaching in Canada since 2000. Prior to this time, she taught in Hong Kong, and has been teaching in total for over 20 years. She is currently a high school English teacher who is teaching Grades 10-12. Before taking part in this study, Karen participated in a long-term vipassana retreat, and she has also attended a Buddhist conference which included some meditation instruction. Karen describes herself as someone who has implemented various compassionate techniques in her classroom prior to this study, including imagining her classroom filled with love, as well as trying to extend unconditional love to everyone she meets.

4) Nicole has worked in education program design and mentoring students in China, and currently resides in Toronto. Her work has involved preparing students to study language as international students and helping students develop strategies to cope with academic pressure, test anxiety and culture shock. She is currently also a student at OISE in the Master of Education program, with background in children’s education, holistic learning and language learning. Nicole has attended study classes on Chinese classics such as Confucius’ Analects, and she has an interest in implementing Taoist and Confucian educational principles and values into learning settings. Nicole’s previous background with meditation has involved taking Jack Miller’s class, Spirituality in Education, and she has also attended some formal group meditation practice. Nicole regularly writes a gratitude journal as one of her principal spiritual practices, and reports on the benefits of this practice in her life.
Findings

I) Composite Textural Description of the Teachers’ Lived Experience of Loving Kindness Meditation

The purpose of the Composite Textural Description is to sketch out experiences that the study participants had shared, using concrete language that stays close to an embodied experience of the phenomena being studied. Moustakas (1994) remarks that, in the Composite Textural Description of a study, “The invariant meanings and themes of every co-researcher are studied in depicting the experience of the group as a whole.” (p.137-138) After coding and identifying key themes, I used a Composite Textural Description to capture an overall impression of how the teachers approached Loving Kindness Meditation. Later, I condense the themes identified in my coding into a Textural-Structural Description. This forms the basis of a more detailed description of how the teachers’ experiences unfolded from their narratives.

The composite textural description for this study is as follows:

*Teachers experienced Loving Kindness Meditation as a peaceful turning inward to the body.*

*Their sense of time slowed down and expanded as they recited the lines and became comfortable in their bodies. The teachers discovered a sense of self that was not competing or striving in relation to other beings. The lines of Loving Kindness Meditation connected teachers to a calm, imageless sense of body and mind. Visual images of loved ones naturally helped them feel comfortable. In the process, they found themselves less determined to control time or tasks in the classroom. It was a relief for teachers to do a practice that took them away from being task-oriented and overly demanding toward themselves.*

*As the teachers practiced Loving Kindness Meditation, many images of students, past and present, came to mind. The teachers also started to review classroom situations as the images proliferated, particularly difficulties they had encountered with specific students. Loving Kindness verses created a meditative and reflective space for the teachers to reflect on how they related to their students and classrooms, as well as what they could change about themselves. The teachers created a calm space*
to reflect on how they plan and connect in their classrooms. After meditating and reflecting on relationships with their students, the teachers became more aware of the ways they resorted to self-blame when facing unpredictable or uncontrollable classroom situations. However, over time, the teachers stopped judging themselves critically or too harshly. They created a gentler relationship to themselves which emphasized being in the moment, letting go of the past, and focusing on what they could influence in the moment. Through the combination of relaxation, visualizing others and meditating, the teachers eased a lot of perfectionist attitudes they had maintained in their regular self-reflections as teachers.

In their classrooms, teachers noticed themselves appreciating their students more. They were able to drop expectations toward students and simply behold them as they were as individuals. Rather than seeing students as one homogenous group, the teachers saw the students as individuals with unique gifts and characteristics. The teachers felt more receptive and listening toward their students, rather than feeling distracted by tasks or a rushed sense of time. Furthermore, Loving Kindness Meditation helped the teachers develop an unconditional regard for beings. They felt less compelled to attach to their role of teacher, and more open to seeing themselves and their students as fellow human beings. The teachers learned to honor the uniqueness of their students, and appreciate the unfolding surprises in their interactions with students.

The teachers did not always give rise to typically positive emotions as they recited Loving Kindness Meditation. They had to manage disappointment, as they realized that their practice wasn’t necessarily being reciprocated by students or those to whom they had difficulties. Second, the teachers faced frustration when they tried to recite to students with whom they felt challenged. They often experienced a conflict between the felt emotions of frustration, disappointment and guilt, and the expressed intention to wish all beings well. They felt challenged in particular with how they negotiate compassion for themselves as caregivers with many responsibilities. Over time, the teachers learned to adopt an accepting, non-judgmental stance on the present moment, which made the practice less exhausting and burdensome. Loving Kindness Meditation took the form of surrendering expectations
rather than trying to build expectations or about the teachers’ spiritual or classroom lives. Internal dynamics shifted away from controlling thoughts, and toward flowing with emerging feelings.

In visualizing students or associates to whom they experienced challenges, teachers frequently felt strained or unable to generate sustained feelings of warmth. The teachers felt more exhausted as they tried to extend the reach of Loving Kindness to all students, present and past, and all beings. Teachers experienced both emotional exhaustion and the exhaustion of images as the scope of Loving Kindness widened. Eventually, teachers started to let go of images and thoughts altogether. They related to Loving Kindness Meditation more as a felt experience in their bodies, as well as a sonorous recitation of words. Visual impressions of others gradually had less impact as the practice of Loving Kindness progressed. In fact, detaching from images seemed to allow the teachers more space to utilize emotionally resonant images to suit the present need.

As the practice period progressed, the teachers started to relate to Loving Kindness Meditation as yielding to the present moment. They stopped demanding themselves to be perfect as teachers and developed more confidence in their ability to receive students. They also used Loving Kindness Meditation to manage anxiety and create a receptive mental space where challenging emotions were accepted and managed. Finding inner calm, cultivating unconditional acceptance, and surrendering expectations were fostered and accentuated over time. The practice allowed teachers to negotiate a balance between the different perspectives and demands they face and their own embodied spontaneous moments in the classroom.

II. Composite Textual-Structural Description

After creating a Composite Textual Description of the teachers’ experiences, I then created a Composite Textual-Structural description which encapsulates the key themes that emerge from all the teachers’ individual profiles. This short description is later expanded as I start to describe the emerging themes, using examples from the teachers. The structural definition later helps me to understand how teachers shifted their orientations toward themselves and their students over time.
For purposes of brevity, I summarize the composite themes which had been compiled based on all four teacher participants and their common practices. Table 1.3 outlines the main themes and subthemes that I compiled based on the total clustered meanings of all the teachers combined.

**Table 1.3 Composite Table of Clustered Meanings, by Theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Key Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. **Diminished striving for perfectionism as a teacher** | -revised understanding of the role of teacher  
- a retrospective re-visioning of teaching life and practice  
- slowed down the embodied experience of time  
- seizing the present moment  
- letting go of self-blame | “Sometimes I realize in the class, but I forgot, or, I need to do something else, but I forgot those parts. But right now when I do meditation and reflection, I give myself a certain time to reflect those things, and I now I know…(pause) how to improve my teaching later. Previously, I reflect, “Oh, I’m so bad, I didn’t prepare this!” But right now after I do meditation for a while, I am like, “let it go”…no worries. “Don’t be worried, nobody starts to know everything.” I did my best this time. I can do better next time, but okay, just every time I do the best I can. I feel like I get more peaceful and happy with everything, not very worried about everything. That’s something.” (Jill) |
| 2. **Encountering the limits of visualizing students** | - felt most challenged when loving kindness lacks proximity or reciprocation. | “Though it wasn't something I consciously or intentionally tried to do, the widening to include more people was challenging in trying to...” (Nicole) |
- heightened appreciation of students and loved ones through guided imaging

imagine, for example, all of the students I've ever taught in 20 years, many still living in Hong Kong. In other words, trying to hold and accommodate all of the people in my mind, or imagine all people living in TO as my neighbours seemed a little heavy to hold.” (Karen)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Cultivating an Embodied Presence with Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- a dedicated moment of self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- a growing sense of bodily and emotional comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- being more present with anxiety and difficult emotions,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- turning inward to care for the body and sensations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- showing unconditional regard for self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- greater confidence in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- allow self to settle the mind and find inner calm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I noticed that there were many sessions (more during week 2 and 3) where I began to feel more calm and at peace during and immediately after the meditation. During the meditation, I remember feeling sensations in my feet and legs. The feeling was soothing and I also felt sensations in my chest and my face/mind felt very relaxed. I found it very beneficial to feel this way (of calmness) right before I had to teach my next class, which happened to be my most challenging one. And because of this feeling of calmness, I felt I was more patient, relaxed, and overall more effective with everyone I had to deal with at school.” (David)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Being Surprised by the Unique Qualities of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- re-appraise students in a way that honors their individuality and unique energies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reflect on self and relationship with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- showing unconditional regard for students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I think what has changed is that they seem much more like interesting individuals to me, rather than a homogenous, challenging blob of teenage excitability and immaturity. In fact, it's becoming like the best teaching situations that I've had, one where I feel like I am warm and loving and truly helpful, rather than the punishing, constricting teacher that I think I can be seen as initially or throughout the year maybe by some students.” (Karen)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Accommodating tension and conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- negotiating tensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- imaginative reframing of conflict with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“If I share my loving kindness with you, maybe you don’t understand what I feel in that period. I usually tell my friends I am keeping a gratitude journal, so they just think nothing. And I am not pushing. I
don’t mean that I want to push them to do the same thing as I do. But I just think it’s a good practice for me. It makes me feel comfortable to keep this practice. Yeah. If they…in Chinese we say “when it’s a good time, the time arrives, you do it by yourself. Nobody pushes you to do that.”

6. *Surrendering Expectations of the Classroom Experience*

- intrinsic appreciation for everyday teaching experiences
- managed expectations that the practice fulfill a specific caring role toward others
- being more present with disappointment

“Initially, I felt confused about what I experienced after the meditation. To be completely honest (and I’m embarrassed to admit this), I think a part of me felt that good things would happen to me since I was “wishing” good things to everyone around me (as well as all those who live in this universe). For example, I thought the meditation would lead to “positive karma” and so when I found myself experiencing challenges/stress at work, I think I felt a little more upset. And so I realized that it was really important to not expect anything at all from this meditation. Interestingly, when I stopped expecting that it would result in “positive karma”, that is when I believe it became much more meaningful for me to continue the practice.” (David)

The resulting composite *textural-structural* description of the four teachers is the following:

*Loving Kindness Meditation became a reflective tool for the teachers to (1) diminish their striving for perfectionism as teachers. The practice initially allowed teachers to review their teaching and caring practices, through an expanding visualization of their relationships to students, past and present. Later, however, the teachers encountered challenges and limits of visualizing their students (2), including feelings of exhaustion and frustration as imagery expanded to include all former students. As the Loving Kindness Meditation progressed, the teachers shifted their orientation to a more embodied presence with students (3). In the process, the teachers experienced surprise as they encountered the unique qualities of*
their students (4), particularly as they felt more present to the students. Loving Kindness Meditation also allowed teachers to better accommodate tension and conflict (5), and let go of unfulfilled expectations toward their classroom dynamics and students (6).

The following subsections describe the themes of the textural-structural description, using key examples culled from the reflections and interviews. Numbers in brackets above correspond to the numbered themes described below:

1. **Diminished striving for perfectionism as a teacher**

   Loving Kindness Meditation challenged the teachers’ perfectionist tendencies. “Perfectionism”, here, refers to a “self-oriented” perfectionism that “involves the tendency to set high goals for oneself and to strive for perfection” (Flett, Hewitt & Pallett, 1995), particularly in the context of planning lessons for a classroom.

   All four teachers demonstrate a conscientious attitude to the practice of Loving Kindness Meditation. In the written reflection, Jill describes Loving Kindness Meditation as “a part of my daily routine now”, while Karen reports incorporating the practice into her daily walks. David had practiced privately just before his class, as well as on weekends. Nicole had kept a daily digital journal for the 3 week period. She wrote in her reflection, “I tried my best to focus on this practice at a peaceful time during the day.” The care and exertion that the teachers put into doing their practice also reflects an attitude of careful planning they put into their lessons. Jill notes that the Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to counteract a tendency to complete many actions, when she remarks: “Meditation time is the most peaceful moment in my everyday life. As life speeds up, I feel the need to slow down.” Over time, Loving Kindness Meditation allowed the teachers to diminish a tendency to demand a lot from themselves as teachers, as they experienced a gentler, less task-oriented, view of themselves.

   It seemed fitting at the beginning of the practice for the teachers to visualize students and reflect on how they relate to others in their lives. For instance, in her reflection, Jill remarks, “When I mention my family and friends, I think of our dialogues and activities during the daytime; when I mention my
colleagues and students, I thought of my teaching and interaction with them.” Jill extends this visualization to her students. She notes:

When I made reflection during the meditation practice, dialogues and interactions with my students and colleagues during the daytime often appeared in my mind again and again. I was able to ‘see’ what I did well and which part I need to improve.

Jill encounters Loving-Kindness Meditation as a process of reviewing her actions as a teacher (“dialogues and interactions with my students and colleagues”), and potentially revising what she could improve about her teaching during the day (“I was able to ‘see’ what I did well and which part I need to improve.”). However, Jill reports that her practice of Loving Kindness Meditation gradually allows her to let go of excessive self-criticism. She writes in her reflection:

Well, I feel quite happy and proud of being a teacher. I get a sense of achievement, like … my students get to know more and more. Therefore at the very beginning they know nothing, and they learn a lot from my teaching. So, I am quite happy with that. That’s, yeah…and [pauses] also, I can get to reflect on my teaching and feel like, “Okay, I need to, maybe I need to prepare more in certain parts in my class today. Sometimes I realize in the class, but I forgot, or, I need to do something else, but I forgot those parts. But right now when I do meditation and reflection, I give myself a certain time to reflect those things, and I now I know…(pause) how to improve my teaching later. Previously, I reflect, “Oh, I’m so bad, I didn’t prepare this!” But right now after I do meditation for a while, I am like, “let it go”…no worries. “Don’t be worried, nobody starts to know everything.” I did my best this time. I can do better next time, but okay, just every time I do the best I can. I feel like I get more peaceful and happy with everything, not very worried about everything. That’s something. (italics mine)

Jill notes two significant experiences coming out of Loving Kindness Meditation. The first is that the meditation process gives her a certain time to reflect on what she could do differently in her classroom. Giving herself time to reflect allows Jill to slow down her pace and take more time to review her practices and think of future improvements. The second experience Jill describes is diminished self-criticism. Instead of blaming herself for lack of preparation (“Oh, I’m so bad, I didn’t prepare this!”), Jill reports a more relaxed view of her perceived mistakes, or lack of pre-planning. She also reframes herself as someone who doesn’t need to know everything all at once (“nobody starts to know everything”) and is able to see herself as capable of gradual improvements (“I did my best this time. I can do better next time, but okay, just every time I do the best I can”). She describes “letting go” and “no worries” as attitudes of unconditional regard for her efforts, as well as the ability to reflect on the impermanent, situated aspect of
teaching and preparation. Jill balances the momentary nature of her role as a teacher with the ability to change and improve over time. This observation reflects a less static view of herself as a teacher. It results in diminished self-blame when unexpected situations arise in her teaching practice.

Loving Kindness Meditation also provided Jill with a different way to reflect on herself, which emphasizes the impermanent and situated aspect of her daily struggles. At one point in her reflection, Jill notes, “since I started to meditate, I have watched my thoughts, reflections and struggles come in and let them go.” Jill maintains that, prior to Loving Kindness Meditation, she struggled with trying to be a ‘perfect’ teacher:

I feel like maybe it’s kind of about my personality. I used to kind of want to be the perfect, be the best one, I should make everything the best. That’s a good point, but sometimes, it makes you give myself a lot of pressures to be the best one, so right now, I say okay, …I am trying my best this time, that’s fine. I can do better next time, but this time, it’s okay. It already left.

Loving Kindness Meditation created a space for Jill to let go of inner demands to be a perfect teacher or to care for students perfectly (“I should make everything the best”). For Jill, the lines also evoked specific memories of interactions with students. This recollection allowed her to appreciate her accomplishments, and also gave her a sense of pride in her role as a teacher. But reciting the lines and observing images arise and fall also sensitized her to the temporality of her experiences (“it’s okay. It already left”). She felt less pressured to be ‘prepared’ for all situations (“I should make everything the best.”). In the process, Jill was able to adopt a more relaxed attitude toward herself as a teacher.

Loving Kindness Meditation allowed David to feel calmer and less demanding on himself to prepare for all situations in the classroom. He admits that Loving Kindness Meditation helped him to feel more confident in his classroom, even while acknowledging that not everything can be controlled or predicted beforehand:

I think [before] I am always thinking of what I have to do next. Like, you know, so, if I’m on the chalkboard and I am drawing a graph or something, um… that lack of confidence might be, you know, like, do I really know what I am doing? I am teaching this new course, this AP economics, and I feel like I have to always look at the stuff before I teach it. Just that little bit where I don’t feel completely, grounded? I don’t know how to put it to words. But I just remember there were a couple of times when I am writing on the chalkboard and I feel like, ‘everything’s fine’. I don’t know, I just feel like this kind of makes me feel more calm (sic). And so I have this feeling like, yeah, everything’s fine.
David describes how he shifts from thinking and visualizing his planning process ("always thinking of what I have to do next"); "I always have to look at the stuff before I teach it") toward a felt presence of his body in the classroom ("I feel like 'everything's fine', "makes me feel more calm"). David associates "lack of confidence" with always having to look outside for answers, and not feeling firm or grounded in his body. David also relates his improved confidence to letting go of excessive thoughts and doubts about his role and competencies as a teacher ("I feel like, 'everything's fine"). This improved confidence also reflects a shift away from visualizing himself as a teacher, and toward feeling himself as embodied in the classroom. Teaching ceases to feel like a “visual performance” for David, and more like a process of accepting his felt presence in the classroom.

Loving Kindness Meditation, for David, took the form of letting go of judgments about his own thinking patterns, which in turn allowed him to be less judgmental toward students. As David suggests in his reflection:

One meaningful thought I had (while drifting during this meditation) was that no matter what kind of thought I had during my practice, I should not judge myself. I always realized that meditation (to me) meant trying not to “hang on” to any particular thought. To let them drift and then to go back to the breath. And the purpose of this (at least for me) was to help provide an anchor so that I have a tool to always bring me back into the present time, where my mind can be more alert/aware. But in that moment, I realized another purpose of not “hanging on” to any thought also meant to not judge myself with any thought regardless of how crazy that thought may be. And if I can get to the point of just not judging myself at all, I can then become much better at not judging other people too, including new people that I meet and of course the students that I teach. I felt having these glimpses of personal insightfulness was meaningful and further encouraged me as to why I need to continue the practice.

David reports a more relaxed attitude of letting go of thoughts, particularly personal judgments about himself ("no matter what kind of thought I had during my practice, I should not judge myself"). He acknowledges that this attitude could allow him to be less judgmental toward others. It also convinces him of the relevance of the practice to his classrooms ("and further encouraged me as to why I need to continue the practice.")
Nicole relates a similar shift in the way she understands Loving Kindness Meditation. At first, she relates how she *pushed* herself to improve how she thinks during the initial stages of reciting Loving Kindness Meditation:

Sometimes I just push myself to think, like what can I benefit from this practice? What can I get? What findings can I get from the practice? How can this practice make me better in the future? Especially at the very beginning, I push myself to think, ‘what can I feel?’ ‘What can I get while reciting those words?’ So I just push myself. In later days, I don’t think… I don’t push myself, I remove it, I just recite, I just follow whatever comes up.

Nicole begins the practice with specific expectations of what she will gain from Loving Kindness Meditation. She reports wanting to benefit and become a ‘better’ person or have a specific feeling from the practice (*what can I benefit from this practice? What can I get?*). But later, she changes her orientation to pure recitation of the lines, and “following whatever comes up”. Nicole makes a parallel shift away from trying to control her thoughts and toward ‘following her feelings’. In the interview, she remarked:

When I tried to push myself to think, the result was more frustrated. But then when I follow my feelings, I become more peaceful, and I become more understanding of people.

Nicole shifts away from using thought to control who she is, and toward a more yielding attitude toward her emotions. This later influences how Nicole views her classroom situations, particularly in reflecting on teacher-student relationships:

You know that when we give a class, we spend hours preparing a lesson. We make a lesson plan. But I think that what is good is just, you *don’t need a plan*. You just follow your feeling that you want to teach, or you want to talk with them. And also the teacher, I think I wrote that the teacher-student relationship is just a human relationship. They’re not students! Don’t title them, don’t put them in groups, [and] don’t label them. Don’t put people in ‘teacher group’, ‘student group’, they’re just human. We’re just different ages. If you’re more understanding, you will know that they’re just human relationships. Then you’ll understand. (italics mine)

Here, Nicole reveals how she used the images evoked in Loving Kindness Meditation to reflect on her attitudes toward the classroom, including her emphasis on preparing a lesson. She starts to re-envision teaching as a process of beholding students and appreciating them as humans (*the student-teacher relationship is just a human relationship*), rather than focusing only on her lesson planning (*we spend hours preparing a plan*). Nicole shifts from an attitude of planning and control, toward following her
feelings in the moment. By adopting a less controlling stance toward her role as a teacher, Nicole is able to report a more harmonious understanding of her students as fellow human beings. She also becomes less bent on using plans to control her classes, and more present with her students.

Reframing experiences with teaching as momentary or temporary allowed the teachers to soften their striving to be perfect. It also shifted the meaning of care from something that is task-driven to something that honors the presence and stillness of an unfolding classroom. As mentioned above, Jill reports on how she felt less pressured to complete all her preparations before the classroom situation unfolded. She also viewed herself more as a teacher who is continuously improving and changing over time.

Nicole uses the term “broadens my horizon” to refer to an expanded view of herself as a caregiver, who can “think beyond myself”. The teachers’ sense of reach and horizon expands as they reflect on other beings in the process of doing Loving Kindness Meditation. David describes the effect of this shift on his experience as a teacher:

I am always thinking about: ‘I have to do this next, I have to do this next, I have to photocopy this, I have to mark this, I have to buy something for my class for this, and I just keep doing as many things as I can’. But when I do that meditation for ten minutes, um…I almost thought I just feel like it just kind of stops, and I just feel more calm (sic). And so now I have this class that I have to teach and all those things will get done later. And I just feel like I can just deal more with that class.

David relates several changes in how he takes care of his classroom. First, he describes the sense of time stopping (“it just kind of stops”), a subsequent feeling of calmness (“I just feel more calm”), and a sense that some things can wait (“all those things will get done later”). David learns to refrain from feeling that everything has to be completed all at once, in one moment of planning. In this sense, Loving Kindness Meditation allowed David to realize that his presence is one of many succeeding moments. What isn’t cared for in the present moment can find another moment later. Finally, David sees his presence as a teacher as an impermanent moment in a flow of time, rather than trying to present himself in a single, perfected moment. This process allows him to practice a more relaxed sense of care for his classroom. The result is that he experiences more space opening up to handle the emerging moment, thus, “I feel like
"I can just deal more with that class." Relaxing his attitude toward what needs care allows David the mental space to handle more of what is unfolding in the moment.

2. Encountering the limits of visualizing all students

During their reflections on Loving Kindness Meditation, the four teachers attempt to expand loving-kindness to all their students. Karen, for example, wrote in her reflection:

As well as meditating at home, I did a walking meditation - with my dog - repeating the words a few times. I found that with each repetition, who I pictured sending the meditation towards widened. For example, neighbours went from those who I share a condo with to my neighbours in Toronto. I often focussed on my students in my one Grade 12 class, who can be a little loud and excitable. This also extended to all students I've ever taught in my 20 year career. This was not a conscious effort, the widening to include more and more people seemed to happen naturally (italics mine).

Visualizing specific individuals naturally occurs as teachers recite particular lines, such as “may my friends be well, happy and peaceful”, and “may my students be well, happy, and peaceful.”

Nicole describes an expansive process of imagining more and more people in the practice, when she relates that “lots of people popped on my mind” during the practice. She begins to realize how much she cares and misses those who have been away from her for a while:

I think this meditation broadens my horizon because it requires me to think beyond myself and think differently. As I wrote, “I began to think of people that I haven’t thought of for a long time or people that I think I’ve lost the connections.” I realized I haven’t talked with my families for a long time. I feel I care about my friends more than yesterday. I am happy that J. [a roommate] found a new job and would like to share with me. I found that I pay attention to people sitting around me in the subway.

Here, Nicole reports that the Loving Kindness Meditation broadens her scope of others (“requires me to think beyond myself and think differently”) and encourages her to feel more care for others (“I realized I haven’t talked with my families for a long time. I feel I care about my friends more than yesterday”). She also encounters the practice as retrospective, looking back on “people that I haven’t thought of for a long time.” As she recites Loving Kindness Meditation over time, Nicole reports that she is able to reflect on her students in ways that challenged how teachers view their students. She remarks, “I also reviewed my past teaching experience with my students. My students have their own difficulties and teachers couldn’t
actually ‘see’ them.” Nicole uses a ‘visual metaphor’ of ‘seeing’ students to describe understanding students through a sustained attention to their difficulties. She also uses the images of her students generated in Loving Kindness Meditation to reflectively inquire into how she can appraise her students differently.

Part of the tendency to expand care ‘outward’ comes from the structure of Loving Kindness text itself, which starts with proximate others and expands outward to all beings. But what begins as the effort to expand love to all beings, including all their students, leads teachers to a more subtle understanding of the limits of expansive imagery. Teachers gradually re-examine their style of exerting energy outward toward the images of their students. Karen reflects on the problematic aspects of trying to expand Loving Kindness to all her students and to all beings:

Though it wasn't something I consciously or intentionally tried to do, the widening to include more people was challenging in trying to imagine, for example, all of the students I've ever taught in 20 years, many still living in Hong Kong. In other words, trying to hold and accommodate all of the people in my mind, or imagine all people living in TO as my neighbours seemed a little heavy to hold.

It seemed particularly challenging for Karen to try to behold or intentionally direct loving kindness to countless individuals, particularly when she viewed them individually as well as over a long time span. In her reflection, she remarked:

While I generally found it calming and loving, I also found it a relief to finish a meditation. I found that the enormity and the scope of the words sometimes a lot to contemplate, that I was being stretched in a way that was a bit uncomfortable. (Perhaps it's easier to reside in 'monkey mind' than in loftier thoughts.)

Karen describes the process of expanding imagery using words such as “lofty”, “a lot to contemplate” and “uncomfortable.” She reflects on the difficulties that she often felt as she tried to extend loving kindness to people who were not immediately close or known to her in a direct relationship. Karen describes her emotions as ‘stretched’, as she struggled with the enormity and scope of the words. But later, she suggests that she was more able to relate to an overall principle of unconditional love for all beings, once she let go of imagery altogether. Karen experiences a sense of total love once she is able to release the pressure of
the accumulated images and emotions of the Loving Kindness Meditation. In the interview, she remarked about the last line, “may all beings in the universe be well, happy, and peaceful”:

I find that it’s so abstract, that it’s quite easy to say it, you know? And, I mean, I’ve practiced for a while. 10 years or 12 years ago I was sending unconditional love and just loving everyone around me. I found that part actually quite easy. But I think as a totality, in total, by the time I got to that line, everything that I had imagined or felt like, that was too much, not the last line. I think that’s a beautiful thing to end off.

Karen clarified in the interview that it was not the last line of Loving Kindness Meditation (“May all beings be well, happy and peaceful”) that felt burdensome. Rather, she felt the accumulated imagery of the previous lines to be exhausting, particularly the effort to extend love to all those images. Karen suggests that she felt more ease when she was able to let go of the images altogether, in the final verse of Loving Kindness Meditation. She reports both emotional strain as she accommodates different images and emotions, and emotional release as she considers the last line as the totality of Loving Kindness practice.

David describes the limitations of expansive imagery after I had asked him whether he was able to apply his sense of love to ‘all beings’, or ‘all students in the classroom’. David explains:

I think the answer is no… Because like I said, I don’t know… I just know that when I start to have people I had conflict with, different feelings came up… Keith, you know, I will be completely honest with you the line about beings on this planet, all beings in the universe, I think I just kind of like, went…I didn’t have any real images.

David suggests that he initially was unable to feel loving kindness to all beings without images. He also reports less intensity of emotions as he progresses to the end of the Loving Kindness verse. He maintains that there are fewer images to attach to at the end (“I didn’t have any real images”), which explains the decreased emotional intensity of the last lines:

I think the emotional part was with my classroom. For that part, I actually visualized my classroom, and I wanted it to feel like it was a safe, clean place where kids want to come. My students… that was, again, very powerful. But when I got to my neighbors, I didn’t have any [images]… I tried. I just thought of the people that [pause]… I live in a condo, I don’t know my neighbors, I just tried to think of those around me, but I didn’t… I just tried to, I would go to the next one. When I went to my family and friends, I felt that line and felt I was holding onto it, and I was like “David, you have to let it go and go onto the next one” [laughs] but with the neighbors, I could let it go [laughs], and all beings in the universe, I could almost just, I am almost near the end… so the family, my friends, my students, my classmates…there was always another image I
could think. There’s another image I can come up with. But of course, I have to go onto the next one.

Here, David relates the struggles that arose with the imagery experienced while practicing Loving Kindness Meditation. While intense images of family and friends caused him to lose the flow of practice (“you have to let it go and go onto the next one”), accumulated images of all beings felt overwhelming (“there was always another image I could think”) and some relationships did not evoke any memorable images. David relates how too many images would disrupt the flow of his practice, rather than encouraging a smooth or engaged recitation of the lines of loving kindness. He at times had to consciously intervene on this process to move to the next line of the meditation (“But of course, I have to go onto the next one”).

Over time, David learned to harness the energies of Loving Kindness Meditation by framing images that allowed him to be more present to his students. This required a more active re-envisioning of students and how the teacher co-exists with his students. Rather than trying to use visualization to expand a loving emotion to everyone, David starts re-envision his connection to particular students to allow him to relax and let go into co-presence with them:

There was this one student, she was put late into the class, and I taught her last year too. It’s not that we have a bad relation but she’s the kind of student that will just walk around. And so when she was put into that class really late, my first reaction was, ‘Ah, I’ve got to get her out.’ [laughs] *But the words and what I am reciting...in my mind I am actually thinking that those words conflict with me trying to get her out.* And so, even when I am interacting with her, so... there was a time when I would say, hey, [student’s name], come on outside, I would now be able to have a conversation with her outside. But I feel like I am calm enough to have a conversation with her outside, whereas before I would make her wait, because I have stuff do and I think that the class is important and you know what? I don’t care if she’s going to walk around the halls. You know, but now it’s more like, I go and I deal with it immediately. I guess what I am trying to say that before I am angry with her and need some time to cool down, keep her outside...it’s almost like, I am ashamed to admit it, but it’s like punishing them, take them outside. I’ll deal with them later. I don’t care about you now, you’re disruptive. I’ll just go through the motions outside when I’m out with you... But I don’t feel confrontational, it was more like, what’s going on? [Student’s name], this isn’t the way you are. It was more...And it’s not like she’s an angel all of a sudden, but she is much better. So, going back to your question, it’s those words where I am actually seeing her face when it’s like, oh, “I wish my students well, happiness and peace” (italics mine).

This part of David’s narrative contains many significant aspects of how he was able to re-envision his students to match with the intent of the recitation itself. While David initially feels uneasy and even
vigilant about having a restless student in his class ("I've got to get her out"), reciting Loving Kindness Meditation causes him to reconsider his initial reaction of wanting her to leave the class. ("in my mind I am actually thinking that those words conflict with me trying to get her out"). In the beginning, David is set on maintaining a sense of inner composure in the classroom, opting to separate himself from troubled students ("I am angry with her and need some time to cool down, keep her outside"). Here, he describes a form of ‘role-based’ care that allows him to keep his composure without inquiring into the more difficult situations with students.

The turning point for David appears to arise when he reflects, “so, in my mind I am actually thinking that those words [of the recitation] conflict with me trying to get her out”. David elaborates that through the recitation practice, he was able to form much more positive images of his student, which he felt allowed him to have a closer connection to her:

that, so that kind of makes. I think it really helps my relationship with her. Because I just have a mental image of her and she’s smiling and whatever it is in my head. And so, it just makes me feel like I am connecting with her, even though we had no real physical connection, if that makes any sense. (italics mine)

Visualizing smiling images of his student allowed David to experience her differently and feel more connected to her. This led to a sense that this student is ‘much better’ than his initial experiences of her suggested. It also gave David the opportunity to appreciate his student’s personal needs, to the point of even inquiring into what was happening with her, rather than retreating somewhat into his professional role (“But I don’t feel confrontational, it was more like, what’s going on?.., this isn’t the way you are”).

David related similar imaginative reframing of students, when he later remarked in the interview:

And that’s a specific example of [how] those words…help…because it brings images of her. Now I am meeting her in real life, and I don’t want to be angry at her. She’s not the only one. There’s another boy who I had the same feeling too. And I think they sense it. I don’t know if it’s in my head, but, I… they don’t come across, like, so strong, where they wanna, yeah..[pause, trails off].

Imagining his students smiling or in a positive way had helped David to feel more at ease with conflict, and even to re-envision what his role could be for his students. Rather than restricting himself to his role in front of students, David repositioned himself as beside them, wondering how they are doing internally.
The recitation itself also seemed to challenge David’s sense of authority as a teacher, by creating an experience which emphasizes inquiring into “what’s going on”, rather than isolating the student. As a result, David had noticed a change in how his students were interacting with him. He particularly noted that they did not come across as aggressively as before.

For David, imagery became a distinct part of Loving Kindness Meditation that distinguished it from other meditation he had done in the past. He comments on the way visualizations of loved ones allowed him to reappraise their value and appreciate them in a loving and warm body-space:

I was a little bit worried about how it could be done. It’s so different from what I know about meditation. But now that I have done it, I think I feel the sensations because when I am talking about, I wish my family well, happiness, and peace, it’s…I feel like it’s easy for me to feel the sensations when these things are just warm to me. I don’t know, I just feel…whereas before…I guess what I am trying to say is, when I am encountering the images of things that are really important to me purposely, I think my body just feels more relaxed, and more warm.

David suggests that he felt more comfortable in his body as he recites Loving Kindness Meditation to his loved ones. This recitation helped David feel more relaxed and warm, which seemed to create an embodied feeling for the practice.

All four teachers suggest that they gradually moved away from expansive, cumulative imagery, as the practice progressed. Over time, the teachers start to let go of images altogether and focus on a more imageless, sound-based approach toward the recitation. Nicole reflects that too many images could be an impediment to the practice:

At the very early days, I found my inner self more pressured than peaceful. For example, on the first day Jan, 21, lots of people popped on my mind, my families, my friends, my colleagues, people living in this city, people living in my hometown, all the plants and animals living in this planet. And I had a feeling of guilt in the reflection process. I was confused, “am I wrong to put ‘I’ first before anyone else in the world?” Another problem is that I couldn’t stay focused even [when] I tried hard to concentrate on nothing but reading the words mindfully. I don’t mean that other people or the surrounding sounds distracted me. But I am easily distracted by my floating thoughts. (italics mine)

In time, Nicole was able to settle a lot of her ‘floating’ thoughts by reciting the words of Loving Kindness Meditation out loud. She describes how she experimented with reciting silently with eyes closed, only to later find that reciting out loud helped her better focus on the words. Nicole writes:
I usually practice the recitation by closing my eyes and saying those words in my mind. But later I hear a voice from inside that I really want to say it out and see if I could improve my focus with this little motivation. So I tried a few times to speak the words out loud and it did work very well.

Nicole notably shifts away from imagery and uses the sounds of words as her focus. During her interview, she reported reciting without having too many thoughts and images, particularly toward the end of the recitation practice. She remarked, “in the third week, I think things get better. I just recited the words without thinking anything else.” Nicole also clarified that this period of reciting without thinking felt calmer than before. She reported, “I feel that it’s easy to do this practice”, when she shifted toward purely reciting the words without harboring too many thoughts or images. This shift away from expanding imagery and toward imageless recitation of words reflected a corresponding yielding orientation to the present moment. The sounds of loving-kindness verses seemed to counteract the proliferating images, marking a shift to present-moment focus.

3. Cultivating An Embodied Presence with Students

Reciting Loving Kindness Meditation toward one’s self was a grounded, embodied experience. The teachers articulate the experience of Loving Kindness Meditation as ‘coming home’ to a more authentic, often more embodied, felt sense of self. Karen remarks in her reflection:

As soon as I first read the words, I felt like I was coming home to my truer self, the one who does try to cultivate an unconditional love towards other people, and which can be masked by challenges of life, and frustrations with other people.

Karen distinguishes between her truer self and a self that is challenged by external pressures (“challenges of life, and frustrations with other people”). She subtly links unconditional love for others with an authentic, truer sense of her own being, which is deeply felt while reading the first lines of Loving Kindness Meditation. Rather than being actively cultivated, this ‘truer’ self is experienced as something already present but somehow hidden behind frustrating interactions and challenges with the outside environment. David characterizes Loving Kindness Meditation as a tuning into an authentic experience of the body, which then allowed him to be more relaxed and patient toward his students and colleagues:
I noticed that there were many sessions (more during week 2 and 3) where I began to feel more calm (sic) and at peace during and immediately after the meditation. During the meditation, I remember feeling sensations in my feet and legs. The feeling was soothing and I also felt sensations in my chest and my face/mind felt very relaxed. I found it very beneficial to feel this way (of calmness) right before I had to teach my next class, which happened to be my most challenging one. And because of this feeling of calmness, I felt I was more patient, relaxed, and overall more effective with everyone I had to deal with at school.

The soothing sensations of Loving Kindness Meditation allow David to feel calmer to face the challenges in his classrooms. He reports feeling more patient and even more effective with those he interacts with, through the extended sense of embodiment in the practice.

For Jill, Loving Kindness Meditation entailed being in tune with her body, as opposed to being interrupted by tasks. In her reflection, she writes:

> During the meditation of the last three weeks, I was not hurried and task oriented. I put my work and assignments aside and entered a state of contemplation. I engaged in nothing. I enjoyed the moment, without interference.

Jill contrasts being “hurried and task oriented” with “engaging in nothing” and “enjoying the moment without interference”. She implies that too much interference pulls her away from an inner sense of stillness, and this takes the form of an uninterrupted flow. Nicole also frames self-care in terms of slowing down her processes, and taking time to respond to the body’s authentic needs, rather than being distracted by outside images. In the interview, she recollected how wishing loving kindness to herself lead her to question and more firmly establish how the self can be better cared for:

> N: I just realize what is really good to me. For example, watching TV is a way to relax yourself but it’s also…I don’t think that is good. Yeah.

> KB: You kind of think you could be doing something.

> N: Maybe control, like, I should learn to control my thoughts. I like to balance the time to be good to myself

> KB: Yeah, yeah. Is there a particular [pause]…do you feel there is an act of kindness that you could do more for yourself? When you were doing the recitation, did you feel kindness for yourself?

> N: Yeah, yeah, I had a strong feeling that I should take care of myself, when reciting the words. Just slow down and recite every word of it.
These passages suggest that wishing kindness to oneself required turning toward an authentically embodied, imageless experience, along with corresponding letting go of constricting mind-frames that limit the teacher’s self-definition, particularly in classrooms. The teachers tended to feel most comfortable extending Loving Kindness Meditation to themselves only when they were able to loosen their sense of what their ‘self’ is, as well as develop insight into why they sometimes adopted critical images and judgments around their social roles as teachers. It ultimately allowed the teachers to re-define what self-care means, balancing their time constraints and embodied needs as human beings.

Along with a calm sense of body comes a calmer, receptive mode of being, both during the meditation and in the classroom. Jill describes how reciting Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to develop an attentive inter-being with her students:

I have tried to bring mindful presence into my teaching. I calm myself down for a while before starting a class. I am attentively together with my students in the class. I have become aware that a good teacher is not necessarily the most knowledgeable one, but the one who is fully present to students. (italics mine)

Jill was able to use Loving Kindness Meditation to reflect on what she could do in the present moment (“the one who is fully present to students”), without taking on the burden of past or future events.

Yielding to the present allowed Jill to let go of self-blame for past actions, rather than accumulating images of students under her care:

…since I started to meditate, I have watched my thoughts, reflections and struggles come in and let them go. The “let it go” experience was enlightened, which enabled me to concentrate only on the present moment. I realized that I could not change the past, I could not decide the future, and I could only seize the present. From this point of view, my attitude toward teaching and life has been changed. My body and mind are more quiet (sic) and settled. I can feel a sense of inner peace.

Jill uses several metaphors to relate the shift away from images and toward a embodied, listening orientation to herself and her classroom. For example, she refers to how she “watched my thoughts, reflections and struggles come in and let them go.” She describes the “let it go” experience as “enlightened”, allowing her to “concentrate only on the present moment”. “Seize the present” becomes a metaphor for how Jill let go of thoughts of past and future to develop a quiet presence and “sense of inner
peace” in her teaching. Jill also suggests that her sense of inner peace comes from adopting a less controlling stance to her teaching life, as well as being more oriented to the present.

Karen reports that reciting Loving Kindness Meditation before her classes grounded her, when she writes, “I have repeated the words silently before a class has started, and it grounds me instantly and I feel like I can interact more easily.” Karen also hints at a contrast between images of people with whom she felt difficulty, and the more soothing, bodily felt elements of Loving Kindness Meditation. She remarks:

Sensations I felt: generally I felt calmer as I meditated upon the words. I did feel tightness in my body as I extended the meditation to those with whom I’m in conflict with. That occasionally made my mind spin off to the nature of the conflict/how I felt wronged.

In this passage, Karen suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation occasionally evoked unsettling images. Later practice, however, allowed her to feel calmer and more grounded in herself, which counteracted the potency of the thoughts. In a later follow-up interview, Karen described how Loving Kindness recitation counterbalanced the difficult images stirred up in the meditation process:

I think in times of stress and difficulty, my mind often spins out into considering how I've been wronged, replaying the situation over and over again, getting further enraged, and then by introducing loving-kindness - it's like a balm or a salve to all of it. It pretty quickly douses the fire in my mind, and I feel like I'm contemplating what lifts my spirits rather than thinking about what preoccupies the ego.

By describing Loving Kindness Meditation as a balm or a salve to difficult thoughts, Karen suggests that it allowed her to let go of disturbing thoughts and yield to an unfolding present, particularly with her students. Karen uses metaphors of ‘expansion’ and ‘proliferation’ to describe how she becomes tense when facing difficult thoughts. For instance, she refers to the mind as “spinning out”, “replying the situation over and over again”, “fire in my mind”, and “getting further enraged.” The “cool” imagery of Loving Kindness Meditation (“a balm, or a salve”) suggests that it operates to calm the mind and prevent thoughts from proliferating. These contrastive metaphors suggest that Loving Kindness Meditation started to take on the function of calming and grounding the mind, even though initially it had taken on a vision-based, expansive function for Karen.
Nicole reports a shift in how she understands the purpose of teaching, as she progressed in the Loving Kindness Meditation. She describes a sense of *allowing space for learning to happen*, rather than treating teaching as an *active performance or imposition of care* onto her students. She expresses this change as a shift away from speaking eloquently and toward listening deeply to her students:

> My previous perspective about being a good teacher is that you have something to say, you have something to *teach* students. But for now, I think being a good teacher doesn’t mean that you have a great life experience but you want to *listen to your students* and, yeah, you’re learning from them. (italics mine)

Jill had also shifted the way she viewed her caring role toward her students. Whereas her early visualizations during the practice focused on how she could improve her preparation, reciting Loving Kindness Meditation leads her to decenter the notion of being in control of the teaching interaction. When I had asked Jill when she might have been reminded of Loving Kindness Meditation in daily life, she relates a more open, yielding presence with others:

> One is in the work, or in especially interaction with my friend, okay, I should be more present to them. Like, when I talk to you, just talk to *you*, not at something else, not look at my phone or something like that.

These examples show the teachers actively reframing a sense of care as yielding to the present moment. The teachers uniformly report moving away from discursive, image-laden thinking, and toward a more grounded relationship to their bodies. Equally significant is the shift away from visual imagery and toward the recitation as a sonorous, rhythmic process of recitation. Finally, “yielding” took the form of receiving students through active listening, and present-awareness.

### 4. Being Surprised by the Unique Qualities of Students

The yielding aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation created opportunities for teachers to redefine their relationships to their students. One common characteristic of the encounters is a sense of discovering student qualities that had not been previously recognized or appreciated. Jill expresses this tendency as *surprise*, when she reflects on how visualizing her students in Loving Kindness Meditation caused her to behold them in completely new ways:
I was also very surprised to find out that I learnt a lot from my students, (mainly culture-related knowledge, since I taught Mandarin to non-native speakers in Toronto), which I had not realized in the classroom. (italics mine)

Jill suggests that the different setting of Loving Kindness Meditation was an opportunity for her to see her students in new ways. As a result of reflecting on her experiences and what she learned from her students, Jill remarked, “I gradually get to better understand myself as a teacher and as a person, as well as my teaching and my culture.” Jill reveals how the process of reflecting on her experiences of the day re-invigorates how she sees the learning interaction with her students. She acknowledges the complexity of the teaching situation by reviewing students and re-evaluating the effect they have had on her own sense of self. The process of reflecting after Loving Kindness Meditation gave Jill an insight into her interconnectedness with her students (“I learnt a lot from my students”). It also helped her to appreciate moments of learning that often don’t get acknowledged because they are not part of a formal teaching process or plan. They, rather, spontaneously emerge from a sense of different cultures and struggles that students might relate to her.

The teacher’s yielding orientation in the classroom tends to connect with esteeming the students as unique beings, with their own distinct talents and personalities. Karen notes that after practicing Loving Kindness Meditation, she was able to appreciate her students by re-appraising their energies in the class:

The Grade 12s: I have not had a class like this before. I find them a challenge as they are good-natured kids, but also very easily distracted by each other. I feel like I have a softer approach with them now, and try to enjoy their exuberance.

When I asked Karen to clarify how she was able to enjoy the students’ exuberance, she remarked:

I think what has changed is that they seem much more like interesting individuals to me, rather than a homogenous, challenging blob of teenage excitability and immaturity. In fact, it’s becoming like the best teaching situations that I’ve had, one where I feel like I am warm and loving and truly helpful, rather than the punishing, constricting teacher that I think I can be seen as initially or throughout the year maybe by some students.
Karen connects Loving Kindness Meditation to an increased ability to appreciate her students as individuals, rather than as a “homogenous, challenging blob.” She contrasts this ability with a previous self-image she possessed as a “punishing, constricting teacher.” During our interview, Karen showed a Thank You card from one of her students. The card exemplified for her the connection she made to her students as she continued to practice Loving Kindness Meditation throughout the term:

She’s so lovely. Even little things. I often do happy faces especially on tests, 80% or above on the board. And I just put a happy face, because there is always a reason to be happy. And she really likes that. She’s a happy child and she always wants other people to feel really good. And, oh I was pretty happy to be able to show this to my parents. Because I have had issues with anxiety, so if this person feels like this, yeah, it’s very affirming.

Although Karen initially expressed frustration about students not reciprocating her efforts, she later starts to appreciate the students for their small gestures of kindness (“Even little things”). In general, this seemed to apply to most of Karen’s relationships, as she recited Loving Kindness Meditation. She notes that Loving Kindness Meditation came at a time when she experienced family conflicts, particularly with a difficult in-law. She remarked, “I think…yeah, it’s such a gift, and it was such good timing. I was in such a crappy mind-frame, right? I am so grateful and I still recite the words, not every day. I have been on holidays and I’ve been pretty relaxed.” In this passage, Karen characterizes the practice as a gift that was well timed with conflict in her family. This contrast suggests that she experienced the practice itself as a surprise and an unplanned gift that mitigated the strains of her daily life.

David suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation allowed him to relax more with his students and experience a genuine curiosity toward them. When I had asked David whether Loving Kindness Meditation affected his experiences of being with students, he replied:

Absolutely. I think when I am more calm, more grounded, I think I just feel more confident. And, absolutely, I think it makes me just happier. And so, any kid, when I’m seeing them in the halls, I smile, say hi, you want to know their names. So, yeah, it’s not just exclusively where it’s making a difference with the ‘difficult’ kids for me. Yeah, it just makes me interact better with everybody, including, actually, my wife. The answer is that I think it just makes me a better person, 360. (italics mine)
The teachers developed different ways of seeing their students as their images came to mind in the Loving Kindness Meditation. Nicole notes that the calm and open perspective of Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to re-appraise a situation with a student for which she felt little or no control:

I remember one of my students...he’s a senior high school student. His parents spent a lot of money for him to study in our school, about $10,000 (Canadian dollars) for short term training courses. So we had teachers who tutored him to get a good score, but he studied at school seven days a week. Yeah, we didn’t see him waste time playing or shopping or going out with his friends. So he wants to get a good score to study abroad. But he always got very poor scores. We don’t see a very good progress in his study. So we think he has some problems such as anxieties. But he didn’t talk with us. He didn’t let us know, so sometimes we cannot do anything if he didn’t talk with us. There is no conversation, so we cannot find a good way to solve his problem. So sometimes, when your students don’t want to talk with the teacher, or don’t want to let the teachers know his problem. Maybe he is shy, or because of his personality, you can do nothing. So what you do is just not talk too much.

Without a call for help from the student, Nicole admitted her inability to help him in his academic goals (“There is no conversation, so we cannot find a good way to solve his problem”). However, she also notes that the process of reflecting on this student during Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to find a less intrusive and more curious approach to the student’s difficulties:

Don’t tell him what we want you to get: “We want you to get the highest score. We want you to pass the exam. We want you to go this university, not this college.” If you don’t give him too much pressure, I think he feels better. Sometimes we cannot actually see them. Because they don’t talk. But their anxieties show on their face.

As she generates images of toward this student during Loving Kindness Meditation, Nicole shifts away from trying to find solutions to the student’s situation, and starts to recognize more subtle communications from her students, such as silent facial language (“But their anxieties show on their face”). Though Nicole admits that she cannot convince her colleagues to adopt a gentler and yielding approach to their students, she sees the Loving Kindness Meditation as a way to appraise the unique personalities of her students and think beyond her own notions of academic success. During our interview, Nicole remarked:

…if I had this perspective at this moment to help him, maybe he would be more understanding about himself. I think he just follows teacher’s instructions, parent’s instructions. But I cannot persuade my colleagues not to push the student. So in some way, doing the loving kindness practice is just a matter of yourself. You cannot bring ask colleagues to be kind [or] to be the same.
As the practice progressed for the teachers, they expressed more recognition of the unique mystery of their students. But they also felt less compelled to control others, or to try to force others to share the same values. As Nicole puts it, the practice becomes “just a matter of yourself”.

The teachers acknowledged that students don’t come in predictable packages that can be transformed through instruction. They also report that each student has their own process that unfolds in its own mysterious way. Furthermore, the teachers seemed able to fully receive this mystery rather than trying to exert pressures to care for their students or other teachers in aggressive or imposing ways. This seemed to shift the teacher’s notions of what caring for students could mean or feel like. Shifting away from an expansive and ‘planned’ caring identity gave the teachers an open space to cultivate a relaxed, unrushed presence in their classrooms.

5. Accommodating Tension and Conflict

Throughout their practice of Loving Kindness Meditation, the four teachers reported de-centering their sense of control in the classroom to accommodate other perspectives. Part of this builds on the notion that Loving Kindness Meditation, at least in theory, extends to all beings equally. David often struggled to accommodate his desire to uphold the spirit of Loving Kindness Meditation with conflicting inner perspectives of how the classroom experience should unfold. He writes:

I have learned to believe the intention of the practice is to want the best for my students. For example, initially I wanted to speak to Guidance in the attempts of having those students removed from my class, but when I thought about doing this, one of the next thoughts I had was that having such actions in response to my feelings of anger and frustration towards these students contradicted the verses of the actual meditation that I had been trying to recite. I began to talk to my wife of why I felt conflicted and upset and her advice was that I be very proactive in making it work with these students. And so, the next day I made a new seating plan for that class and after school I was able to speak to one of the student’s parent on the phone. I also spoke to another student about her behavior privately as well. I found all of these interactions were positive. I believe a part of me has internalized my intention of the meditation and so whenever I am under stress/conflict, I do want to take on the action that supports the intention of the meditation.

Here, David suggests that wanting to extend Loving Kindness Meditation to others conflicted with his desire to remove challenging, at-risk students from his classroom (“my feelings of anger and frustration
towards these students contradicted the verses of the actual meditation that I had been trying to recite”). Yet, the desire to fully embody Loving Kindness Meditation impelled David to reduce inner conflict, and seek solutions that would be potentially more inclusive of the students and their parents (“whenever I am under stress/conflict, I do want to take on the action that supports the intention of the meditation”).

Supporting the intention of Loving Kindness Meditation pushed David to behold conflicting viewpoints, rather than try to reduce them by eliminating conflict in the classroom. It also encouraged David to actively seek support from others, including his spouse, rather than making decisions in isolation. The intention of Loving Kindness Meditation allowed David to be more present with and address conflict rather than quickly trying to exclude it from his classroom life.

Nicole intimates that Loving Kindness Meditation fostered a gentler inner space for her to accept conflicts that are beyond her influence, particularly in the workplace. During the interview, she described the situation of maintaining Loving Kindness Meditation, even when those to whom she recites don’t understand its meaning or resonate with the practice itself. She remarked:

If I share my loving kindness with you, maybe you don’t understand what I feel in that period. I usually tell my friends I am keeping a gratitude journal, so they just think nothing. And I am not pushing. I don’t mean that I want to push them to do the same thing as I do. But I just think it’s a good practice for me. It makes me feel comfortable to keep this practice. Yeah. If they…in Chinese we say “when it’s a good time, the time arrives, you do it by yourself. Nobody pushes you to do that.” But you will feel different.

In this passage, Nicole demonstrates awareness that Loving Kindness Meditation is still meaningful to herself, even though her colleagues may not share its vision or perspective, let alone feel the benefits of her recitations toward them (“maybe you don’t understand what I feel”). Her insights also reflect a growing comfort with her own spiritual cultivation, irrespective of whether it directly impacts the perspectives of those around her. The practice starts to feel intrinsically meaningful to her (“I think it’s a good practice for me”). She also extended a similar attitude toward her boss, when she remarked:

I told myself don’t complain to others when they are rude to you or they are not that kind. It’s none of my business. But I keep doing the right thing. And I am trying to understand. If my boss, if my student is reluctant to do the right things, I won’t blame them or something. I understand that we’re in different ages. You think differently. My boss, you think “how should I make the best? How should I make profit to make more money? You have to make the balance meet, make the ends meet”. And I am just an employee, I cannot think what the boss thinks. So if I
understand what position he stands, I don’t want to blame. If I think for him, I think he would like me, and maybe he would give me more tips or something like that.

Nicole is able to shift between perspectives without feeling she needs to take responsibility for others’ behavior (“It’s one of my business”) or try to match their behaviors with her beliefs (“I keep doing the right thing”, “I understand that we’re in different ages. You think differently”). This reveals how Loving Kindness Meditation changed the way Nicole approached diverging expectations in the workplace. It seemed to allow more space for conflicting perspectives to co-exist, rather than trying to reduce conflict.

Through Loving Kindness Meditation, Jill was able to entertain perspectives that were different from her own, particularly in her actions as a teacher. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

J: for me, sometimes I want to teach a student in this way, but my supervisor says no, no, no, you shouldn’t do this. [trails off] Or, no, no, no, we should do that for our [pauses] profit. My challenge, from ‘real me’, I think ‘no’, but to the other perspective, I have to say ‘yes’. [pensive]

KB: So you kind of struggle with your ideas, and then as opposed to the main purpose that the supervisor might have. But you mention a ‘profit’?…

J: Or like, we should keep this course smoothly like that way.

KB: Ohhh, yeah, yeah not allowing you the freedom to try different strategies

J: Yeah, I don’t have the authority to do anything…maybe I can secretly (rising intonation) do something but… I should… yeah..

KB: So that would be an example of where the sense of self struggles with the situation and you have to… either you have to accommodate or let it go, let go of the situation.

J: Yeah, okay, that’s fine. The other way also works [smiles], yeah.

In this passage, Jill describes how she was able to entertain another perspective on how a class should be administered, even though it markedly differed from her own. Jill learned to reflect on what she was able to influence. She didn’t attach to her specific preference to teach in a certain way, even though she was able to acknowledge and validate her own viewpoints as well.
Loving Kindness Meditation also allowed the teachers to better contain inner tension, so that they could manage particularly isolating situations. Karen relates an experience at a swim meet, where she was able to use Loving Kindness to contain her anxieties in a difficult, tense, and very isolating situation:

I was at a very loud swim meet. I supervise the Jarvis swim team, and I'm noise sensitive. I was feeling increasingly anxious, and disconnected to everyone there, as I'm not a competitive athlete and it's my first year supervising and I don't know many of the students. It went on for much longer than I expected, and I felt a bit sick with anxiety. I started saying the words of the meditations, perhaps for about 10 minutes, and I started feeling more grounded and calmer. And after I felt myself breathing easier, and able to focus more clearly (literally, sometimes my anxiety prevents me from making eye contact). I was so grateful for the meditations.

Karen again evokes the notions of turning inward and feeling more grounded in bodily awareness. The recitation allowed Karen to breathe more easily and stay more focussed, in spite of her anxiety. I asked Karen whether reciting Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to feel more connected to others during the swim meet. Karen repeated that reciting the lines helped her stay grounded and manage her difficult emotions. Reciting Loving Kindness did not, however, allow her to feel connected to specific people around her at the swim meet:

I'm the teacher-supervisor of the swim team, the lifeguard does all of the work. I'm just a 'presence' there, a legal requirement. I don't feel very connected to them, and generally feel unappreciated. Nothing has changed, except that it [Loving Kindness Meditation] allowed me to contain my considerable (and irrational) anxieties that day.

Karen suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation created a safe inner space to redirect her difficult anxieties, though it was difficult for her to establish connection with others on this basis alone. During the second interview, she clarified what it meant for her to contain anxieties:

No, I think ‘dissipate’ is the better word. I don’t think it was contain. I just think it sort of dissipated. Like ‘this is awful’. And I actually felt like saying I’ve got to leave. And she [the lifeguard] is like, well it’s a legal requirement that you’re here and if anything happens to the kids you are liable. So, OK, I am stuck here for as long as this stupid thing goes to, which is 5:30, you know, so it’s 3 hours there. So, okay, I started saying the lines quietly in my mind. And I just felt a lot better and I could just…yeah, so I was not really containing it. I was just sort of…it went away.

In this passage, Karen reveals that Loving Kindness Meditation had its own unique effect on releasing her anxieties, without necessarily having to connect her with others or create a better social bond with her
colleagues. She also suggests that _wishing everyone well_ and _being grounded_ were complementary ways of dissolving her anxiety and being present with the difficult swim meet. She remarks:

> I just found that saying those, it just kind of _ground me in my seat_. I was wishing everyone well around me and myself and, you know, yeah. (italics mine)

Although reciting Loving Kindness Meditation didn’t necessarily help Karen to feel connected to specific people, she was able to ground herself in the act of wishing wellness to herself and others. This created a connection between herself and the noisy environment that mitigated her sense of isolation. Karen’s response suggests that the Loving Kindness Meditation grounded her by meditating her sense of disconnection and anonymity (“_being a legal requirement_”) in the swim meet. The act of _wishing others well_ provided a way to vicariously connect to her isolating environment, even when others were not responding to her anxieties at the moment. The meditation seemed to provide a buffer for teachers to face isolating situations in different educational settings.

6. Surrendering Expectations of the Classroom Experience

The teachers often described facing conflicting feelings before they could authentically relate to Loving Kindness Meditation. In the beginning, the process of fostering loving kindness often felt like a ‘transfer’ or ‘exchange’ of energy between people, rather than an unconditional acceptance of self and others. The teachers in this study also began the practice with some expectations of what they could gain from the practice itself. In this regard, Loving Kindness Meditation was initially thought of as an object that would orient the teachers toward specific feelings of happiness, wellness and peace. Nicole describes how her initial expectations of the practice created frustration and tension for her:

> I have my expectation. Maybe I wanted to find a peaceful…to be more peaceful, to have a good relationship? Yeah. After doing this practice, maybe I [would] feel like better about myself, better about people. Maybe we can have a better relationship after doing this practice

Nicole relates a shift away from looking for an instrumental value from the practice, as she learns to let go of striving for personal gain. She uses the Loving Kindness Meditation as a platform to follow feelings,
rather than giving rise to a frame of mind that expects personal benefits or betterment. She also stops pushing herself to feel in certain ways that seem most fitting to the practice. Nicole reports a shift away from an emotional model of self-control and toward a more receptive orienting toward herself, which she refers to as ‘following my feelings’, in her reflection. She suggests that giving herself permission to observe and follow feelings allowed her greater understanding and empathy for those around her.

The teachers in this study create similar narratives of expectation as they enter the practice, later dropping these expectations as their practices developed. Karen admits that expectations of her students did come to mind as she recited Loving Kindness Meditation. When I asked Karen what challenges she felt while reciting to students, she noted:

Maybe there was some tightening as I was visualizing the same people, as if I were getting bored by the process, and a little resentful that my efforts in the classroom were not being appreciated or reciprocated.

When I asked Karen to clarify the slight resentment she felt, she described how reciting Loving Kindness Meditation created a desire for her students to benefit in the same way that she had done from the personal meditation:

I just found it personally really um …initially when I started, I just found, you know, I just felt just so much better after saying it, you know? That I really found it a nice way to start the day and finish, right? So I think it was as you’re saying, I like the feelings, right? But the fact that my mind kept going to the Grade 12’s…maybe I wanted there to be some change which there has been, I think. Yeah.

Karen reveals an expectation that the Loving Kindness Meditation extend to others in ways that would promote change, growth, or some form of ‘being appreciated for reciprocated’. She later shifts her thinking as she starts to experience the benefits of Loving Kindness Meditation (“I like the feelings”).

David describes a similar struggle at the beginning of his practice, when he writes:

Initially, I felt confused about what I experienced after the meditation. To be completely honest (and I’m embarrassed to admit this), I think a part of me felt that good things would happen to me since I was “wishing” good things to everyone around me (as well as all those who live in this universe). For example, I thought the meditation would lead to “positive karma” and so when I found myself experiencing challenges/stress at work, I think I felt a little more upset. And so I realized that it was really important to not expect anything at all from this meditation. Interestingly, when I stopped expecting that it would result in “positive karma”, that is when I believe it became much more meaningful for me to continue the practice.
David’s belief that good thoughts would lead to ‘positive karma’ initially colors his experience of the practice, and leads to greater upset when he faced challenges at work. His idea of positive karma forms a kind of folk narrative which outlines how he expects Loving Kindness Meditation to work between himself and his students. David even reports negative feelings, as he struggled to adjust to the failed expectations that subconsciously arose during his practice:

I would get thoughts of people that recently disappointed me, even though my conflict with these people was very minimal/relatively insignificant and short-term. Nonetheless, I believed (at the time) that part of the meditation triggered and even increased my feelings of disappointment and I began wondering if doing that part of the reciting was counter-productive as I noticed there were some times when I felt a little cranky after my practice.

It is notable that David reports difficult emotions such as disappointment and ‘crankiness’, as well as the sense that these feelings are counter-productive. Over time, however, David felt compelled to stop expecting and suspend his belief in positive karma, in order to find a deeper, more resonant meaning in Loving Kindness Meditation (“when I stopped expecting that it would result in “positive karma”, that is when I believe it became much more meaningful for me to continue the practice”). But suspending expectations did not come easily or naturally for any of the teachers.

Loving Kindness Meditation seemed to challenge times when there was no way to explain behaviors or experiences of failed reciprocity. Over time, David adopted a more meditative approach to disappointments, allowing thoughts to come and go without labelling them as good or bad. He reflects:

…in hindsight, I realize that I would have had those thoughts of disappointment regardless of the meditation and that the meditation helped me realize that I am feeling this way (quite strongly) even though I thought I shouldn’t or wouldn’t. And in time, the negative thoughts and feelings diminished.

It’s notable that David had to re-encounter Loving Kindness Meditation from a perspective of letting go of expectations. He also seemed to position himself more as an observer of his disappointment, rather than trying to attribute his disappointment to anything, such as the practice itself. This marks a shift away from trying to know why certain outcomes appear, and toward a more witnessing stance toward his feelings. David’s story nonetheless reflects how painful expectations arising from practice can be, as well
as the risk that Loving Kindness Meditation can create vulnerable experiences for the teachers. David carries this weighted sense of expectation over into his life as a teacher:

I think I was expecting to become a better teacher that things would just kind of come to me. Like, ah, like. I, to be completely honest, with or without meditation, I believe my life so far has been pretty good, like I think, things come because I do good things. So, I just thought it would continuously be easy…. Like last year, I just had really good classes, and I just flowed, so I thought it was just flow...But then I have this one class …and all my classes are really good, but there was this one class that was big. And they just kept adding more kids to it, and in the beginning it was fine. But when about 6 or 7 kids were added in that time, within that one week. And I felt like it was… it wasn’t, that’s not what I expected. So in the beginning I thought things would just flow because I am releasing some kind of [gestures]…and when I was doing the reflection I was really thinking too… and to be honest with myself, I just knew I was cranky in the beginning. And, I was like, well, why am I cranky? I don’t know. I think because I was expecting something..

David hints at the expectation of flow between himself and his teaching environment during a meditative practice, particularly as it relates to compassion and social harmony. His concerns reflect a potential confusion that practitioners experience between the stated intention of Loving Kindness Meditation and the often unknowable outcomes in lived experiences.

As the teachers became more relaxed with their practice, they appeared to be less attached to specific images or outcomes of Loving Kindness Meditation. David reports a time when he starts to see the impermanent nature of thoughts, so he is able to let go of his judgments or tendency to cling to specific images. He describes a kind of “epiphany” as he starts to reflect on the impermanent nature of judgments and thoughts in general, as he rides the subway and reflects on his students:

I just remember when I am on the subway, and I am doing the practice, and then my mind starts drifting, but then it just felt like, oh my god, this totally makes sense to me…I had these really crazy, stupid thoughts, but I think I was so relaxed. At that moment, in my mind, I kept thinking, “It’s just a thought”...it has no… it doesn’t mean that I am crazy or that I am a bad person. Your mind can just construe the weirdest things and at that moment for me it was like ..I felt removed from my head….Then I am thinking, then, I should apply this to everybody. When somebody does something crazy, whatever, it’s just ‘so what’, yeah, ‘that’s not …we don’t know who that person really is’, you know? But at school…teachers and kids, like, there is so much judging. It happens all the ...I do it all the time. There is so much judgment.

David starts to see beyond thoughts, when he describes being ‘removed from my head.’ This shows a new insight of not being captivated by thinking or identifying with its process. Yet, in spite of these very profound glimpses and epiphanies, the teachers were also forced to face and accept the gap between the
desire to connect better with their students and an uncertainty that the Loving Kindness Meditation could ever fulfill that need.

Jill’s practice hints at a way in which expectations were managed, especially when she stresses the equanimity she used when reciting Loving Kindness practice:

they’re all the same [calm, reflective voice]. I am already familiar with these lines. And I am quite used to get familiar with them, so I don’t have any special feeling.

Jill treated the lines of Loving Kindness as a meditative experience, where she didn’t accord special significance to any lines or thoughts that arose. Hence, she remarks: “I could see thoughts came into my mind, and I did not push them away; instead, I watched them come in and let them go.” Meditative equanimity toward all the recited lines became a key factor that shifted the teachers away from expecting specific outcomes, or attaching to results from the practice.

Discussion

Previous studies (see Frederickson, et al, 2008) have assumed a one-to-one correspondence between the text of Loving Kindness Meditation and the intention of the reciter. The impression is that ‘intending’ positive states of being will automatically foster these states in the reciter of Loving Kindness Meditation. However, I suggest in the following sections that the teachers did not show a uniform intentionality in their reflections on the practice. Instead, they tended to orient to Loving Kindness Meditation in different and very complex ways, depending on different sets of expectations they experienced or brought into the practice, whether for themselves, for their students, or for the practice itself. I suggest that the most prevailing orientation the teachers learn to adopt over the course of Loving Kindness Meditation is a yielding and receptive approach, both to themselves and their students.

In their reflections and interviews, the teachers all show often startling insights into the kinds of motivations and desires that were revealed to them as they embarked on Loving Kindness Meditation. One of the indirect benefits of Loving Kindness Meditation was that it allowed the teachers to create deep
narratives exploring their intentionality, and how they experience intention with their students. I attempt to outline ways they described how they related to Loving Kindness Meditation, in the sections below.

I Two “Orientations” of Loving Kindness Practice

In the course of practicing Loving Kindness Meditation, teachers seemed to orient to the practice in two distinct ways. The first orientation was viewing Loving Kindness Meditation as a visually-based, emotional transfer of energy between teacher and students, which gradually expanded to embrace all students. I refer to this as an ‘expansive orientation’, expanding love to include all students and beings. However, over time, teachers gradually shifted toward a second, almost opposite, orientation, which is a more grounded, spontaneous experience of being-with students as individuals, which I refer to as a kind of ‘yielding’ orientation. I discuss both orientations in the following sections.

1. An “Expansive Orientation” of Loving Kindness Meditation

Teachers initially oriented themselves to Loving Kindness Meditation as a way to expand or extend positive emotions outward, to all students, and then to all beings in general. The teachers often typically navigated their way through successive imagery that fans outward to embrace multiple beings and situations. Karen even reports experiencing cosmic images, as she recited the final line “May all beings everywhere be well, happy and peaceful.” When I asked her to explain any feelings she experienced with this final line, she noted:

Oh, very expansive. I often had in my mind’s eye —I mean it’s a pretty grand thought, the universe and everything. So, I mean, I don’t know, just sort of mind stretching, expansive. I think it’s, yeah, I don’t know. I just had an image of the universe, these galaxies, you know. I guess the feeling would be just good, you know, feeling good that you’re wishing well. If there’s any selfish aspect, it’s just feeling good.

As they recited outward toward numerous beings, the teachers tended to expand on imagery to accommodate these beings. In fact, the emphasis for teachers seemed to be on the proliferation of imagery, particularly at the beginning of their practice.
Imagery and visualization tended to be a natural way for the teachers to connect with their students and review their relationships with students and teaching. This process echoes Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) assertion that imagery in what he calls flow experiences can enable people to “rehearse imaginary situations so that the best strategy for confronting them may be adopted, alternative options considered, unanticipated consequences discovered—all results that help increase the complexity of consciousness” (p.120). Visualization expanded possibilities for teachers and allowed them to consider different ways they could orient to their teaching and class preparation.

It made sense for teachers to initially use Loving Kindness Meditation as a visualization tool, particularly in orienting toward their students. Dale S. Wright (2009) suggests that compassion for other beings needs to be grounded in a concrete, imagined experience of the other:

Compassion originates in acts of imagination. In order to feel for or along with someone else, you must be able to imagine their suffering, both as it actually is in their lives and as it would be in yours if it were you in that condition. You cannot have one without the other. Meditation expands the powers of imagination and empathy, and in so doing, it expands our capacity for giving and for compassion. (p.52, italics mine)

Over time, the teachers report that it became more taxing for them to behold images of those to whom they had no prior closeness, as well as those to whom they felt difficulty and tension. Yet, I suggest that it was meaningful and intuitive for teachers to orient to Loving Kindness Meditation as an expansive visual tool, particularly in the beginning of the practice. One reason is that the expansive model of love parallels the narrative structure of Loving Kindness Meditation itself (Csaszar & Curry, 2013), which goes from loving immediate others to all beings. The second is that extending kindness unconditionally to all beings seems to correspond with the teachers’ inner values. Karen, for example, notes that Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to experience coming home to her truer self, “the one who does try to cultivate an unconditional love towards other people.” Karen creates a contrast between a “warm and loving and truly helpful” teacher identity and the “punishing, constricting teacher that I think I can be seen as initially or throughout the year maybe by some students.” She indicates that being warm, loving and unconditional matches with her image of who an ideal teacher should be. On the other hand, she expresses regret that
she sometimes needs to show a firm and disciplining presence to her students at the beginning of the school term.

The teachers also reported the difficulty of reading the final lines of Loving Kindness verse. Karen describes the expansive imagery of all students as occasionally ‘burdensome’, while Nicole and David felt that the imagery could be distracting. Jill implies that she needed to see all the lines ‘equally’ in order to treat the practice as meditative, rather than being emotionally drawn by images or words. David reports a diminished sense of feeling toward the end of the recitation, as the lines expand to all beings in the universe, even though he still acknowledges that it is meaningful to recite the final line:

KB: The sense of like, for example, wanting to extend that same feeling that you have to all beings, it sounds like it was less than for example, just reciting for your family, reciting for the immediate people in your life.

D: It was, but it was still meaningful.

KB: It was still meaningful.

D: Yeah, for sure, I tried, or my mind was trying. I realize that my mind was trying to wish everyone the best.

KB: Sounds like you…

D: But it wasn’t intense.

As I listened to David and Karen’s responses, I sensed a conflict that the teachers felt between the ‘right’ way for teachers to care and a diminished intensity of emotion, particularly when the expansion of images increased. I wondered whether expanding images to include all beings might lead the teachers to dissociate from their true feelings altogether, similar to Arlie Hochschild’s notion of emotional labor (2010). Hochschild documented care workers who undertook practices to generate inauthentic but socially acceptable emotions to their clients. Over time, the care workers’ felt emotions become enmeshed with emotions they are expected to feel or embody, resulting in a confusion of role and personal identity.

Similarly, Kjersti Van Slyke-Briggs (2010) coined the term “nurturance suffering” to refer “a form of stress that is the result of emotional ties to students.” (p.1) For VanSlyke-Briggs, teachers experience nurturance suffering when they fail to live up to an imposed role model of a caring teacher.
Instead of functioning from an authentic awareness, the teachers become enmeshed in trying to fix their students’ personal dilemmas, many of which are beyond their control (xiii-xiv). I wondered whether over-reliance on expansive imagery might similarly lead teachers to suppress authentic feelings toward their students. The exhaustion and frustration that the teachers felt toward the end of the recitation suggests a conflict between how the teachers felt and emotions they tried to extend toward others. Too much imagery of students seemed to lead the teachers into an uncomfortable sense of being emotionally stretched or numbed by the Loving Kindness Meditation.

*Expanding loving kindness* to different envisioned beings seemed to mesh with a teacher’s image of what a ‘loving kind teacher’ does or practices. VanSlyke-Briggs refers to a similar “culture of caring as a mark of good teaching” (p.3). She outlines the ways in which the ‘caring teacher’ has become a model for all teachers. Current North American culture and media reinforces the stereotype of the teacher as “hero/savior” (p.2) who tries to solve student’s problems or serve the role of a universal healer. However, the teachers in this study experienced an exhaustion of imagery as they moved toward the last lines. Furthermore, they often reported feeling overwhelmed from beholding too many images, or being simply unable to feel them. This suggests that the teachers could not sustain an expansive orientation indefinitely. The images needed grounding in a lived interaction, or a more bodily experience of kindness.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for the expansive orientation of Loving Kindness Meditation is that it parallels the teachers’ felt experiences of what teaching entails for them. Throughout their reflections and interviews, all the teachers provide glimpses of professional lives that make the maximum use of space and time to stretch the teachers’ individual strengths and resources. In the beginning of their reflections, the teacher report on *task orientation*, and having to take care of many errands before classes. Jill recollects that meditation gave her a reprieve from being “hurried and task oriented”. David also reports on feeling less concerned with photocopying, or finishing small tasks, as the Loving Kindness Meditation progressed. Nicole, in turn, describes how she felt less compelled to try to resolve her students’ anxieties through her own opinions or suggestions. Through Loving Kindness Meditation, teachers gradually experience a relief from their need to anticipate and manage all situations that could
come up in their classrooms. Karen compares her experiences as a teacher to ‘putting on a good show’, when she remarks:

I think that so much of part of being a teacher [is] that you have to put on a good show and sell them [students] on certain ideas, right? And sometimes eventually you’ll catch up to where you want to be, but I guess it’s because I’ve been teaching so long that I know that I can be patient…I can just be patient, you know, knowing that it will probably work out.

These narratives suggest that the teachers strive to create a positive performance which maximizes their capacity for care and outreach, with an emphasis on adequate lesson preparation and making things fun and inspiring for the students. Teachers see themselves as ‘expansive’ and ‘all encompassing’, even as their energies are stretched thin across many tasks. Throughout the interviews with the teachers, I was able to glimpse the pressures for teachers to continue to expand themselves, as well as the resulting frustrations of extending this mindset to the practice of Loving Kindness Meditation.

Expanding love to encompass all beings is an example of what philosopher Irving Singer (2009) describes as a metaphor of ‘love as bestowal’. Singer argues that Western cultural models of love are predicated on two metaphors: bestowal, which involves using imagination and reflection to bestow or grant value to other beings, and appraisal, which attempts to love others based on their observed values. While appraisal stresses appreciation of others’ unique qualities, bestowal emphasizes the qualities that the lover brings to the loved in terms of care and imagination. Comparing the act of bestowal to that of an artist, Singer remarks:

Artists, even the most abstract, do not create out of nothing: they re-create, create anew. So too, the lover re-creates another person. By deploying his imagination in the art of bestowing value, by caring about the independent being of another person, the lover adds a new dimension to the beloved. In relation to him, within his loving attitude, she becomes the object of an affirmative interest, even an aesthetic object. She is, as we say, appreciated—made more valuable through the special media and techniques in which love consists. (p.16)

Throughout the Loving Kindness Meditation, the teachers tapped into newly discovered appraisal abilities, such as being able to behold students’ true qualities. However, when teachers encountered difficult students or troubling relationships, they tended to rely on imaginative bestowal processes to reframe how they see their students and their challenges. David is one teacher who used bestowal during
Loving Kindness Meditation, to generate a positive image of one of his more challenging students.

During the interview, David remarked:

I think it really helps my relationship with her. Because I just have a mental image of her and she’s smiling and whatever it is in my head. And so, it just makes me feel like I am connecting with her, even though we had no real physical connection, if that makes any sense.

David attributes his ability to connect with his challenging students with his own mind’s ability to create positive images of them. He continued:

And that’s a specific example of [how] those words...help...because it brings images of her. Now I am meeting her in real life, and I don’t wanna be angry at her. She’s not the only one. There’s another boy who I had the same feeling too. And I think they sense it. I don’t know if it’s in my head, but, I... they don’t come across, like, so strong, where they wanna, yeah.[pause, trails off].

However, as David later suggests, there are limits to how well bestowal works to replace existing tensions or frustrations. David tries to replace a difficult emotion with the pleasing image of one of his students during the Loving Kindness Meditation, only to find that his frustration with the student over-rides that ability to re-envision the student. It’s notable that both appraisal and bestowal strategies don’t work very well when David is faced with the student who poses a strong challenge to him. David relates an experience of a student with whom he had issues in a previous teaching year, and who is currently in his class:

… he’s okay. But he has that little chip on his shoulder I just feel. But you know when I did that meditation and then that 3rd last line where you know, “people you are having difficulties with, I wish them well”-um...his face came in, and I...[laughs] I just feel tense, you know? ...And so, I don’t know, that one’s a little bit different. When I saw his face, he wasn’t smiling.

This passage suggests that the ability to form positive images has a lot to do with the teachers’ embodied experience of relaxation. When David felt ‘tense’, he struggled to form an image that would positively connect him to the student. Interestingly, however, David does not attribute his frustration to reciting Loving Kindness Meditation itself. Rather, he maintains that reciting Loving Kindness Meditation allowed certain concerns to surface which he would not normally address in his daily life. As David puts it:

it made me realize that I am uncomfortable with this student and worried about the relationship to some degree but I don’t really think about that outside of that. When I am at home I don’t
really think about that. Like I said, overall, this year’s been fine. But that was a situation where [pause] I can feel very tense, my body is very stiff, but what I did was you know, here is this student, and then I went to the next line [laughs]

While David could not find a positive image to connect to his student, the experience of tension allows him to acknowledge the care and concern that is underlying his volatile experience of this student. I believe that this passage shows a deepening of how David understands care. He begins to realize the unconscious repression of care that comes out in the form of unresolved tensions. Many of these tensions are evoked by the recitation of Loving Kindness Meditation. This ‘unexpected tension’ disrupts the expected flow of positive emotions from practice. Care and love do not need to look bright, expansive and encompassing. In this manner, David had a glimpse into the ways in which his caring connections with students can manifest in forms such as frustration, body tension, stiffness, and even a failure to envision the student in positive ways. “Caring” and “connecting” with students does not necessarily feel pleasant, but it is still a deep connection nonetheless that is worth exploring.

Karen struggled initially with imaging students and reframing them in positive ways that felt expansive. She writes about one her frustrations with one particular student:

No real surprises, but I did find it surprising that the same students popped into my mind (grade 12 students). I was getting attitude from a boy who is privileged and felt a bit judged by him the first couple of months. My mind often chose him to direct the meditation towards (and things are easier between us now).

Karen also feels a tightening of her body over time, “as if I were getting bored by the process”, and feels disconnected when she doesn’t feel the students appreciating her efforts in the classroom. She also feels tension after reciting to an in-law who had “wreaked havoc” on her personal life, and expresses relief as the Loving Kindness meditation fans outward and away from those with whom she experiences difficulties:

I think the line (I may have said them out of order from how it was written) that follows - extend it to someone with whom you have conflict - is extending it to beings on the planet. And that felt much easier, from a person who has been deeply unkind to considering the unconditional regard for all. It did not really change over time. I was always relieved to move on from that line, and was relieved in general to finish the meditations. Though it was very powerful and helpful to me.
For Karen, the progression and extension of emotion does not follow a smooth and logical process from loved ones to difficult people. She even at one point reports feeling exhaustion from the culmination of previous lines, and relates the difficult balance between extending kindness and preserving boundaries:

I believe there is a line in the meditation that includes people with whom you have conflict. And I have an in-law who wreaked havoc this fall, and every time I did consider him when saying this line. It humanized him, but also I feel like I've done my bit in being charitable and forgiving. I've also chosen to never speak to him). But I did consciously wish him well. It was never easy.

In this passage, Karen relates the tricky balance between establishing emotional boundaries and allowing a person’s humanity to arise in the reflections. This required a very strong sense of seeing others foremost as human beings.

All the teachers appear to challenge the notion that care is a transaction between the teacher and students. I believe that over time, the teachers experience care as a form of ‘being with’, rather than as a particular professional role that they bestow upon their students. Nicole aptly describes her frustration as a new teacher who tries to accommodate a transfer-model of care for students:

It’s interesting, because in some training schools, what is a good teacher means if you have good stories. Like, are you a good teacher? Do you have a good life experience? Do you have a very interesting personal experience to share in the class? So I observed many teachers, they are considered as top teachers in that school. So in their classes, they spent a lot of time sharing their interesting stories with the students. Like a speech. They give a very good speech. So, from my experience, my primary school teacher, my high school teacher…they usually talk about their own experience in the class when they talk about the teaching material. They would relate to a thing that happened to them before. So, like, I’m a new teacher, so I try to follow their way in my class. So when I teach sometimes I would talk about my personal story, but I am not good at talking about my personal life. I don’t want to share too much about myself. And I feel that this is an energy flow. The energy flows into my body and into somebody else. I become weak, I have nothing to talk, I don’t have new things to talk with them.

Nicole suggests that, rather than seeing herself as an active agent who ‘fills’ the students with stories or messages, she is able to appreciate the experience of being with students, as she recites Loving Kindness to them. Nicole also questions her idea of teaching as an ‘energy flow’ between herself and a student.

Through Loving Kindness Meditation, caring is gradually experienced by the teachers as more spontaneous, yielding and intersubjective, as opposed to originating in a single authority or role.
Nicole struggled with the idea that Loving Kindness Meditation should somehow extend to all beings equally. While she initially views this as an ideal, her later reflections reveal a more balanced position which tries to behold people in terms of her appropriate interactions and relationships with them:

I think families and friends are more close to me than my students, and they should have better relationships with me than my students. And I care more about my friends and family than my students. I think everyone thinks so, right? So, I think the ideal perspective to see the relationship between teacher and student is human. I should be good to students in a way I do with my parents. I did the same thing to my parents, and I did the same thing to my students. They’re the same. This is the ideal relationship, but in real life, I don’t do that. I still put my family in front of other people, right? And also I don’t think I, yeah, sometimes, I spend most of my time working with students, but at the same time I didn’t have time to stay with my parents. So, that’s upside down. Sometimes I did better to my students than to my parents, so it seems opposite. So I still cannot find a way to balance the relationship.

Rather than passively following the logic of extending love outward to all beings, Nicole’s practice of Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to examine differences in her relationships and where to put appropriate emphasis and care. This challenges the linear progression ‘outward’ and demands a nuanced understanding of how Nicole positions herself as a daughter and as a teacher.

Too much imagery seemed to lead teachers to dissociate from their feelings at times, as the intention to love all students conflicted with felt bodily tensions and conflicts. Part of the dissociation might arise from the many conflicts that do arise as the teachers struggle to frame loving-kindness to difficult situations at work and challenging students. Parker Palmer (1998) has suggested that an authentic encounter with diversity can spark deep existential fears in teachers. These fears can lead teachers to dissociate from their true feelings, or hide in a mask of ‘objectivity’. He remarks:

If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict, and of ‘losing’ in order to ‘win’, we still face one final fear—the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives….Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives—and this is the most daunting threat of all. (p.38)

One interesting dynamic that took place for teachers was balancing between creating a personal space to handle conflict meditatively (relaxing, letting go) and supporting the intention to truly see and appreciate their students. The teachers gradually had to challenge the belief that loving-kindness would ‘naturally expand outward’ over time, and over countless people. Instead, they embraced a more tentative approach
to visualizing students, which honored both their emotions and the unfolding, often spontaneous and unpredictable needs of the moment itself.

2. A ‘Yielding’ Orientation of Loving Kindness Meditation

Over time, the teachers experience a gradual lessening of images. At this time, Loving Kindness Meditation takes on a different orientation. Rather than trying to expand a sense of care outward, this orientation takes the form of being present to situations without heightened expectations or memories. This shift took the form of (i) yielding to present awareness; (ii) yielding to self-care, iii) yielding to the sacred mystery of students.

i) Yielding to Present Awareness

As mentioned in the Literature Review, researchers in meditative practices often distinguish between mindfulness as the “capacity for bare attention” (Mace, 2010, p.21) and “exercises designed to promote the *Brahmaviharas* or ‘perfections’, which develop higher, social feelings such as loving kindness, compassion and joy in others’ behalf” (p.20). Some researchers suggest that mindfulness needs to be supplemented with a greater emphasis on “giving rise to” specific desirable intentions, including loving kindness and compassion. Shapiro & Schwartz (1999) attempt to enhance the traditional Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction model “through inclusion of specific exercises to engender feelings of loving-kindness and forgiveness and the cultivation of empathy skills in the course of small group discussions.” (in Mace, 2008, p.133).

Initially, the teachers practiced Loving Kindness Meditation with a sense that they were giving rise to specific energies and *sending them forth* to their students and others. However, the teachers in this study seemed to shift their experience of Loving Kindness Meditation toward a *bare*, unconditional attention toward self and others. Rather than using the practice of Loving Kindness Meditation to *give rise* to specific feelings of kindness, the teachers resonate more with the practice when they allow themselves to simply observe the feeling states unfolding in themselves and those around them. Nicole mentions the
example of how Loving Kindness Meditation created a space for her to better observe people around her, without trying to give rise to specific feelings of empathy or connection to them. She notes:

I think that when I am sitting in the subway, I don’t see people around me. Yeah, they’re everywhere. They’re reading a book, they’re listening to music, they’re just sleeping, or they’re working. They’re everywhere, but I don’t see them. I just sit there myself and think about…have a lot of thoughts. But when I am doing this practice, I start to open my eyes and just to look at those people sitting around me. And why are they reading a book and not the newspaper? Yeah, I can see that they’re calm when they’re reading a book. Sometimes I saw people crying silently next to me. Yeah, they don’t want to…they hide their feelings, they don’t want others to see. They just cry and then dry their tears. And just a small….just one moment. Yeah, just very interesting. Sometimes you see people very tired. At late night, now, when I’m travelling back from my workplace, you can feel what happened to people. (italics mine)

Nicole describes opening up receptive qualities such as listening and observing (“I start to open my eyes and just to look at those people sitting around me”). While she cannot always express concern or know people’s stories, she reflects on her feelings toward someone who cries on the subway. Nicole is able to connect the sadness of this person to her own concerns, as well as to everyone’s concerns:

I think she got some text message from someone. Yeah, and then just…first I think, when I think she comes in, she was very happy. And then she sat for a while, then looked at her smartphone. And then her eyes became red. And then she just cried. And just all hiding somewhere, don’t want other people to see….I think because we’re strangers to each other, I cannot comfort her or, “what’s wrong with you?” but I can feel she must have something. So I could feel that sometimes every person, even if I don’t know maybe they have their difficulties. It made me feel that we’re equal. We meet in the same….we all have anxieties, we all have happy things. We also have some bad news in the day. Life is [pause] just…we’re just one person.

Nicole uses these observations as a springboard to allow herself to express emotions that she had previously suppressed in public. Nicole relates:

Yeah, so [laughs]…yeah, because that experience…in later days I had something where I was not so happy. I just cried. I am not afraid that other people see me. I just want…I don’t want to hide my feelings. I think when you want to cry, just cry. Don’t hide your feelings. I think that’s a good thing….

Over time, Nicole seems to relate more to others’ experiences and emotions. Furthermore, her sense of care extends toward herself as she faces similar situations. Loving Kindness Meditation allowed Nicole to drop expectations of how a caring person ‘should be’ or behave. The practice made her more able to empathize with others through greater presence and observation of others’ situations. Interestingly, Nicole
reports giving herself permission to cry after she observes others doing the same. The ability to express herself arose from an unintentional observation of others around her and their emotion states.

The teachers’ initial expectations of what Loving Kindness Meditation should do reflects an idea of what they could reasonably expect from others after behaving or intending a specific way. This is reminiscent of Jerome Bruner’s description of ‘folk psychology’ as “a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world.” (Bruner, 1990, p.35) According to Bruner, folk psychologies serve to explain human situations in a way that expected outcomes of transactions become transparent to the agent. Bruner notes:

Folk psychology is invested in canonicality. It focuses on the expectable and/or the usual in the human condition. It endows these with legitimacy or authority (p.47)

Over time, Loving Kindness Meditation challenges the teacher’s folk psychologies, by suggesting that good intention does not necessarily lead to an observable good effect or result. As with many forms of prayer or invocation, Loving Kindness Meditation evokes intention without a known or observable effect. Norman Wirzba (2005) suggests, in line with Aristotle, that the meaning of prayers and other spiritual invocations cannot be confirmed through an observable or verifiable experience. He notes:

Unlike declarative propositions that assume a possible correspondence between our words and the affairs of the world….prayers do not illuminate or clarify the world in the way that more or less scientific statements do. They cannot be tested according to the rigors of scientific procedure because they follow a different grammar, obey rules of use in which considerations other than truth or falsity come into play. (p.88)

Though Wirzba doubts the ability for prayer to “clarify” the world, he does note that prayers can be gauged by how much sincerity is invested into wishing wellness to other beings. He remarks, “we should not think that prayer is irrelevant as regards our perception, understanding, and handling of the world, particularly if we understand the praying act as a faithful and loving attention to others.” (ibid)

From a Buddhist perspective, it makes sense that Loving Kindness Meditation would redefine the sense of what unconditional love or regard means, by continuing to reveal a gap between the practitioner’s expectations and the observed effects. Psychiatrist Mark Epstein (2005) suggests that Buddhist practices in particular reveal the gap and expose the clinging tendencies of practitioners:
When desire is made into an object of contemplation, it always reveals an uncomfortable, but ultimately liberating, truth. Neither lover, nor beloved, has the solidity that we assume is required. The gap that comes between lover and beloved is a reflection of this lack of solidity. We want to possess, or be possessed; but nothing is substantial enough, lasting enough, permanent enough or 
real enough, to ultimately come through. In Buddhist language, it is said that nothing is real enough in its own right to be ultimately satisfying. Indeed, the transcendence that desire seeks can only be found by accepting this (p.72)

It’s not very clear from this study how the teachers were able to better tolerate the gap between their initial spiritual desires and expectations for the practice, and the actual feelings that did arise for them in the practice. I suspect, however, that the enjoyable aspects of ‘letting go’ helped the teachers to relax with difficult emotions toward students. Furthermore, the meditation puts less of a demand on the teachers to solve problems, or fix themselves, on this level. 
Wishing oneself well also reminded the teachers to feel well about themselves, even as they tried to navigate tense moments with their students. Reciting Loving Kindness Meditation became intrinsically enjoyable without needing to connect with others. On the other hand, wishing others well and imagining others stimulated the teachers to reflect on their relationships and practices. It allowed the teachers to behold multiple students and viewpoints in addition to maintaining the more comforting, personal aspects of the practice.

ii) Yielding to self-care

Though Loving Kindness Meditation involved reciting lines that reach out to embrace all beings, the teachers eventually most resonated with letting go of strenuous efforts to care for all thoughts and images. Jill remarks, “The reflection during the mediation practice is a ‘let it go’ experience”. She also highlights less attachment to images and thoughts when she states, “I could see thoughts came into my mind, and I did not push them away; instead, I watched them come in and let them go.” Jill also frames her appreciation for Loving Kindness Meditation as a form of self-care:

I feel like I have come to an age to think about good health, take care of myself. And, it’s like go to the gym. I almost go to the gym every day. I give myself, no matter how busy I am in the day, I give myself one hour to go to the gym and also I give myself about 15 to 20 minutes to do meditation. Because I come to an age to feel like, okay, I can’t stay overnight. It’s not good to my health. And I should have good time management. I can’t work overtime and stay overtime. I should balance my time, my life, studies and work. And at this moment, meditation comes… just comes into my life and makes me realize that it is a good way to care of these thoughts. It can
give me some time to calm down even when I am very busy with everything. And I can reflect or think something during meditation.

Throughout the teachers’ reflections, there is a marked shift away from the task-centered and performance-based aspects of teaching, and toward a more authentic inner space to behold teacher’s emotions and create a calm space for self-care.

Self-care was a difficult theme for most of the teachers to negotiate, especially at the beginning of their practice. It seemed to mark a reversal of a tendency for the teachers to strive outward toward all students and tasks. All four teachers report personal struggles integrating the first line of Loving Kindness Meditation, “May I be well, happy and peaceful.” Nicole, quoted earlier, felt guilty when she recited this line. In her reflection, she described how the weighted emphasis on this line felt problematic, remarking “I was confused, ‘am I wrong to put ‘I’ first before anyone else in the world?’”. In the later interview, Nicole clarified a slightly different view of reciting Loving Kindness to herself:

...when I say “May I be well, happy and peaceful”, I realize that I was not very good to myself as well. So, I think I should love myself more, yeah. …I think sometimes like I care about things I do. For example, if I watch TV I focus on the things on TV. Especially after 1 hour of watching TV or something or You tube videos, I kind of have a sense of guilt that I wasted so much time on things that…and yeah, I should like to do things for myself. I like to think about, for example: I think I should go to bed earlier, have a good sleep, don’t waste too much time on watching TV or doing nothing.

Nicole reflects a common ambivalence toward her position as recipient in the Loving Kindness practice. While she feels guilt for placing any emphasis on herself, Nicole also laments a perceived inability to apply correct care to herself. “Doing nothing” feels too risky for Nicole, and it felt difficult to for Nicole to adopt a gentler view on why she may need time to ‘do nothing’, or simply slow down her life pace. Instead, the line “May I be…” evoked for her a sense that she did not adequately care for herself. “Not taking care of myself” paradoxically created guilt for Nicole.

Jill experienced struggle and ambivalence about extending Loving Kindness Meditation to herself. This point arose partly because she uses Loving Kindness Meditation as a springboard to reflect on her performance as a teacher and how she interacts with students. Jill describes a struggle between
‘ego’ and ‘soul’ as she negotiates a softer relationship to her role as a teacher. In her reflection, she writes:

Previously, when I reflected for the past and made decision for the future, I tended to blame myself for what I had done and worry about what would happen. My ego and soul sometimes struggled for a while. However, since I started to meditate, I have watched my thoughts, reflections and struggles come in and let them go. The “let it go” experience was enlightened, which enabled me to concentrate only on the presence [sic] moment.

Jill later describes the struggle between ‘ego’ and ‘soul’ as a deep dynamic between the social pressure to compete with others and the ‘real’ self. Jill remarks in the interview:

…ego is like, your struggle, your suffering, the competition, your everyday plan, your fear to something…it’s kind of opposite to the original ‘yourself’. It’s everything outside. And then soul is everything [pause] ‘inside’ and yourself, and your original self, and the ‘real me’. It’s kind of like the soul is like just living this moment, living the present, and the ego makes you have to think about ‘in the past’, ‘in the future’, ‘your plan’, your competition maybe with your colleagues, your fear to do something.

Jill contrasts the ego that competes with others or has fear, and a more authentic self. She suggests that over time, Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to let go of painful, self-blaming thoughts and embrace a more present moment, especially with students.

David experiences the line “May I be well, happy and peaceful” in terms of slowing down, as well as imageless contact with the body. About this verse, he remarked:

I never wished that [verse] before. But that part is the part where it’s the slowest part for me. Cos, I am just trying to calm myself down. I have to admit, though, I do feel happy saying that part, because it’s about me …? [uncertain] I feel like this is a good thing to wish for me. When that’s happening, I don’t have any images of myself or anything, but it’s more like I feel like the blood is starting to calm down and flow a little bit.

David seems to experience self-love as a genuine sense of pleasure in the body. For instance, he remarks, “I feel like the blood is starting to calm down and flow a little bit.” Yet, David also expresses a slight unease with the notion of wishing himself loving-kindness. Further in the interview, he stated:

D: ….there’s a sense of relief, almost that, it’s okay for me to wish for these things for me? Um. And I am kind of happy, it’s like a relief kind of feeling..? That I am allowed to even…? I don’t know for me, that this is how I am going to start this meditation. It’s a good feeling.

KB: You’re allowed to kind of….how would you complete that?

D: I am allowed to wish this for myself, without sounding like you’re being selfish or...greedy, you know.
KB: Yeah

D: It’s okay it’s …

KB: Giving yourself permission to love yourself. It’s not this sort of thing that is acceptable

D: Yeah I feel kind of awkward talking about that verbally with my guy friends [awkward laughter]. But it’s kind of refreshing to be able to do that within my mind privately. So it’s important, that part.

David expresses loving kindness toward self as allowing himself to wish something that may not be socially acceptable, particularly among male friends. He emphasizes the importance of starting the meditation with the wish for the self to be well, though he also frames it as a private emotion (“refreshing to be able to do that within my mind privately”) whose expression could be perceived as having negative moral and even gendered implications. David’s remark about not wanting to share this wish with male friends suggests the possibility that self-regard is perhaps not a socially acceptable emotion to express among other males, and might even carry judgments or stigma. While reciting loving-kindness to oneself felt comfortable and relieving to David, his narrative suggests that this form of self-wishing remained private, and was not openly or easily communicated to others.

Karen also hesitated when she was asked how extending Loving Kindness to herself worked for her. In the interview, she remarked that it was difficult to feel the lines “May I be well, happy and peaceful” when she was upset with herself about something. She noted,

I mean, I do find sometimes, you know, like I’ve said those lines and the first time, “May I be happy peaceful and well”. And I am like, why am I so mad at myself that I can’t really feel this line?

Karen elaborates in the interview that wishing oneself loving kindness felt problematic in light of images and impressions she harbored about herself.

Oh, I don’t know. That’s the thing. If I am mad at myself about something. But I’ve been actually, I don’t know. No, I was actually kind of surprised. Because I know myself well, and so I really don’t know why I found it hard to say, you know? I didn’t know why I was mad at myself, which is funny when you split yourself in two, “I am mad at myself”.

Karen also hesitated when she was asked how extending Loving Kindness to herself worked for her. In the interview, she remarked that it was difficult to feel the lines “May I be well, happy and peaceful” when she was upset with herself about something. She noted,

I mean, I do find sometimes, you know, like I’ve said those lines and the first time, “May I be happy peaceful and well”. And I am like, why am I so mad at myself that I can’t really feel this line?

Karen elaborates in the interview that wishing oneself loving kindness felt problematic in light of images and impressions she harbored about herself.

Oh, I don’t know. That’s the thing. If I am mad at myself about something. But I’ve been actually, I don’t know. No, I was actually kind of surprised. Because I know myself well, and so I really don’t know why I found it hard to say, you know? I didn’t know why I was mad at myself, which is funny when you split yourself in two, “I am mad at myself”.
Karen explores her wish to modify the image she conveys to her students. Particularly in the beginning of the school year, Karen viewed herself as a “punishing, constricting teacher” who has to set strict rules to maintain a certain etiquette in the classroom. While she acknowledges that Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to “feel like I am warm and loving and truly helpful”, she also suggests a need to establish boundaries at the beginning of the school year. Karen suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to extend compassion to understand why she needs to set boundaries, even though it didn’t change her self-image of being a disciplining teacher at the beginning of each school term:

I guess, coming down really hard on kids. I mean if the kids are being jerks, that sometimes needs to be done. I don’t know if it changes my image of myself. I think that it’s an ongoing journey that I am on in terms of…I was taught to be very hard on myself. I’m learning that. And I think it helps. I think definitely it helped. But it’s hard in September, you know?

Karen evokes the complexity of wishing Loving Kindness to herself, particularly when the self adopts several different roles depending on the social contexts with students in a changing classroom experience. It also raised the important question of whether Loving Kindness always entails performing in a warm and gentle way, or having a ‘soft’ self-image. Karen’s narrative suggests a need to create space for different ways to care, such as setting firm boundaries for her and her students. Loving Kindness Meditation also allowed Karen to step out of her tendency to ‘be very hard on myself’. This tendency to over-extend the self appears in all the teachers’ reflections, and leads them to self-blame when classroom situations don’t unfold as planned.

The teachers tend to communicate wishing themselves Loving Kindness as a delicate negotiation between a ‘true’ authentic self-care, and social roles that they feel pressured to play out in their daily practice as teachers. While they acknowledge the necessity to play these roles, the teachers often convey Loving Kindness Meditation as a way to stop over-identifying with these roles.

Nicole at one point comments on the effects of Loving Kindness meditation on her emotional well-being. She connects the anxiety-reducing aspects of her own practice to creating a welcoming classroom space for students:
Teachers couldn’t completely get rid of anxieties, but I think we could benefit from staying in a peaceful state of mind for a longer time. If teachers are full of anxious feelings, then we have no space to welcome our students to visit.

Nicole notably contrasts being full of anxious feelings with providing a welcome space for students.

Empty space equates with a welcome care, while the fullness of thoughts is equated with anxiety and lack of accommodation to care. David connects the greater calm of the classroom to his own calmness as a teacher, when he states:

…one reason why things so far have gone smoothly was because I have been relatively more calm and patient due to the meditation. And I do believe if I am able to stay calm and focused, the students eventually will act the same. There is no doubt that the meditation helped me be a better teacher. Feeling more calm while I am teaching has helped me be more patient and feel more alert when dealing with the students.

Karen also reflects on her own anxiety and how Loving Kindness practice helped her deal with difficult anxieties with her students.

I think there’s enormous anxiety around teaching for first year teachers. Not all, I mean some are very confident, but it’s a lot for um…and I see how students test [teachers], right? If they don’t know, they test. I don’t know, I think. I would like to see this is part of teachers training in college…as a tool for teachers. It’s a good way to calm anxiety.

The teacher’s observations imply that Loving Kindness Meditation provided a holding space for them to explore and contain anxieties. They parallel psychotherapist Franklyn Sills’ observations about selfhood (2009). Sills suggests that people instill confidence and calmness in others when they have realized that their own anxieties will not harm them, and they have room to accommodate threatening or negative emotions without overly identifying with them (p.151-152). Sills also suggests that empathy is not negotiated between two people, but is a felt experience of inter-being that starts from relating to an embodied sense of oneself (p.121) Loving Kindness Meditation allowed certain difficult emotions to surface and be re-integrated into the teachers’ ways of being with their students. Working with psychotherapeutic forms of mindfulness, Flowers & Stahl (2011) similarly suggest that being open to difficult emotions in the teacher can open a pathway to greater understanding of students. They remark:

The pathway of healing is a journey of feeling the disowned and unwanted pain that stories of unworthiness have covered and concealed. Mindfulness is a key skill for making this journey, fostering the present-moment awareness that will enable you to turn toward and be with the
inevitable pain of being human. Awareness allows us to look deeply into the pain of our lives because awareness itself isn’t subject to pain. (p.14)

David attributes his ability to forgive himself for mistakes to a greater sense of closeness to students, generated through Loving Kindness practice:

I feel like, when I am feeling that way, I feel like I am closer to the kids. And so, if I make a mistake, it’s okay, you know. If I, like …[pauses] when I first started teaching, and for a long time, I never wanted to make a mistake. I’d feel worried that I would make a mistake, even walking, tripping on a cord or something like that, the way I look or something. But I just feel like, I don’t know, just more…*we connect better.* I just feel…I don’t know, happier? I think they can sense that, I don’t know. I really don’t know, Keith, but I just feel that, feeling more calm makes me feel more confident. If I don’t feel that calm or if I feel less calm, then I feel that there’s a little bit of anxiety. And, uh, you know, it can be as simple as keeping your back straighter. If I feel calm, I can realize I keep my back straighter. (italics mine)

David suggests that he appreciates the students best when he feels grounded in his own body. He links the calm and grounding aspect of Loving Kindness Meditation to a greater sense of body awareness (especially posture), ease when approaching students, and diminished fear of making mistakes.

Parallel to the shift inward is the sense that teachers were beginning to engage their sense of hearing and tactile senses as they practiced Loving Kindness. All the teachers experience many visual images at the beginning of the practice. Over time, however, they tap into felt qualities of their bodies, and this experience fans outward into a *feeling for* the classroom. David aptly describes this shift as moving away from entertaining thoughts about students, and toward an “energy that you feel with someone”:

There’s so much judging, you know what I’m saying? And, you know like…yeah, where you can just remove yourself from these thoughts that you have and they have less weight. And then, if a student says something, it has less weight. And, you know, it’s just the energy that you feel with someone…that’s how you know them. It’s not what they say to you, or what you heard someone say about someone else. That’s the kind of thought that I kind of had.

While Karen has practiced imaginative framing in the past, she appreciates how Loving Kindness Meditation had allowed her to tap into a particular felt *vibration* in the classroom. This appreciation seems to replace Karen’s earlier sense of resentment that her efforts to care were not being reciprocated.

When I asked Karen to clarify this sense of not being appreciated by her students, Karen remarked:

I feel that since I wrote that quite a while ago, things have changed. Like, I’ve been told by, you know, a couple of students how much they appreciate the calm, peaceful classroom, so it’s hard for me to go back and think about how I was feeling. Because I think that I actually felt a palpable, like, really great vibe in that class, right? And it is very nice kids, and I’m not saying
it’s all coming from the practice and from me. A really great group of kids, so I feel it is reciprocated. Like, I don’t feel that way anymore.

This passage suggests that Karen experiences the energy of the classroom feels unified, and she no longer tries to attribute that energy to a separate self as a teacher. In fact, she shifts away from a narrative of expecting specific returns from students, and toward a general energy field which they start to experience as they progress in the Loving Kindness practice. David remarks:

For me, my personal interpretation of all of this stuff is that there is some kind of intention, and I don’t know if it’s my mood or my vibe, and expecting her and vice versa or if there’s something bigger than that, it’s our.. the energies, and now we are more coherent with each other.

The teachers gradually shift toward a sense of shared energy, rather than staying with particular images of their students in the classrooms.

iii) Yielding to the sacred mystery of students

Over time, the teachers in the study experienced a shift away from expecting specific results from Loving Kindness Meditation and toward what James A. Mensch (2005) describes as “the attempt to provide a space where the sacred can appear.” (p.64) Mensch suggests that prayers work by way of “kenosis”, or self-emptying, with the aims of creating a space through which the praying person can enter a relationship with the sacred or divine. In the case of Loving Kindness Meditation, the ‘sacred’ was how the teachers related empathically to their students, rather than trying to impose an agenda of care onto them. Mensch suggests that prayers without expectation of results can create a space where empathy can naturally arise between people:

…empathy is a feeling (a suffering or undergoing) of the world in and through another person. At its most basic level, empathy is bodily. Another person hurts his hand, and we reach for our own. We see someone cut himself, and we wince. In each case, we take on the other’s flesh. We allow the other, at least as long as empathy lasts, to incarnate himself in us….In each case, empathy involves both a self-emptying and an assumption of the other—a letting him or her come to be in our person. (p.68-69)

Mensch ultimately positions prayer as an encounter, rather than as a form of petitioning toward a sacred being or an energy transfer. His thoughts parallel those of Martin Buber (2002). Buber saw potential
limitations in a teacher model that is grounded in what he calls the “Eros of monologue”. A passion that
doesn’t give space or meaning to the other’s lived reality is only mirroring itself. In his essay, “Dialogue”,
he remarks:

Only he who himself turns to the other human being and opens himself to him receives the world
in him. Only the being whose otherness, accepted by my being, lives and faces me in the whole
compression of existence, brings the radiance of eternity to me. Only when two say to one
another with all that they are, “It is Thou”, is the indwelling of the Present Being between them.
(p.35)

Buber proposes a kind of dialogue with students that puts the “mystery of personal life” at the center of
the exchange between teachers and students. For Buber, education is not instilled in students like a funnel,
or elicited from them like a pump. Instead, it is summoned (2002, p.106) from encounters between teacher
and student, and arises from the necessity of each moment. Buber hearkens back to times when students
learned through sharing in the handiwork of a teacher (ibid): “they learned, without noticing what they
did, the mystery of personal life: they received the spirit.” (p.106)

Buber emphasises shifting away from an instrumental orientation to the world (and “I-It”
orientation) and toward receiving the mystery and sacredness of other beings, a relationship he famously
refers to as “I-Thou” (Buber, 1970, p.54). Buber also hints that prayers to others cannot have a specific
‘direction’ because the encounter with another being doesn’t exist in a specified space and time.
Invocations to real others refer to timeless moments that can’t be predicted or controlled:

Even as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the
sacrifice—and whoever reverses the relation annuls the reality—I do not find the human being to
whom I say You in any Sometime and Somewhere. I can place him there and have to do this
again and again, but immediately he becomes a He or a She, an It, and no longer remains my
You. (p.59)

Buber (dis)locates prayer outside orientation altogether. He hints that there is no separate, defined ‘being’
evoked when wishing others wellness, because true others don’t exist as ‘objects’ of the mind. While this
explanation eludes language, I believe Buber is suggesting that encounters between teachers and students
are revealed and received, and cannot be reduced to a predictable and controlled occurrence. These
encounters always take place in a realm of spontaneity and mystery. Writing on Buber’s philosophy,
Guilherme (2012) remarks:
The I-Thou relation stresses the mutual and holistic existence of two entities. It is an encounter of equals, who recognise each other as such. It is a dialogue. Buber argues that the I-Thou relation lacks structure and content because when two free rational human beings encounter one another and recognise each other as equals, then an infinite number of meaningful and dynamic situations may take place (p.366).

Buber’s observations seem to parallel what I discovered in the teacher’s reflections on their practice. Loving Kindness Meditation gave the teachers the depth and warmth to appreciate interpersonal mystery and enjoy it as they recited the lines to their students.

II Loving Kindness Meditation and Teacher Care

The narratives of this study have similar connections with other studies on teachers who recite personal prayers toward their students. E. James Baesler (2009) describes his research into the effects of prayer on his college students. Baesler found himself reciting prayer before his first day of classes, to cope with anxieties related to encountering new students. Coming from a Christian background, Baesler’s practice consisted of “slowly reciting the names of the students, growing in the realization that these names represent eternal spiritual beings, and that we in the forthcoming semester would shape our eternal destiny together.” (p.14) The results of this daily practice felt similar to this present study. Baesler writes:

Cultivating a contemplative prayer life changes one from the inside out. One of these spiritual transformations is a growing attitude of receptiveness to life, including the lives of my hundred some students each semester. The spiritual discipline of cultivating a center within, a place that allows the Spirit entry to work and move, spills over into my personal relationships, including my relationships with students. I find myself less defensive, more ready to openly admit my errors (even laugh at them), a greater willingness to be vulnerable when listening, a conscious effort to engage in authentic dialogue... Contemplative prayer has helped me become a better listener, focusing on student concerns, worries, challenges, and questions.

Baesler cites similar themes as those of this current study, including the loss of teacher defensiveness, humility, and the ability to be more vulnerable and open in listening.

Baesler’s study also emphasizes the cherishing of students as beings in their own right. Tibetan Buddhist teacher Kelsang Gyatso (2000) has suggested that cherishing others over the self is the keystone for all other spiritual insights and enlightenment (p.46). The teachers in this study seem to create a psychic space where it is possible to behold students and still function as teachers. Gyatso predicts that a
teacher’s cherishing of students would create a respectful energy in the classroom, which many of the teachers had experienced in their classrooms over time. Gyatso remarks:

> If a schoolteacher cherishes his or her students, and is free from self-concern, they will respect him and learn not only the subject he teaches but also the kind and admirable qualities he demonstrates. Such a teacher will naturally influence those around him in a positive way, and his presence will transform the whole school. (p.52)

What is equally interesting about this study is the sense of perspective that the teachers seemed to gain toward the administration in which they work, as well as fellow teachers. Teaching is not without the administrative conflicts with other teachers, or even competition between teachers. Karen suggests that she was able to find space to genuinely wish her students happiness, even when she sometimes felt a pressure to be a ‘better’ teacher compared to others:

> I think that I was talking about this before. There is actually a competition among English teachers for who has the best, you know. I work with somebody who is very competitive, right? And um…you know, there’s part of me that, yeah, really wants my students to feel happy in my class, you know? And that they learn something; it’s not like ‘oh how great Ms. Smith is’. But that they like coming to class…yeah, so definitely there is a desire there, right?

It seemed essential for teachers to find a space where they could foster a genuine appreciation for their students, even in a competitive work environment. This space took the teacher away from preoccupation with the image of the best teacher or ‘best practices’. Jill describes her acceptance of administrative decisions that conflict with her own. She relates that Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to recognize that she could accept others’ frameworks, even if it conflicted with her beliefs about how to teach. Gilbert & Choden (2014) suggest that psychic, meditative space needs to be created where feelings of competition don’t intrude in the process of being with others:

> If we live in a threatening world where people don’t value compassion, and where instead we have to compete with others and worry all the time about keeping our jobs or preventing our houses from being repossessed, then these are not the conditions for nurturing a compassionate mind. (p.5)

Gilbert & Choden point to a necessity for professionals to create a space where there is no striving or competition. Loving Kindness Meditation allowed such a state to arise, once the teachers let go of trying to assimilate this practice into an inner narrative of a striving, ‘expansive’ teacher.
In addition to finding a non-competitive psychic space, the teachers also gradually shift away from a vision-based reflection on images to a more listening orientation toward their bodies and their students. As the teachers become more present and allowing of their emotions, they become better listeners to others. This seems to reflect a shift away from a pedagogy of ‘envisioning’ students and one of listening to students. Philosopher David Levin (1989) puts forward a model of communication which uses deep listening as a basis for connecting. He argues against what he refers to as “the enduring domination of oculocentrism—a paradigm based on the dual nature of the Gaze, the one practical and aggressively active, the other theoretical and contemplative, panoramic, stationary, unmoved, dispassionate, disembodied, outside time and space.” (p.30) Levin suggests that listening allows for a more authentic shared space, which does not separate a knowing subject from the seen object. It is interesting how much Levin’s recommendation parallels the kinds of natural shifts that the teachers made from visual to more embodied and listening orientations.

Levin’s critique of oculocentric views of care are echoed in other phenomenological thinkers, such as Luce Irigaray. Irigaray (2001) suggests that truly beholding another person’s subjectivity requires an unburdening of images, as well as acknowledging a space between subjects that cannot be reduced to a subject-object relation:

Perception implies: I am not you, you are irreducible to me. The one who looks and the one who is looked upon cannot be substituted for each other, and not just in this active-passive relationship. They do not look in the same manner. They look at each other between each other. (p.40)

Practicing Loving Kindness Meditation over time seemed to shift the teacher’s attention away from images of themselves and students, and toward a grounded sense of mystery toward inter-subjectivity itself.

What the teachers experienced seems to hinge upon deep and complex notions of how teachers care for their students. Noddings (1984) uses an analogy of proximity in relation to describe those to whom people are obligated, when she remarks:
We are not obliged to summon the “I must” if there is no possibility of completion in the other. I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa, because there is no way for this caring to be completed in that other unless I abandon the caring to which I am obligated. (p.86)

Noddings recommends that caring obligations be limited to those to whom caring can be fully received and completed. She also doubts that there could be a universal love for all beings. Rather, Noddings suggests that an attempt to love all beings as overly abstract and idealistic and leads to disillusionment (p.90). The findings of this study suggest that teachers did indeed feel strained to care for people to whom they did not feel close. However, what emerges over time is a sense that teachers did not limit themselves to extending kindness only to proximate loved ones. In fact, the cultivation of presence and “being with” the current moment allowed the teachers to cultivate a space where they could behold many students they would not normally contemplate. The teachers seemed to go beyond a concept of being care-givers and having to extend to all images of people. This reflects an orientation that is not limited to proximity to specific people.

The practice of Loving Kindness Meditation also felt *intrinsically* enjoyable to the teachers, as they reported feelings of comfort, inner calm and stillness. I believe this distinguishes Loving Kindness Meditation from a purely unmediated relationship of care. The calming, fairly consistent relationship to the practice allowed the teachers to manage feelings of disappointment and anxiety, as Karen reports in her experiences of the swim meet. Unlike other flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) which often depend on challenge and external or intellectual stimulation, Loving Kindness Meditation could be done in the absence of external stimulation or rewards.

**III Situating the Findings with Contemplative Traditions**

Many of the key themes in this study describe a surrendering and yielding aspect to Loving Kindness Meditation. The teachers had to ‘shed’ their understandings of what a loving kind teacher needs to be to her students, as well as where they expected the practice would take them. One significant implication is that the teachers seem to tap into an inwardly-oriented sense of interconnectedness with others, when they let go of excessive personal demands on themselves. Franklyn Sills (2009) chronicles
how this inner sense is mapped out across different spiritual practices. In Buddhism, the innate field of interconnection with all being is known as citta or mind (Sills, p.29), and it is contrasted with what is known as “conditioned self”. While citta is considered already spacious and liberated (p.30), the ego is a somewhat constrained form of mind which plays out specific roles with others. Sills remarks:

The tragedy of human life is that we, more often than not, identify with our conditioned self or ego, and being becomes clouded over, concealed, obscured, as does our natural connection with other beings (p.30)

Sills anticipates the teachers’ tendencies to try to predict or anticipate how their students would respond, after practicing Loving Kindness Meditation. He remarks:

All organisms, from the single cell to the human being, have a survival imperative to be able to predict the nature of their relational and physical environment. In this sense, the central self has predictive functions. It is set up to foresee the likely outcomes of relational and environmental processes and respond to relational encounters in appropriate ways. (p.81)

Sills suggests, in contrast to what he calls a “Central Self”, a pure radiant being that is found in most spiritual phenomenology, including the Christian concept of Soul (p.32) and the Taoist concept of the source of being in Tao (p.30). He goes on to suggest several key qualities of Central Self orienting to citta, including what he calls “mature interdependency”. Curiously, Sills describes similar qualities to mature interdependency that are reflected in the teachers’ responses to Loving Kindness Meditation, such as “real, present-time relationship with others”, as well as orientation to “innate being”, which “can perceive other as separate yet interconnected” and “can negotiate needs-fulfillment in a mutually fulfilling way.” (p.82).

The notion of an innate sense of interconnection is significant, because it suggests that the work of spiritual practice is a kind of subtle ‘undoing’ of ways the teachers engage in task and result oriented behavior in their classrooms. It also entails an active revision and unearthing of the kinds of assumptions teachers have about themselves and their obligations to run a classroom. Osho (2004), a contemporary mystic, has compared contemplative practices with having to unburden the self of many of its baggage before climbing a mountain:

You go trekking in the Himalayas. The higher you start reaching, the more you will feel the weight of the things you are carrying with you. Your luggage will become more and more heavy.
The higher the altitude, the heavier your luggage will become. You will have to drop things. If you want to reach top the highest peak, you will have to drop all. (p.110)

The ‘undoing’ aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation are most seen in how the teachers learn to be more relaxed with themselves, as well as attach less to critical thoughts of their social identities as teachers. However, the process of letting go was perhaps never as easy as dropping luggage before a mountain climb. Teachers had to identify what kinds of expectations they harbored toward students, as well as face disappointments, before they could come to terms their frustrations and cultivate self-acceptance. This process is a very complex dance between expansive outreach and authentic embodiment of what is arising in the present.

Although Loving Kindness Meditation appears to be about generating loving, positive emotions, it’s more subtle effect is to expose an ephemeral, constructed aspect to thoughts, emotions and images. In Buddhist phenomenology, this is often referred to as the notion of the five aggregates (skandhas, in Pali). The five aggregates are described as five distinct layers which ‘compose’ the way experiences are constructed. They include form, sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness, and are described in detail in a traditional Buddhist text called the Surangama Sutra (Hsuan Hua, 2009, p. 89-94), as well as Heart Sutra (Red Pine, 2004). Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh (1976) uses the analogy of a table to describe how experiences are the result of interactive forces that impinge upon the mind. He remarks:

Consider the example of a table. The table’s existence is possible due to the existence of things which we might call ‘the non-table world’: the forest where the wood grew and was cut, the carpenter, the iron ore which became the nails and screws, and countless other things which have relation to the table, the parents and ancestors of the carpenter, the sun and rain which made it possible for the trees to grow. (p.47)

The teachers seem to gain insight into the ways that they co-construct their understandings and perceptions of their students, particularly in the process of appraising their students differently after Loving Kindness Meditation had progressed. David, for example, notices how certain images of his student smiling during the Loving Kindness Meditation allowed him to evoke a response to that student. Jill notes that her reflections allowed her to see her teaching as a shared experience with students and their unique backgrounds, rather than as an isolated experience observed by the teacher. The teachers use
images, reflections and body sensations to ‘co-create’ an experience of their students in Loving Kindness Meditation. This in turn seems to allow teachers greater flexibility to use images and emotions to better relate to their students, as the need arose. However, this is quite different from the idea that the teachers ‘expand’ their love to include all students. While the latter entails a progressive model of assimilating all beings into one great ‘love’, the former suggests a more nuanced insight into the continued co-construction of experience between individuals.

Impermanence (anicca in Pali; see Boddhi, 2005, p.154) is yet another concept in Buddhist phenomenology that aligns closely with the teachers’ descriptions of what they experienced during Loving Kindness Meditation. Being forced to move from one ‘relationship’ to another across the recited lines of Loving Kindness Meditation challenged the teachers’ capacity to let go of the images as needed. As reported earlier, David described his reluctance to move on from pleasant images of his loved ones to less pleasant images. Nicole felt overwhelmed by the flooding thoughts and emotions, and expresses relief when she learns to sound out the words of Loving Kindness Meditation as a way of quieting the mind. Over time, the teachers start to express not being bound by the images of themselves and their students. The insight into the impermanence of imagery had a large impact on how the teachers used the imagery themselves. Rather than being led by images, the teachers learn to see the limitations of them while tapping into their emotional power. David and Karen report using images to creatively reframe their relationships with them, even though this didn’t always generate positive emotions for them. Loving Kindness Meditation allowed the teachers to behold other beings while also recognizing the impermanence of these images of others.

All the teachers expressed a sense of greater potentiality in the present, rather than being constrained by their preconceived roles as teachers. Nicole expressed this sense as seeing teachers and students as equally human. Jill had described a listening, attentive orientation to her students. In Buddhism, sunyata (emptiness) is a term used to describe the creative potential for novel interactions to take place in the ever-changing present moment. Yamaguchi (1956) refers to the interdependence of beings such that “it is inconceivable that there can be any active subject which might act of its own
Applying Buddhist theories of mind to the object relations theories of D.W. Winnicott, Mark Epstein (2001) has articulated a psychotherapeutic approach to sunyata that stresses “a stream of unimpeded awareness, ever evolving, yet with continuity, uniqueness, and integrity. It carries with it the sense of the unending meeting places of interpersonal experience, convergences that are not blocked by a reactive or contracted ego.” (p.31). The teachers all expressed an ability to be taken and surprised by spontaneous moments with their students. They reported fewer demands on themselves to complete their tasks before entering new moments with their students. I believe that the teachers had developed insights into sunyata. Over time, they seem to acknowledge the value of the spontaneous beholding of others, rather than relying on lesson planning to structure their experiences.

One interesting aspect of the teacher reflections is that the teachers don’t necessarily report feeling unified with others’ energies or patterns. At times, the teachers reflect an opposite tendency to separate themselves from social agendas, as well as negotiate a balance between personal needs and the needs of others. Jill reports earlier on how she struggles with conflicting goals of administration and her own desire to teach her way. While she learns to accommodate both views, Jill is still able to distinguish her own purposes from administration. Nicole also shows a heightened respect for her own subjective space, and learns to separate it from the rushed environment of the working world. She notes,

I observe that other colleagues rush, that they are very efficient, but they are very stressed inside, but I don’t have that feeling, so I don’t want to be stressed like others. So I will try let me find a way to make things down, and make me feel good.”

Nicole learns to find her own pace and sense of time, and is able to distinguish between the pace that feels best for her and a hurried pace picked up from her co-workers.

IV Situating the Findings with Teacher’s Reflective Practice

In his book *The Reflective Practitioner* Donald Schon (1983) characterizes reflection as a process of revealing the uniqueness of unfolding experiences, using past experiences intuitively to anchor and scaffold the new. Some of the qualities he identifies in the reflective practitioner include the selective management of large amounts of information (p.130), “the capacity to hold several ways of looking at
things at once without disrupting the flow of inquiry” (ibid), and a process of continually reframing problems from new perspectives (p.130-131). For Schon, reflection differs from technical knowledge in that it responds to newness using a combination of past experience and intuitive insight (see Miller, 2000, p.122).

The narratives of the study suggest that Loving Kindness Meditation had also become a springboard for many forms of teacher reflection. One strong feature of Loving Kindness Meditation is that it employs imagery of other beings to ground the body into a sense of shared being. This use of imagery was not always linear, progressive or ‘expansive’. The teachers frequently had to actively reflect on how well imagery was working in their practice of Loving Kindness Meditation. David reflects on the proliferating array of images and how it potentially interfered with the full recitation of Loving Kindness Meditation. He remarks, “I am almost near the end… so the family, my friends, my students, my classmates…there was always another image I could think. There’s another image I can come up with. But of course, I have to go onto the next one.”

The teachers often had to adjust their attitudes and actively reflect on why they are doing the practice when they felt frustrated or simply numbed by images, referring to their inner sense of values as a compass to guide them. David expresses inability to evoke strong emotions with the last line of Loving Kindness Meditation (May all beings be well, happy and peaceful), yet resorts to an inner sense of purpose in granting meaning to this particular line. When asked to clarify if this last line felt meaningful overall, David remarked, “Yeah, for sure, I tried, or my mind was trying. I realize that my mind was trying to wish everyone the best.” In the absence of strong emotion or imagery, the teachers still managed to find creative ways to make the final lines of the practice meaningful. At the same time, they often reference the effort to do what feels right for them. Nicole frequently refers to ‘doing the right thing’ (“It’s none of my business. But I keep doing the right thing”) to show how Loving Kindness Meditation gives her an open perspective toward others’ behavior while still anchoring her in a sense of her own values. Karen also describes how she felt wishing all beings happiness was a meaningful statement, even
though it didn’t point to a concrete situation or person to whom she could relate. When I had asked Karen how important she felt the last line to be, she remarked:

I think it’s essential, you know, there’s my little world, there’s me, my family, you know, the people I love, and no one else, my little fiefdom, right? I don’t think that’s a very healthy, when the world is a very awful place for many people. I think the more compassion [the better]. I think there’s no downside to it, you know? I think it’s all how we should think, that everyone is our neighbour, if not our friend. No, I think it’s really important. I have a dog that I dearly love. I think there has to be a lot more compassion for animals and I know that….no, I think it’s wonderful, absolutely it should be a part of it.

I believe that Karen uses a complex combination of contemplation, felt imagery and reflection to make sense of Loving Kindness Meditation. Rather than simply being a relaxing or purely emotional experience, Loving Kindness Meditation seemed to give the teachers a non-judgmental space to reflect on what they value most in their classrooms and in themselves. It also broadened the teacher’s horizon (to use Nicole’s term) to contextualize themselves as part of an unfolding universe of beings. This seemed to have an effect of encouraging the teachers to consider multiple perspectives in their professional lives, as well as flexibly shift between layers of meaning to sustain the practice overall.

V Situating the Findings with Other Research

This study also suggests that practicing Loving Kindness Meditation evokes qualities found in many other mindfulness practices, including letting go (Frewen et al, 2008), being present (Simpkins & Simpkins, 2012), and reducing internal stresses (Barak, 2012). Rather than being a separate, ‘second-stage’ quality as Kristeller & Johnson (2005) suggest, the feelings of loving kindness, warmth, and compassion seem to extend naturally from distinctly meditative elements of the practice. The teachers often describe the effect of Loving Kindness Meditation in terms of ‘being fully present’ with students. David mentions that the calm relaxation of Loving Kindness Meditation allowed him to feel more generous toward his students. He remarks,

I think when I am more calm, more grounded, I think I just feel more confident. And, absolutely, I think it makes me just happier. And so, any kid, when I’m seeing them in the halls, I smile, say hi, you want to know their names.
While the recited lines of Loving Kindness Meditation definitely had an impact on the teachers’ experience of meditation, the felt emotions of loving kindness seemed to develop as a result, at least in part, from the enjoyment of the meditative aspects of letting go, being present, and shifting toward feelings in the body. For this reason, I suspect that Loving Kindness Meditation falls closer in line with Kabat-Zinn’s metaphor of mindfulness as “letting be”, rather than the metaphor of ‘sculpting a compassionate self’ that Wright (2009) and Ladner (2004) suggest in their writings. Loving Kindness Meditation felt more like releasing and letting go of attachments, as opposed to deliberate arousal of special compassionate states of being.

The teachers seem to report a shift away from narratives of reciting to specific students, and toward a more intrinsic and grounded experience of “just being”. These findings resonate with Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh’s self-observation (1996) that, in prayer, “What matters most is that my heart is open. I only need to touch the source of love in me and send my love in my thoughts and also in my actions.” (p.3) At certain points in their narratives, the teachers let go of their thoughts, at which point it ceases to matter where loving kindness is directed. It becomes a present-moment experience of being open and attentive to all the teacher’s actions in the classroom.

The findings of this study also suggest that Loving Kindness Meditation incorporated many kinds of experience into a single practice, including reflection (Schon, 1983), guided imagery (Naparstek, 2011) and contemplation (Plante, 2010). The findings accord with Wirzba’s (2005) observation that prayers or recited meditations can operate on several simultaneous levels. At least one teacher, David, reports on the connection between pleasant images of others and a growing bodily comfort during the practice:

It’s so different from what I know about meditation. But now that I have done it, I think I feel the sensations because when I am talking about, I wish my family well, happiness, and peace, it’s…I feel like it’s easy for me to feel the sensations when these things are just warm to me…when I am encountering the images of things that are really important to me purposely, I think my body just feels more relaxed, and more warm.

Loving Kindness Meditation was not just a purely contemplative practice. In fact, the practice seemed to spark teachers to reflect deeply on specific envisioned situations with students as the verses progressed.

describes various techniques that are aimed at integrating the soul, in what Assagioli refers to as “a careful analysis of the various phases of the will” (p.5). Many of Assagioli’s descriptions of the inner dynamics of soul and will could potentially shed light on what might be happening as the teachers cycle through the different ways of encountering Loving Kindness Meditation. For one, visualizing different students often released pent up or suppressed feelings, a process that Assagioli (and, earlier, Freud) describes as catharsis (p.101).

Both Karen and David reported how the practice surfaced negative emotions, and led to potential re-integration of these feelings into constructive actions. Karen uses the example of how reciting verses to many people brought up many images and emotions. She reports that, by the time she had reached the end of the meditation of ‘May all beings everywhere be well, happy, and peaceful’, “everything that I had imagined or felt like, that was too much, not the last line. I think that’s a beautiful thing to end off.” Proceeding from many successive layers of beings to ‘all beings in the universe” felt like a release for Karen, even after she had cycled through many difficult emotions. David also underwent a process of choosing to reflect on challenging students whom he wouldn’t normally envision after school hours:

…it made me realize that I am uncomfortable with this student and worried about the relationship to some degree but I don’t really think about that outside of that. When I am at home I don’t really think about that. Like I said, overall, this year’s been fine. But that was a situation where [pause] I can feel very tense, my body is very stiff, but what I did was you know, here is this student, and then I went to the next line [laughs]

Paradoxically, however, David later remarks, “My mind actually starts to actively look for, visually look for those people I am having conflicts with.” Karen also remarked, about the privileged boy with whom she felt difficulties, “My mind often chose him to direct the meditation towards (and things are easier between us now)”. Both examples suggest that the teachers were using the visualization aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation to seek out a release of difficult emotions. These examples seem to illustrate and parallel Assagioli’s notion of catharsis as:

…asking the patient to live again, as realistically as possible, the scene or situation which aroused the emotional disturbance, letting the emotion have a free psychosomatic discharge. The process can be repeated several times, until the intensity of the emotional upheaval gradually decreases and finally exhausts itself. (p.101-102)
Although the teachers often felt tense when reciting to ‘difficult’ students, they also report a smoother relation to these students over time (“and things are easier between us now”). Although this study suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation may have similar effects to catharsis, there is an accompanying risk that tension is *escalated* rather than *released*, with certain imagery. David reports stiffness and discomfort while reciting the line to the difficult student. Assagioli likewise cautions that:

> On some people a re-living of a dramatic or traumatic scene may have an effect contrary to the one aimed at. A kind of feed-back effect and a recharging of the emotional tension may occur instead of the discharge. This depends on the psychological type of the patient and on his attitude. (p.106)

While Loving Kindness Meditation generally invited space to re-integrate difficult emotions and relationships, teachers may require support when facing traumatic images of difficult relationships. At the same time, as Karen notes, the final line of Loving Kindness Meditation tended to defuse the tension of beholding particular people by spanning outward to all beings in the universe. This line appears to readjust the practitioners to a calm, almost oceanic space.

As a practice of visualization, Loving Kindness Meditation encouraged the teachers to review their practices in the classroom, a point that parallels Assagioli’s cathartic technique of *critical analysis* (p.107). Jill used the visualizations of Loving Kindness to allow her to calmly reflect on how she could better manage or plan for classroom situations, without going into self-blame. The essential component here is what Assagioli calls “dis-identification”, a process of learning not to excessively identify with one’s body, thoughts or emotions (p.111-114). Calmly visualizing students and classroom situations *without self-blame* allowed Jill to examine her actions *without suppressing difficult emotions* (p.108). This delicate process, in turn, allowed her to entertain new possibilities of acting differently in planning her lessons. David also reports how the principle of Loving Kindness Meditation encouraged him to entertain new ideas on how to include at-risk students, rather than succumbing to his first impulse to have them expelled. Both cases seem to parallel Assagioli’s technique of inserting a “stage of reflection…and of critical analysis of his impulse” between impulse and action.” (p.107).
This study suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation could improve teachers’ abilities to reflect on classroom situations in a non-judgmental, self-compassionate way. On the one hand, the meditative, calming aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation seem to allow the teachers to ‘dis-identify’ from emotions and thoughts, so they could be kinder toward themselves and less judgmental. On the other hand, the visual aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation seem to allow the teachers to illuminate classroom situations and encourage teachers to refine their practices and understandings, without collapsing their reflections into a self-referential emotion like guilt or shame. Though they don’t always employ visualizations, many Buddhist practices emphasise the balance between calming and illuminative aspects of meditation (Sheng Yen, 2008), particularly as a way of avoiding too much self-absorption in meditation. While calming elements emphasize stillness and being present, illuminative aspects of meditation emphasize gaining insight into social experiences (p.64-65).

As noted in the previous Literature Review section, the Positive Psychology movement tends to position Loving Kindness as the deliberate and intentional cultivation of positive emotions, such as well-being, social connectedness, and happiness (Akhtar, 2012). My study suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation is closer to a meditation that takes teachers into the mystery of students and other beings in general. In other words, Loving Kindness Meditation is a meditation on alterity, or “the proximity of one to the other” (Kemp, 1997, p.10). This mystery of beholding the other allows the teachers to develop a less controlling, more attentive orientation toward themselves and their students. It allowed the teachers to experience surprises with their students, as they became more actively attentive to the present moment. Freema Elbaz (1992) also notes a kind of active attentiveness that allows teachers to practice “living with conflict and juggling opposite tendencies and accepting the impossibility of resolving them.” (p.427). Elbaz links attentiveness to being accountable for an unknowable mystery unfolding between teacher and student:

Attentiveness in this more active sense is likewise a moral quality: In their attentiveness, teachers acknowledge that certainty is unavailable but that they are morally bound to act anyhow according to their best understanding of children’s interests. (ibid)
While the teachers report similar states of being to other mindfulness practices, the verses of Loving Kindness appear to shift teachers away from an instrumental view of their role as teachers and their students. They start to develop more equanimity to others and a listening, receptive orientation, as well as more spontaneous interactions with students.

**Summary of Key Findings**

Several interlocking experiences seemed to be taking place in Loving Kindness Meditation. One is that the teachers internalized the meaning of the text to embrace difficult emotions toward others and allow a caring space for themselves not to be ‘perfect’ or ‘all-knowing’ teachers. A second aspect was being able to create an intention, not to actively love students, but to see them as human beings with their own intentions and plans. This soon became a meditation on alterity, difference, otherness, and mystery. Jill perhaps expressed it best when she described how, “I have become aware that a good teacher is not necessarily the most knowledgeable one, but the one who is fully present to students.”

Visualization and reflection were particularly powerful aspects to the practice. When combined with relaxation, visual imagery allowed teachers to assess their teaching and caring practices without self-judgments. However, too much ‘expansive’ visualization of students created emotional strain, and this needed to be offset with the meditative aspect of ‘letting go’ of thoughts and images. I suspect that the visualization often provided a cathartic element by unearthing difficult emotions with students, and thus allowing the teachers to explore the emotion before finally exhausting the visual impact of the experience. A psychoanalytic study would perhaps help to clarify what elements made this practice cathartic for some teachers.

The teachers seemed determined to ‘get the practice right’ and started with a transactional, expansive view of love, where they strove to apply the benefits they felt to all their students. The teachers frequently reported disappointment that these efforts were not reciprocated in a real classroom situation. Though the teachers had let go of seeing Loving Kindness Meditation as a transfer of energy, they did eventually reframe the practice as an art of turning into the body and letting go of their expectations.
Self-care and forgiveness were also essential characteristics of Loving Kindness Meditation which often felt new to teachers. These aspects of the practice allowed the teachers to open up to difficult emotions they tended to repress toward students, as well as their own anxieties to be perfect or to ‘connect’. This self-compassion seemed to come from internalizing the intention of love, and allowing the body to feel the meaning of the words of loving kindness. I suspect that self-compassion also came from less attachment to judging thoughts that the teachers had about themselves.

In this study, Loving Kindness Meditation did not just involve cultivating what are deemed ‘positive’ experiences. Teachers oriented to the practice in different ways as it progressed over time. The teachers struggled with frustration, disappointment, and lack of feeling for certain lines of the practice. Paradoxically, the teachers encountered great frustration when they used the practice to try to control emotions, as Nicole notes in her distinction between controlling and letting emotions flow. The intention of Loving Kindness Meditation did not always create authentic experiences of loving-kindness, in spite of all efforts. The narratives suggest that the teachers were forced to reflect deeply on their intentions throughout the practice, particularly when they struggled with their disappointments toward failed expectations of the practice as well as expectations of themselves. This struggle seemed to help teachers articulate a view of self-compassion and helped them to be less perfectionistic or demanding. The teachers’ new understanding of themselves did not preclude the possibility of ‘non-loving’ emotions toward students. Rather, it allowed space where the teachers could befriend their emotions and create holding space around anxieties and social disconnection in the schools.

The teacher reflections definitely showed a reduction in the experience of a separate self and an expanded sense of perspective, as opposed to simply replacing negative with ‘positive thoughts’. Though none of the teachers are necessarily Buddhists, they seemed to resonate with the ego-reducing aspects of Loving Kindness Meditation. I believe that the insights the teachers gained were deeply transpersonal and spiritual. They did not just operate on a principle of replacing emotions with more favorable ones.

Throughout this study, it surprised me that none of the teachers reported an increased love for students, though they certainly reported greater receptivity and calmness. At first, I struggled with the
fact that the teachers were not saying that they loved their students more after doing this practice. But, after spending considerable time reviewing the transcripts and doing my own practice, it made more sense to me that the teachers did not report such an experience. Loving Kindness Meditation seems to run somewhat counter to Western religious concepts of love, which are heavily influenced Plato’s notion of Eros. Anders Nygren (1969) describes Western concepts of love as a fluctuation between the striving toward a divine source (Eros) and yielding to divine grace (Agape):

According to Augustine, the relation between Agape and Eros is therefore as follows. Eros, left to itself, can see God and feel itself drawn to Him. But it sees God only at a remote distance: between Him and the soul lies an immense ocean, and when the soul imagines it has reached Him it has simply entered, in self-sufficiency and pride, into the harbour of itself. But for pride, Eros would be able to bring the soul to God. Here Agape must come to its assistance: God’s humilities must vanquish man’s superbia. (p.474)

Describing Plato’s notion of Eros, Christopher Cordner (2011) characterizes the Eros striving for love as a striving for completion, when he remarks:

For Plato in the Symposium love is needy, the mark of a lack in the lover... Furthermore, according to Plato, that ‘something’ is always understood as something good. Someone’s love is then his aspiration to a good that he lacks. But if and when that goal is achieved, he will lack no more, and therefore no longer love that good, because he will be perfect or compete with respect to it. (p.316)

These narratives of love stress its passionate nature, as well as the striving toward self-sufficiency (“he will lack no more”) that is promised once the object of love is achieved.

While Eros describes the process of ascending toward a desired object to appropriate its qualities, this study suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation points toward an opposite tendency. This practice flows downward into the body and surrenders outward into a communal space where there are no clearly delimited, predefined subject/object divisions. Loving Kindness Meditation does not expand to envelop beings, but surrenders to a receptive beholding of them. Loving Kindness Meditation also paradoxically allowed the teachers to better understand and accept feelings which were not at all ‘loving kind’, including anxiety and frustration with students. Nicole put it quite aptly when she described her changed understanding of loving kindness after the practice:

Before, I think that to be kind to someone, I think maybe it’s superficial? On the surface…be kind to people. But when I really care about what people say, that kindness can be the real
kindness. You don’t need to be kind to everyone, but when you are talking with someone that you really listen to the people who are talking with you, you are doing a very kind thing. That is not superficial.

Nicole suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation is not a particular quality the teacher gives rise to or cultivates with students, as when someone remarks, “be kind to everyone”. It, rather, involves a kind of emptying space to receive both herself and her students on their own terms.

In many instances, I observed the teachers becoming less driven by a need to perfect themselves using a preconceived understanding of love or kindness. The four teachers practiced diligently in the meditation, and even reported anxieties about doing the practice correctly. But they also acknowledged subtle meanings and small connections to the practice, even when it did not yield the reciprocal kindness that they had occasionally expected or wanted from the practice.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study trace back to how I framed the question, as well as an unexamined assumption underlying the direction of the practice itself. By treating Loving Kindness Meditation as a personal practice that is done by teachers in relative isolation, I subtly frame the practice into a psychological study. As such, it does not touch too deeply on the social implications of the teacher’s emotions. Instead, it remains rooted in the phenomenological assumption that experiences can mostly be understood as mental phenomena, particularly in relation to a single subjectivity. What this overlooks in addition are the institutions and power relationships that construct and inform the subjectivities of the teachers. In fact, what the study overlooks at times is the role of culture in relegating meditative practices into a psychological and presumably ‘neutral’, positivist space. Even when this study tries to use phenomenology to bracket and use thick description, it doesn’t quite get to how teachers of different race and cultural heritage might be viewing the practice differently. It also overlooks hidden tensions that could be arising from a conflicts with cultural beliefs and values.

The seeming ‘universality’ of Loving Kindness Meditation became problematic as I observed and analyzed the teacher’s transcripts. Is the peace and wellness described in this meditation really ‘universal’
to all cultures and life-worlds? What does this universality imply in particular, and what differences might I be concealing or overlooking by assuming its universality across differing cultural spaces? One issue with positioning loving kindness as ‘universal’ might involve the question of who gets to assign universality to loving-kindness. Assuming Loving Kindness Meditation to be applicable to all people already subtly puts me in a position of unquestioned authority in relation to the participants, without exploring the kinds of epistemologies that might run counter to this assertion. A post-structural treatment of the data might have challenged the notion of “may all” that underlies the text, by asking the question: who is ‘all’, and how can a meditation practitioner experience all beings? What effect might “may all” have on the reciter’s position in relation to the ‘all’? How might this ‘all’ connect with, or contrast with, similar assumptions of universality that underlie scientific discourses, or neoliberal notions of standardized education?

In addition, this study did not explore in depth the ways reciting Loving Kindness Meditation might clash with existing cultural practices and institutionalized roles situated in the reciter’s life worlds. While the teachers had the opportunity to articulate their prior spiritual practices such as meditation and yoga, they were not given much chance to examine the way Loving Kindness Meditation relates to their personal beliefs, cultural practices or heritage. Throughout my presentation of this study, I tried to root Loving Kindness Meditation in terms of its Eastern origins and practices. Still, I wonder what this study might have looked like if I had asked the participants to teach me about a compassionate practice from their own tradition, and how it has affected their life as a teacher. Mutual sharing of compassionate practices might start to unearth diversity among ways of expressing compassion. This kind of study might also challenge the supremacy of ‘universal love’ by revealing differences in how subjects express or receive kindness. I wonder if this study might render the act of ‘extending kindness’ more problematic, as my participants and myself become more sensitized to differences in how this gets expressed across different or intersecting traditions. It might also challenge the assumption that students desire the kindness that the teachers extend to them.
Another problematic aspect of this study is that it had asked teachers to reflect on how Loving Kindness Meditation connects with their classrooms. In doing so, this study colludes with the understanding that learning and teaching is restricted to the physical space of the classroom. I might start to question this assumption by shifting the question to “how does Loving Kindness Meditation affect your identity as a teacher?” without limiting that identity to the classroom interaction. Even this question has limitations, since ‘teacher identity’ is also a somewhat limiting construct. It fails in some ways to acknowledge the teacher as a whole person, let alone contextualize teaching within fluctuating dynamics, both inside and outside the classroom.

Karen in particular had alerted me to the possibility that the ‘teacher’ is not a fixed identity with one power dynamic throughout the school year. She described how she felt a need to establish boundaries by asserting herself as a ‘punishing teacher’ at the beginning of the school term. While Karen expressed misgivings about this view of herself, she raised interesting concerns about how ‘boundaries’ would be established in classrooms while Loving Kindness Meditation is recited. Like the other teachers in this study, Karen had started Loving Kindness Meditation when she was well into her school term and had some familiarity with the students and their styles of being. But, I wonder, what would this experience look like if the teachers had started the school term with Loving Kindness Meditation? This question has a lot of related implications to unpack. The first is how Loving Kindness Meditation might affect the way teachers experience or ‘set boundaries’ as they come to meet new students or encounter the ‘strangeness’ of the new school term. A second perspective might explore how ‘discipline’ and the expression of authority or ‘will’ (Ahmed, 2014, p.80) might play out when coupled with a compassionate practice. David in particular had explored the intertwining notions of compassion and discipline when he talked about how he connected with students’ disruptive behaviors differently after reciting loving kindness to them. While the teachers report a yielding orientation over time, I wonder whether it conflicts with pressures to assert discipline in specific ways, particularly in initial encounters with students. But the data in this current study is limited because it doesn’t explore this initial encounter with students as strangers, particularly at the beginning of the school year. This kind of exploration into the ‘strange encounter’ with
new students (Ahmed, 2000) might radically shift away from the psychological discourse of this present study, and into a more social framing of the teacher’s identity and shifting power dynamics with students.

The way teachers define themselves in the classroom has wider repercussions, many of which cannot be fully understood unless neoliberal influence is factored into the teachers’ experiences. Henry Giroux (2014) suggests that neoliberal models of education stress a survival-of-the fittest mentality “in which social problems are reduced to individual flaws and political considerations collapse into the injurious and self-indicting discourse of character.” (p.2) I sometimes worry that practices such as meditation might encourage teachers to focus exclusively on emotional well-being, without considering the greater social pressures that might be giving rise to difficult or tense emotions. Without balanced awareness of and inquiry into what feeds emotional pressures, teachers may find themselves reinforcing the neoliberal notion that the self ‘falls back in itself’, when in fact the self is created through interconnection with many sources of flow and power. Giroux rightly reflects that “[N]eoliberal ideology has construed as pathological any notion that in a healthy society people depend on one another in multiple, complex, direct and indirect ways.” (2014, p.6-7) More studies need to explore what happens when insights into interconnectedness might create dissonance with the neoliberal notion that selves exist separately, in competition with other selves. How does the teachers’ role become challenged through such insights, and what do teachers do to address the dissonance and tensions?

This study also raises the related question of how Loving Kindness Meditation could be an agent for social change, particularly in relation to the institutionalized setting of the school. Many examples abound of people who bravely use compassionate practices to challenge institutions rather than simply creating a ‘peace of mind’ to accept the situations as they are. Mohandas Gandhi was one such an example of a spiritual leader who saw engagement in political action as essentially tied to loving-kindness and compassionate practices. He remarks:

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a person who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. (2003, p.67)
The pressures of administration were lurking in the background, in many of the teachers’ reflections. Jill, for example, shared about how Loving Kindness Meditation allowed her to acquiesce to administrative standards, even when she felt conflicted with these standards. Karen also describes the competitive atmosphere she experienced with other teachers, hinting at a pressure to live up to comparative standards in teaching. While my own participation in the institutional setting of the Chan Buddhist temple is my freely own choosing, the teachers do not have such a choice when it comes to the factors they must work with or submit to in their daily struggle as teachers. David describes how Loving Kindness Meditation pushed him to embody a more activist stance in handling situations with students. Rather than reacting passively to institutional requirements or focusing on his own emotions, David responded to the pressures pro-actively by contacting the parents of the at-risk students, as well as seeking guidance and help from others. David’s example suggests that Loving Kindness Meditation could be a spur to better accommodate both teachers and students. The meditation gave David the mental space to examine different responses to institutional pressures and classroom crowding, rather than shutting down defensively. However, since my focus in this study was more around the embodied experience of Loving Kindness Meditation, it does not touch too deeply on the way institutions affect and shape the embodiment of teaching, particularly teacher anxieties. It doesn’t quite challenge teachers to look deeply into why they might feel the kinds of embodied pressures they do, although loving-kindness did lead them to feel more curious about the emotional spaces of self and others. I look forward to engaging future studies in these areas.

Throughout this study, it was difficult to distinguish between meditative and discursive effects embedded in Loving Kindness Meditation. Loving Kindness meditation differs from other meditation practices, such as watching the breath (Hanh, 1976; Sheng Yen, 2015, p.108-112), in that it incorporates words as part of an overall meditative experience that includes calming the body and being in a quiet environment. Throughout the research process, I continually asked myself: are the experiences teachers report coming from the calming effects of recitation itself? Or were there more specific meanings they
experienced from reciting the words of loving-kindness? At times, I found it hard to discern whether the ‘good feelings’ that teachers felt arose from a greater care for students, or simply from the calming aspects of reciting lines repeatedly, in a quiet state. More narrative study could be done to discern the meanings of the lines themselves, and how these meanings might have transformed the teacher’s experiences of their students.

What complicated this matter was that the teachers often reported an inability to distinguish effects of particular lines in the recitation. For instance, when asked whether there were specific lines that gave rise to a sense of comfort in the Loving Kindness Meditation, Karen reported:

I can't really pinpoint words or phrases, all of the verses said in one sitting creates this sense of returning to feelings of basic goodness, of being more comfortable in my own skin.

In her Loving Kindness practice, Jill made a point to recite the lines evenly, without attaching importance to specific lines or meanings. She remarked, “they’re all the same [calm, reflective voice]. I am already familiar with these lines. And I am quite used to get familiar with them, so I don’t have any special feeling.”

Jill’s remarks raised an interesting issue for me of how to understand the different ways teachers approach the meaning of the verses. I realized that the approach depended on the teacher’s former background with meditative or spiritual practices. Jill’s previous readings and experiences in meditation and yoga allowed her to recite the words without too many distracting thoughts. Similarly, Karen reported how difficult it felt to differentiate effects of Loving Kindness from similar compassionate practices that she has done in the past, though she felt tangible benefits from Loving Kindness alone:

I think it's hard to untangle what often happens with the passage of time in my classroom with the effect of the loving-kindness as I often try to imagine my classroom filled with love - have done this for many years, esp. with difficult classes. But I think I smile more, and am just more gentle with the students, which is how they treat me. I laughed out loud at a bit of a risqué statement someone made, and they see me more as human and maybe as one of them to a certain degree.

Both Jill and Karen suggest that many intersecting narratives may be shaping how the teachers recite Loving Kindness meditation and its effects. A different kind of methodology, such as narrative inquiry
(Clandenin & Connelly, 1990) might better illuminate how the teachers’ backgrounds and previous experiences intersect with their experience of the Loving Kindness verses.

Perhaps the biggest limitation I had while doing this study is the length of the teachers’ practice period. While the three week period gave the teachers time to experience significant changes in themselves and their interactions, it would be of interest to learn how a long-term, continuous practice of Loving Kindness deepens the teacher connections to the practice. How the practice is embodied over time is of particular interest. With more studies being conducted on compassion in the classrooms, it would be interesting to learn how compassion is felt in the body, and which particular lines resonated the most with the felt sense of love or receiving love.

A few teachers who had agreed to take part in this study had dropped out before the end of the three week period. While some had sited busy work and family schedule, most did not reply regarding their experiences of, or challenges with, the practice. I became curious to understand what prevents teachers from staying with a longer practice of meditation. Exploring resistance that teachers felt toward Loving Kindness Meditation might have enriched my picture of the struggles that teachers undergo when doing this practice.

**Recommended Future Study**

This study hints that further research could be done into how Loving Kindness Meditation intersects with teacher’s sense of caring identity. O’Connor (2008) explores the notion of how teachers choose to care for their students based on how valuable they ascribe caring to their identities as teachers. I wonder if there may be conflicts between adopting a regular spiritual practice of Loving Kindness Meditation and the way teachers prioritize care in their classrooms. Do specific phrases or moments of Loving Kindness practice conflict with the way teachers choose to care for students? How might this practice conflict with a teacher’s experience of what most requires care? This kind of study would likely require much longer-term familiarity with Loving Kindness Meditation, as well as more in-depth interviews with the teachers.
M. Regina Leffers (1993) relates a touching autobiographical vignette about her role as a mother. She maintains that the ‘caring identity’ often excludes notions of self-care, when she remarks “At the time, I knew how to take care of everyone else very well, but I had no understanding that I could think of myself as a good person and take care of myself, too.” (p.67) At times, an overinvested caring identity might compromise self-care. Since the teachers struggled with acknowledging themselves as beings to receive loving-kindness, a lot could be explored related to how Loving Kindness Meditation strikes a balance between self-care and other-care, or whether this practice could do so. While my study suggests that the teachers begin to operate in a less role-based caring space, more work needs to be done on how this is sustained in the face of institutional demands that teachers take on more than they can sustain without risking personal care and well-being.

Karen’s observations about her self-image as a teacher were also of interest to me. I was struck by how Karen contrasted her image as a kind teacher after Loving Kindness Meditation to the more “strict” teacher she felt compelled to embody at the beginning of each school term. I was troubled by the question of how Loving Kindness practice connects with teachers’ struggles to discipline their classrooms. I also wondered what happens when teachers try to maintain a Loving Kindness Meditation through this period of adjusting to new classes and new students. How do ‘new’ or ‘strange’ connections work out in terms of Loving Kindness practice? How does this practice affect the way teachers discipline students, if at all? From a Buddhist perspective, this question may be hinging on how the practices of compassion (brahma-viharas) intersect with wisdom practices, which stress discerning ways of encountering people in different situations (Sheng Yen, 2010, p.89-90).

This study also raises the question of how the teacher’s personal connection with Loving Kindness practice enhances the process of ‘being with’ others, without expectation. A deeper and richer description of this parallel would perhaps make for an interesting study. I suspect that the teachers in this study needed to genuinely relate to themselves unconditionally and authentically before they could risk being fully present to their students. Paradoxically, they had to stop pressuring themselves to be ‘loving kind’ before they could have a genuine relation to their real feelings toward students. I also speculate that
a felt sense (Gendlin, 1981) is needed to create a corresponding risk to be open to students and their behaviors. Gendlin coined the term ‘felt sense’ to describe a holistic, schematic picture of what an experience feels like for a person. Carl Rogers (1961) and Parker Palmer (1998) evoke the notion that having the courage to be fully with others requires a certain radical honesty. Rogers in particular connects this honesty with self-acceptance, when he remarks:

…the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change. I believe that I have learned this from my clients as well as within my own experience—that we cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are. Then change seems to come about almost unnoticed. (1961, p.17)

I agree that the practice of Loving Kindness Meditation does involve risking and revealing authenticity. The attempt to wish loving-kindness to all beings without condition appears to create an inner space where teachers were allowed to face limits to who they could accept and love. It challenged their preconceived notion that teachers should be all-loving and infinitely caring, particularly as the recitation extended to challenging situations and students. The meditation also allowed the teachers to accept limits in what they are capable of planning or controlling in their professional roles, rather than trying to ‘fix themselves’ through their dynamics with the classrooms and with students. However, I believe that a more detailed narrative study would be required to trace the precise inner shifts that teachers experience in relation to their sense of self. In fact, I suspect that “self-acceptance”, to use Rogers’ term, actually might be a more subtle realization that the teachers are no longer identifying themselves with any particular thoughts they have about “themselves”. In other words, I wonder if ‘self-acceptance’ is really what Rogers says it is, and might not simply be the sense that truly accepting individuals no longer attach to any static view of a fixed or permanent self. If this is the case, the ‘change’ comes about not through accepting a stock narrative of ‘who one is/is not’, but, rather, transcending all narratives about ‘fixed self’. More study might be needed to understand how important the teachers feel it is to have a solid, unchanging sense of self, as they undertake Loving Kindness Meditation.

After this study, I am under the impression that the teachers’ ability to accept, forgive and be more at ease with their students came from a more dynamic, impermanent sense of situated selves that
arise in response to situations, as opposed to a fixed, singular sense of self. All four teachers narrate letting go of trying to demand too much from a single moment of teaching practice, as well as an ability to fluidly behold students. For this reason, I believe they approach John P. Miller’s notion of selflessness as the fluid shifting of interlocking identities in a dynamic, shared space. Miller (2000) describes it thus:

Selflessness does not refer to a denial of self but placing our sense of self within a larger context. In the West we tend to look at the self as something hard and fixed. This rigidity can also make change very difficult as we begin to over-identify with our own sense of self and this over-identification can lead to inflexibility. However, if we can soften the edges around the sense of self we can learn to identify with others and see their point of view. Change can become much more organic if we see ourselves within a larger context of being. (p.149)

Rather than being more attached to a sense of themselves as ‘good teachers’ or ‘good human beings’, the teachers in this study narrate the exhaustion and eventual surrender of imagery related to themselves and their students. Through a combination of reflection on the meditation and contemplative experiences, the teachers develop insights into the impermanence and dynamic nature of their roles in relation to students and administrators.

This study focused on the teacher’s felt experience of Loving Kindness Meditation. Another potential research area is how Loving Kindness Meditation operates as a text, where teachers negotiate a virtual ‘ideal self’ that prays. Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenology of reading would be one interesting starting point to analyse how this self is created and where it interacts with other kinds of identities. Iser distinguishes between a text created by an author and the way readers bring text to life through their own experience and orientations. He remarks:

…the activity of reading can be characterized as a sort of kaleidoscope of perspectives, pre-intentions, recollections. Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the ‘preview’ and so becomes a ‘viewfinder’ for what has been read. (quoted in Rice & Waugh, 1992, p.78-79)

Iser’s theory delicately positions reading between an act of ‘self-reflection’ and ‘self-transformation’. Similarly, while reciting Loving Kindness to others evokes images of familiar people and memories, it also creates an active well-wishing which differs from a merely passive recollection of a teacher’s experiences in the classroom. In this manner, the implied intention of Loving Kindness arises alongside
the reciter’s previous experiences and recollections to potentially offer new perspectives on these same experiences. This merging parallel’s Iser remarks regarding the reading of texts:

…we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact of this reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text, and yet in supplying all the missing links, he must think in terms of experiences different from his own; indeed, it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him. (ibid p.80)

I suggest that the Loving Kindness text could evoke something similar to what Iser describes in his phenomenology of reading. In order to connect to the verses of Loving Kindness, the reciter draws from her own modicum of experiences about others. But the verses of Loving Kindness also bring something potentially new or unfamiliar to these experiences.

Many potential tensions or conflicts can arise in this process between the stated intention of the Loving Kindness narrative and the lived experiences and emotions of the teachers. The frustrations and occasional disappointments that teachers felt while practicing Loving Kindness, were an interesting and perhaps inevitable result of this practice, especially in the early stages. It is tempting to resort to a standard explanation of the ego wanting to control expectations and results, as do some of the teachers in this study. Over time, however, I became convinced that a more supportive framework would be needed to facilitate teachers in sustaining this practice. A standard explanation of “just keep practicing and you will have no expectations” feels somewhat untenable, and it goes against the kinds of self-acceptance and nurturing that the practice fosters. It also reinforces an individualist, neoliberal notion that selves are somehow separate entities which have the capacity to develop self-control and emotional regulation by themselves. In reality, teachers have expectations, hopes and wishes, just as all human beings do. A longer term study would be needed to understand how the teachers balance between loving kindness and their personal hopes and disappointments toward their professional lives. I am not so much interested in how loving kindness ‘dissipates’ disappointment, as how it might transform disappointment into a variation that honors the teacher’s sense of purpose and passion.
I would be interested in conducting Action Research (Atkins & Wallace, 2012) to determine what frameworks best support teachers as they practice Loving Kindness, particularly using a group setting. Group meditative practice can have great benefits, especially if there is a component of shared dialogue. I would be interested to explore further how teachers could support each other’s practice through personal narratives. The shift of this kind of study might include some of Jerome Bruner’s (1986) theories about how identity is structured through successive, changing narratives (p.68). This kind of study would not assume that Loving Kindness operates as a separate, stand-alone narrative from others, but would try to reveal the relationships between overlapping or conflicting narratives. How the teachers make sense of Loving Kindness in light of conflicting or contradictory self-narratives would be an interesting future study.

In retrospect, I am also aware that other methodological approaches could enrich the study of Loving Kindness Meditation. I am particularly interested in psychoanalytic approaches to understanding how the visualization worked for the teachers and generated insights as well as emotional shifts. What makes images overwhelming, hard to handle, or passionate? A study such as this would likely require more detailed journaling of images, similar to dream journals (Miller, 2000, p.67-71), where the teachers might start to pay finer attention to the images and feelings after each line and answer questions based on those images. Sills (2009) and Epstein (2001, 2005) in particular are psychotherapists who are adapting Buddhist concepts into exciting theories of psychodynamics. Exploring how Loving Kindness Meditation sheds light on these processes would be a potentially interesting form of future study as well.

Perpetuating Wishes: What I Learned from the Teachers and the Practice

It’s early May 2015 as I wrap up writing the first draft for my MA thesis on Loving Kindness Meditation. A Vesak celebration takes place in the Chan Hall on a warm Sunday morning. A crowd of 30 people attend the ceremony, mostly clad in fine black robes draped down to their feet. A few children’s cartoon films in Mandarin outline the significance of Vesak.
Vesak is a celebration of Buddha’s birthday, as well as his enlightenment and eventual death, sometimes referred to as *paranirvana* (Fortunato, 2009). We light candles as a tribute to the teachers of the past. We walk in single file toward a small statue of a baby Buddha, after which we take turns pouring water across its tiny shoulders. We chant the lines “*Na Mo Ben Shi Shi Jia Mo Ni Fo*”, which means “Homage to Shakyamuni Buddha”, the incarnate form of the Buddha who taught on Earth over two millennia ago.

As I join palms, I feel my hands trembling and struggling to stay together. My body feels the occasion as momentous, though I cannot consciously say why. There are no thoughts to explain that single-minded sense of purpose that I feel. I walk back to my place and close my eyes, continuing to chant the lines to myself.

What did I learn from this experience? Who are my teachers?
Who or what inspired me?

As a researcher, I lived with the teacher reflections for a long time and tried to understand their puzzles and contours. I came to know some of the wisdom of four teachers who are working in very different teaching settings, yet who all came together in this project to share with me their joys and struggles with reciting loving kindness.

From Jill, I came to understand the pride of being a teacher: preparing notes, reflecting on the experience, and wanting to improve herself in a sincere and open way through the practice itself. I learned from Jill that Loving Kindness is not just a meditation or a repeated, but it can incorporate intellect and reflection into its nuances. Jill took Loving Kindness Meditation to a very quiet and calm contemplative place, and she showed it in the way she became more attentively present with her students. Jill maintained such a quiet dignity as she dedicated her moments to loving kindness meditation, and didn’t attach to particular lines or emotions arising from the lines.

From David, I learned about how important it is to be sincere and earnest in the practice of dedicating to others. I learned the way spiritual practice reaches into the conflicted spaces of both teachers and the students who are challenged and pressured by the educational system itself. I had a glimpse of
how Loving Kindness Meditation reveals risky possibilities, as teachers step outside their roles and try to be congruent with the intention of the practice. I learned about the unique sacrifices that arise as teachers take spirituality into the contested spaces of their professional lives. David approached the practice with such an invigorating honesty about himself as a teacher as well as the benefits that the practice had on his being.

From Karen, I learned the value of being enchanted, particularly by the special gifts and surprises of students. I learned how important it is to behold loving-kindness as a gift, and how important the meditation could be for teachers in handling the complex anxieties of being in often anonymizing situations in the schools. I learned how loving-kindness can mitigate some of the most painful aspects of alienation in schools. I also learned to appreciate the many ways Karen has brought a spirit of equilibrium to her classroom, through a continued intention to wish her students well.

From Nicole, I learned that teaching can be such a fertile listening space. It needn’t be intrusive, it needn’t be role-centered, and it needn’t be a place where teachers roll out their theories and speeches. Nicole taught me the value of sincere listening, and how this is so much more needed than trying to create the care that teachers assume their students need, in their unique journeys in life. She emphasized so much the human-to-human aspect of loving-kindness, as well as her continued struggle to negotiate a space for herself in professional life that doesn’t emphasize speed, rushing, and giving into hurries.

In the course of both my research and meditative practice, phenomenology itself became my trusted entry method into Loving Kindness Meditation. Phenomenology reminded me of how I am continually orienting myself in a milieu of changing objects and spaces. It allowed me to listen without giving into a strong sense of self. I struggled not to dogmatize the practice or expect anything profound to arise from it. I experienced a dizzying array of possibilities as I explored the narratives of the teachers. What I present here is only a small fraction of what could be done or explored with Loving Kindness Meditation.

This practice is so different from how I see myself, particularly as I have struggled with introversion for much of my life. In many of my self-reflections on the practice, I noted times when I
struggled to apply this practice to strangers. It often seemed impossible. In one journal entry, I note about how I found expectations to connect with others a kind of impediment to the practice. I remark:

I did a bit of loving kindness today during the Thursday evening group meditation practice, though not for very long. I did feel that one of the resistances was the expectation, the desire, to somehow connect with others. I feel it is actually a barrier to practice because my desire to ‘connect’ is bound up in all sorts of conditioned thinking. I keep ‘negotiating’ with others in my mind, somehow trying to find a way to make it work. On the other hand, when I am not expecting too much, treating the practice as a way to develop equanimity, then there is an almost natural sense of wanting to extend that ‘release’ to those around me. It is as though I have a gift inside to give when I cultivate release, letting go, whereas when I practice with the idea of ‘trying’ or ‘striving’ to connect or sustain a connection, there is a loaded sense of construing something there. This loving kindness really has to start from some kind of abundance, which comes from emptying the self, not trying to connect the self somewhere.

Working with the difficulties of Loving Kindness Meditation allowed me to reflect on why and when I might shut down, and what might give me the courage to keep going. At one point, I compare the practice to that of “the timeless presence of a friend who just knows you even if you haven’t talked to that person in so many years.” I have come to appreciate the struggle to connect as a necessary struggle that enriches spiritual life, and professional life as well. It is good to try to reach others, and it is also good to fail at it every once in a while. Learning the contours of ‘reach’ is like making myself at home in a dark room, feeling my way along the gentle curvatures of the furnishings to find a comfortable chair on which to sit.

We finish the ceremony and all the mats and cushions are packed in the storage area. Soon, the Chan Hall is bare again. We go outside for a festival of games and activities including Zen-style drumming and painting.

I enter a fun activity to see if I can carry a bowl of full water around a circular walkway, without spilling a single drop. My close friend and colleague finishes effortlessly in no time, with one arm raised. I wonder: how did she do it? What can I learn from it? Invariably, I end up taking twice as long, and at a much slower pace. But it’s the way that feels right for me. And in time, I can learn to understand her way as well.
The day ends in light rain, and the festivities folds up. The grounds are bare and ripe for another ceremony at a later time.

References


Bickford, Melanie (2005), Stress in the Workplace: A General Overview of the Causes, the Effects, and the Solutions. Canadian Mental Health Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Division.

Boddhi, Bhikku (2005), In the Buddha’s Words: an Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.


Detmer, D. (2013), Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight. Chicago, Ill: Open Court


Fortunato, Peter (2009), 1 May, 2007: Vesak Celebration. Doha,Qatar: Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue


Gawain, Shakti (2002), *Creative Visualization: use the power of your imagination to create what you want in your life.* Navato, CA: New World Library


Ionata, Maddalena; Ionata, Benedetta; Regina, Maria Liberti; Del Torre Stefania (2014) By the Kindness to the Gift of Self *JOURNAL FOR PERSPECTIVES OF ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION*, V. 19 (1-2), 01/2014, p. 261


Kristeller, Jean L. & Johnson, Thomas (2005), Cultivating Loving Kindness: a Two-Stage Model of the Effects of Meditation on Empathy, Compassion and Altruism. *Zygon*, vol. 40, no. 2


Pickert, Kate (2014), The Mindful Revolution, *Time Magazine* 2014-02-03


Starks, Helene & Trinidad, Susan Brown (2007), Choose Your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory *Qualitative Health Research Volume 17 Number 10* 1372-1380

Todd, Sharon (2003), A Fine Risk to be Run? The Ambiguity of Eros and Teacher *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 22: 31–44


Appendix A: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Research Project: "A Phenomenological Study of Loving Kindness Practice in Education Settings"

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study on the effects of Loving Kindness education in secular education settings. This study will significantly explore the ways in which Loving Kindness meditation can help teachers enhance a subjective sense of community and compassion in their classrooms or other educational environments. It will also explore the potential challenges that Loving Kindness Practice poses when it is directed toward a teacher or educational professional's students in a classroom.

Your participation in this study will involve reciting a Loving Kindness practice on a daily basis on your own for a period of 10-20 minutes daily, and directing the intent of this practice toward a classroom of students with whom you are currently working. The Loving Kindness practice will be done at a set time during the day, as chosen by the participant, for a period of 3 weeks. At the end of the 3 week period, you will submit a short reflection 1-3 pages long, which explores what you experienced from the Loving Kindness practice itself (sensations, reflections, experience of self), and how the practice might or might not be affecting your sense of connectedness to a classroom setting. During the reflection process, you could also explore whether or not Loving Kindness practice helps you to feel a general sense of community with your classroom, and what sorts of inner challenges and conflicts might arise when Loving Kindness is practiced with a classroom in mind. During this process, there is also an opportunity to explore any connections which might spontaneously happen during the day between Loving Kindness practice and the actual experience of teaching itself. All reflections will then be submitted to me, the researcher, for analysis. Participants also have the option of submitting...
diary entries for the 3 week period, which record the day-to-day experience of Loving Kindness practice.

After the reflections have been submitted and reviewed by me, the researcher, 1 to 2 follow up in-person interview or email correspondence may be conducted to clarify, the kinds of challenges which this exercise of Loving Kindness practice had posed to you, as a participant. In this way, you will have an opportunity to explore the kinds of conflicts or challenges which prevent or might be an obstacle to fully benefiting from Loving Kindness practice, as a teacher.

All the information that is collected during this process will be from reflections written by participants themselves as well as the oral and/or written interviews and email correspondence, which will be recorded and transcribed. This information will only be used for this study, and actual names of participants will not be used in any presentation, publication or submission of analysis and findings. Only I, the researcher; will have access to this data. After the study, all raw data collected will be destroyed, and will not be used for any other purposes besides the current study.

In addition, to the best of my knowledge, there are no social, physical or psychological risks to you as a participant in the course of this study.

As a participant, you will have the opportunity to potentially benefit from being introduced to a contemplative practice which can increase your sense of engagement and care as a teacher/educational professional, as well as enhance emotional health and well-being.

Please note also that individual participation is strictly voluntary, and, should you choose to be part of this study, you may decline to participate and/or withdraw at any time. In addition, all participants in this study will be able to decline to answer any question or participate in any parts of the procedures without any negative repercussions. Should the participant choose to withdraw at any point in this study, no data collected from them will be used as part of the study itself. There is also the possibility of publishing the results of this study or presenting the results at a later time through a respected academic journal, forum or publication. Should this opportunity arise, all participant information is kept strictly confidential, with pseudonyms used in place of real participant names and locations.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact me at keith.brown@mail.utoronto.ca or (416) 733-0162. Participants may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416 946-3273, if they have any questions about their rights as participants.

In addition, my supervisor for this project, Dr. Jack Miller, can be contacted at j.miller@utoronto.ca, or alternately, at (416) 978-0221.

Your signature below indicates that you have been fully informed of the research, what your participation involves and you are at least 18 years of age and of sound body and mind, and agree to voluntarily participate in the study as indicated above.
Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Invitation Letter

Re: "A Phenomenological Study of Loving Kindness Practice in Education Settings"

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Keith Brown, and I am currently working towards my MA in Curriculum Studies at the University of Toronto, where my main interest is Contemplative and Spiritual education and its effects on teachers.

I am writing to invite you to a study which explores the effects of Loving Kindness practice on teachers and their lived emotional response to the classrooms in which they work.

During the course of this study, participants will use a calming and relaxing practice of reciting loving kindness verses to themselves and to those in their classroom and surroundings. The recitation can take place anytime during the day, at the participant’s convenience, and preferably in a comfortable and undistracted state, for a period of between 10 and 20 minutes, or a period of roughly 3 weeks. After this time, they submit a short 2-3 page reflection exploring the effects of the practice on their emotional stance toward self and classroom life.

All participants must be 18 or over, and preferably in a teaching or educational professional or voluntary capacity. Though no monetary compensation will be provided, the participants will be enriched by the opportunity to learn and adopt a contemplative practice which can potentially enhance their emotional life in the classroom.

Results and names of this research will be kept confidential, and all efforts will be made to ensure that information gathered for this research is secure and encrypted, in accordance to U of T’s policies.

Should you wish to participate in this study or learn more, you may contact me at keith.brown@mail.utoronto.ca (Phone: 416 733-0162) or my supervisor, Dr. Jack Miller, at j.miller@utoronto.ca (Phone: (416) 978-0221).
Appendix C: Promotional Flyer

Participants Needed
For a Study on the Effects of Loving Kindness Practice on Teachers

I am an MA Student in the Curriculum Studies program (CTL) at OISE, with a special interest on the effects of meditative and contemplative practices on teacher development. I am interested in studying the effects of a special practice of mindfulness called Loving Kindness Meditation on teacher’s perceptions and attitudes toward classroom life.

I am looking for participants who are currently teaching or doing educational field in a work or volunteering capacity, to recite a short verse of Loving Kindness meditation for a period of 10-20 minutes per day, for a 3 week period.

After the 3 week period, participants will write a short 2-3 page reflection sharing their experience of the practice and how it impacts their experience of classroom life. Meditation script and instructions will be provided to the participants.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age.

All names and personal information will be kept confidential.

Should you wish to participate in this study or learn more, you may contact Keith at keith.brown@mail.utoronto.ca (Phone: 416 733-0162).

Thank you!
Appendix D: Study Instructions To Participants

Your participation in this study will involve reciting a Loving Kindness practice on a daily basis on your own, and directing the intent of this practice toward a classroom of students with whom you are currently working. The Loving Kindness practice will be done at a set time during the day, as chosen by the participant, for a period of 3 weeks. At the end of the 3 week period, you will submit a short reflection 1-3 pages long, which explores what you experienced from the Loving Kindness practice itself (sensations, reflections, experience of self), and how the practice might or might not be affecting your sense of connectedness to a classroom setting. During the reflection process, you could also explore whether or not Loving Kindness practice helps you to feel a general sense of community with your classroom, and what sorts of inner challenges and conflicts might arise when Loving Kindness is practiced with a classroom in mind. During this process, there is also an opportunity to explore any connections which might spontaneously happen during the day between Loving Kindness practice and the actual experience of teaching itself. All reflections will then be submitted to me, the researcher, for analysis. Participants also have the option of submitting diary entries for the 3 week period, which record the day-to-day experience of Loving Kindness practice.

Instructions:

1) Choose a time during the day, approximately 10-20 minutes (or more, if possible) for a 3 week period in which to practice Loving Kindness meditation. You can vary the time on a daily basis according to your schedule. The key is to try to do the practice daily for a 3 week period, to maintain consistency of the practice.

2) Get into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, preferably in a quiet place where there are relatively few distractions.

3) Recite the following words slowly and mindfully¹. Try to contact a warm place in the heart while performing this practice:

   “May I be well, happy and peaceful.”
   “May my family be well, happy, and peaceful.”

¹ Both exercises adopted from Miller, P (2014), The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and the Workplace. Toronto, ON. University of Toronto Press, page 51
“May my friends be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May my neighbours be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May my colleagues be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May my classroom be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May my students be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May all people that I am having difficulty with or feeling anger toward, be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May all beings in the planet be well, happy, and peaceful.”
“May all beings in the universe be well, happy, and peaceful.”

The participants also have the option to recite the following before this recitation, while visualizing a person who is close to themselves:

“May you be free from suffering.”
“May you be healthy.”
“May you be free from danger.”
“May you dwell in wisdom.”
“May you dwell in compassion.”
“May you rejoice in the happiness of others.”

Participants will repeat these phrases mindfully for 10-15 minutes approximately, keeping their body still and relaxed while resting the mind in the phrases themselves.

Participants are also encouraged (though not required) to use times during the day in which they are unoccupied to recite the lines which they remember, such as at a supermarket line-up or doing a routine task. Again, the basic foundation is open, relaxed and sincere, rather than forced.

During the 3 week period of Loving Kindness Recitation, you welcome, though not required, to keep a diary recording the daily experiences of the Loving Kindness practice. At the end of the 3 week period, you will write and then submit a 1-3 page reflection which describes the experience of Loving-Kindness practice. In this reflection, you may describe the following:

a) Sensations, emotions and body experiences that arose during the course of the loving kindness practice period
b) Ways in which the practice was extended during the day (for example, was the Loving kindness recited in other situations besides the 10-15 minute sitting period)
c) Ways in which you felt connected to the Loving Kindness practice
d) Ways in which the Loving Kindness practice helped you feel more connected to your students and classroom overall
e) Note any challenges, tensions, inner doubts or disconnections that were experienced in the process of doing Loving Kindness in general. Did this experience feel connecting all
the time, or where there other moments when the practice didn’t seem to ‘work’ on a specific level?

Note any challenges, tensions, etc. that might have arisen when specifically reciting the Loving Kindness verses toward the students (“May my students be well, happy, and peaceful”) and the classroom (“May my classroom be well, happy and peaceful.”)

Reflections will be due no later than 1 week after the 3 week period, to ensure that there is no significant time-gap between the Loving Kindness practice itself and the written reflection.

After the reflections have been submitted and I have reviewed them, you may be asked for either a follow up interview (1-2) or email to clarify key points or observations that arose in the reflection itself.

References

Miller, John P (2014), The Contemplative Practitioner: Meditation in Education and the Workplace. Toronto, ON. University of Toronto Press

Appendix E: Schematic Diagram of Data Analysis Steps

To arrive at my analysis, I performed the following steps:

I) Forming a Textural Description of the Individual Teacher’s Lived Experience
   a) Translated all statements in the reflections and transcribed interviews into units of relevant meaning
   b) Created a table of clustered meanings, which group similar meanings into shared themes that are relevant to the experience of Loving Kindness practice for each teacher
   c) Created textual narratives of each theme, using verbatim transcripts from the teachers
   d) Combined all the themes into a textural statement that summarizes the experience of teachers

II) Forming a Composite Textural Description of all Four Teacher’s Experiences
   a) Clustered similar themes of all four teachers into single over-arching theme or ‘sub-theme’
   b) Ensured that the themes are distinct and clearly delineated
   c) Created a Composite Textural Description of the teacher’s experiences based on all the themes combined
   d) Created descriptions of each theme, using verbatim examples and quotes to connect the teachers’ experiences into a coherent thread

III) Imaginative Variation and Synthesis of Meanings and Essences (Moustakas, 1994, p.100)
   a) Used Imaginative Variation to seek out the underlying shifts in the way teachers orient to the practice of Loving Kindness over time, including orientation toward students, self, classrooms.
   b) Created a structural description which summarizes how teachers’ orientation toward students and the practice change over time,
c) Incorporated findings into current literature on Loving Kindness