THE HIGHLY SENSITIVE SEEKER’S SOUL IN EDUCATION: A HEALING PARADIGM

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Master of Education
Nipissing University

2016
THE HIGHLY SENSITIVE SEEKER’S SOUL IN EDUCATION: A HEALING PARADIGM

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY
SCHULICH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
NORTH BAY, ONTARIO

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Abstract

This thesis, *The Highly Sensitive Seeker’s Soul in Education: A Healing Paradigm*, is an immersion into the alchemy of self using alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research. Using these methodologies, the unconscious, soulful, mystical, archetypal, poetic, holistic, and imaginative are brought to light through creative expressions, dreams, reverie, and depth dialogues. As a highly sensitive intuitive introverted empath, I examine what it means to be an educator and student from a phenomenological and deeply personal lens and how being this way has affected my personal and professional life. I believe there needs to be an awakening, a holistic and healing paradigm shift in how we view education for the highly sensitive person where the active imagination and contemplative soul feel at home.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank Dr. Carlo Ricci who encouraged and supported my thesis topic when I first approached him in 2013. Even through the many revisions and suggested edits when I started losing confidence he was a constant, and I am grateful for his empathy and academic experience. I could not have chosen a better thesis supervisor. I would also like to acknowledge my original second reader Dr. Michael McCabe who was supportive in his offered suggestions. And also Dr. John Vitale my current second reader who replaced Dr. McCabe because of a previous work related travel commitment. I would also like to thank my father who was a big inspiration in my life and in this thesis. I’m sure he is proud of his only daughter and is watching me from beyond the veil. He passed away before I could share it with him. I also want to thank my mother who continues to inspire me to move forward with my dreams. And finally I want to thank my beautiful and supportive husband Mark Solnoky. His moral and loving support carried me when I doubted I would ever finish what felt like my albatross. Today I am grateful for the illuminations on my seeker’s journey, a happy alchemist singing the melody of enchantment holding my philosopher’s stone.
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Chapter One: Introduction

It is my personal and strong belief that true education can be healing. Educators with an awareness of the soul know that education is about more than just the tangible or physical reality. Beyond the parameters and structures of fixed curriculums, hierarchies, and linear pedagogies, timelessness awakens the contemplative’s soul and the imagination makes anything possible. Using alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research methodologies, I am exploring my world as a highly sensitive introverted intuitive empath in relation to education, and the difficulties I have and continue to experience in my life. I am proposing that because of my experiences and temperament, what is missing in education is a holistic and healing paradigm. How does one incorporate the challenges of being highly sensitive, empathic, introverted, and intuitive, and all that it implies, on one’s intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual reality in relation to education and living in the world? The ideas and perspectives like “timeless learning” in John Miller’s (2006) book, Educating for Wisdom and Compassion: Creating Conditions for Timeless Learning, are ones that in my opinion, need to be more in the forefront of education. Some of the qualities found in holistic education, such as intuition, wonder, healing, connectedness, and the transpersonal, are what “gives meaning and purpose to our lives” (Miller, 2006, p. 5). We are called by an eminent energy that is indescribable and ineffable connecting us all to each other.

I believe that if education is to be healing, then it must be transformative and transpersonal. We, as a species and as a planet, are still evolving. Therefore, what is needed for the healing of ourselves and our planet is wisdom and self-awareness and a realization that we are all unique and, therefore, need to be treated as such.

There is an evolving consciousness that calls for the development of our sensibilities
and sensitivities. Like Teilhard de Chardin’s (as cited in King, 2011) evolution of the noosphere, something new is being birthed into consciousness and we cannot separate the human from the cosmos. In Ursula King’s book, *Teilhard De Chardin and Eastern Religions*, she writes referring to Teilhard, “This is what the visionary, the mystic, seeks: to live apart from the multitude, to be lulled by passivity, to awaken to cosmic consciousness” (p. 43). This is what I am calling forth and what has called me my entire life, a dialectically evolving alchemy of education for the highly sensitive.

I personally resonate with the soulful, transcendent, contemplative, healing, and timeless aspect of life and education. I also see the evolution of consciousness as connecting to sensitivity and self-awareness, with the awakening and understanding of unique temperaments and sensibilities. Educators who are intuitive allow for moments of wonder and enchantment, where stillness and flow move interchangeably like the natural rhythm of life. If we want education to truly be a healing experience, there needs to be a grounding of information by researchers. These are my personal philosophical beliefs that have been developed and adopted from readings of holistic and spiritual writers throughout the many years of readings and study. Transpersonal research methods, like alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research, allow for a metaphysical language of communication to endorse this focus of healing in education. In a youtube video entitled *Three Pillars of Transpersonal Education*, Dr. Robert Frager (2010), a leader and forerunner in transpersonal psychology, said that “transpersonal education is transformative.”

Throughout my journey in life, and as an educator, I have always been attracted to the holistic; seeking the alternative and spiritual, and finding myself on the road less travelled. Life and education are not separate and as a highly sensitive, predominantly nonlinear,
intuitive, empathic-feeling introvert, I have felt disconnected with mainstream society and with the educational system. I have been drawn to the spiritual and transcendental and transcendent quality of life, where philosophical ideas within the holistic and transcendental worldview have been my canvas, and the focus is on the soul in education and inclusion of intuitive, empathic introverts.

That which cannot be measured has an unquantifiable value; it is immeasurably important. There needs to be a recognition that some people are born with higher sensitivity, which not only affects their personal lives, but also how they learn best. The voices of the less represented should be given representation. I see the need for a more soulful education and have noted this gap in education circles. Even though I am in the minority, parents and educators should be aware that people like me exist.

Adding sensitivity as a type along with other temperaments in education circles may help those of us who as a minority are negatively affected by many of the conditions in regular institutions. From a strictly research oriented perspective, I realize that as a highly sensitive, intuitive-empathic I am not the norm; not everyone can feel the molecules of emotion of a body that is conscious of a spiritual anatomy created out of stardust. The term *molecules of emotions* came from Dr. Candace Pert (1999), a neuroscientist and pharmacologist, who also wrote a book by the same name. Pert wrote about this process that occurs in connection with the mind and body:

In my talks, I show how the molecules of emotion run every system in our body, and how this communication system is in effect a demonstration of the bodyminds’s intelligence, an intelligence wise enough to seek wellness and one that can potentially keep us healthy and disease-free without the modern high-tech medical intervention
we now rely on. (p. 19)

Michael A. Jawer, the main author, along with Marc S. Micozzi (2009) in *The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotions: How Feelings Link the Brain, the Body, and the Sixth Sense*, research and explore ideas like thin and thick boundaries. Not surprising, I fit the characteristics and attributes of someone who has thin boundaries and is thin-skinned. In their book, they write about Ernest Hartmann, a psychiatrist’s definition on thick and thin boundaries. Jawer and Micozzi write about Hartmann stating that “Hartmann asserts that everyone can be characterized on a spectrum of boundaries from thick to thin” (p. 252).

There are people who strike us as very solid and well organized; they keep everything its place. They are well defended. They seem rigid, even armored; we sometimes speak of them as thick-skinned. Such people, in my view, have very thick boundaries. At the other extreme are people who are especially sensitive, open, or vulnerable. In their minds, things are relatively fluid. ... Such people have particularly thin boundaries. ... I propose thick and thin boundaries as a broad way of looking at individual differences. (Hartmann, as cited in Jawer & Micozzi, 2009, p. 252)

Being thin-skinned or having thin boundaries is very much akin with the Psychologist Elaine Aron’s (1996) concept of being highly sensitive. When her book *The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You*, was first published, I could not believe there were others out there like me. I had always felt different, and communicating my perceptions and experiences with others would always leave me feeling even more alienated and alone. I am deeply affected emotionally, physically, and psychically by my personal environment and world events. I constantly have to reapply a protective barrier; my immune system seems to always be detecting every germ and bacteria out there and my
emotional boundaries are always feeling too much.

Catherine Crawford (2009), the author of *The Highly Intuitive Child: A Guide to Understanding and Parenting Unusually Sensitive and Empathic Children*, counselled and counsels adults who are highly sensitive intuitive and empathic and, therefore, thought it was important to write a book for children with these qualities so parents and educators could understand. In this example Crawford writes about the differences in how these children are wired by suggesting, “Highly intuitive, empathic children may need to learn how to quiet their heightened responses to people and environmental stimuli by learning how to regulate the ‘volume’ of these channels and calm down” (p. 44). For the highly intuitive, because our nervous systems are very sensitive, we are very much affected by outside stimuli. The same can be said for those of us who are highly sensitive, empathic, and introverted. And we will see how sometimes these labels and definitions are used interchangeably depending upon the researcher’s personal understanding and experiences. Dr. Elaine Aron (1996) researched high sensitivity. It can also be called sensory-processing sensitivity. Through her extensive research she found many common characteristics of:

- being very aware of their environment; more sensitive than others to caffeine, pain, hunger, and medications; easily startled; prone to allergies (a depth of processing of the immune system); and easily overwhelmed by highly stimulating or unfamiliar situations—crowds, noise, deadlines, sudden changes in their life, rough textures, strange odours, visual clutter, and so forth. (Aron, 1996, p. 5)

about my thesis topic in 2012, confessing my difficulty fitting in as an introvert in what felt like a highly extroverted online class, Dr. Carlo Ricci, the Professor of the course I was taking, and who would later be my thesis supervisor, asked whether I had heard of Cain’s book. He said I would probably find it affirming and research worthy. I honestly did not think it would be as popular as it is, though because of how well it is researched and written, Cain was able to raise discussion, bringing it into various media and education circles. Cain (2012) reiterates some of Aron’s description of Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs), especially the introverts, by writing that they:

- tend to be keen observers who look before they leap. They arrange their lives in ways that limit surprises ... have difficulty when being observed or judged for general worthiness ... tend to be philosophical or spiritual ... describe themselves as creative or intuitive ... dream vividly ... love music, nature, art, physical beauty. They feel exceptionally strong emotions—sometimes acute bouts of joy, but also sorrow, melancholy and fear. (p. 136)

Even though I share the same biological suit as others of my species, I am uniquely wired and, therefore, my experiences, perceptions, ways of thinking, and apprehending the world and cosmos are uniquely mine. I have always felt like I was an outsider, never truly belonging to the mainstream experience; even among strict HSP Facebook groups. Because of being easily overwhelmed and having a low sensory threshold and also being thin-skinned, I have tried to find ways and remedies to feel better and be able to deal with the environment and emotional overloads. Mainstream and conventional approaches never seemed to match my temperament and this is why I naturally gravitated to various holistic and healing modalities in the form of alternative education and therapies.
I recently had a bottom back tooth, which was root canalled, extracted, and even though I told the dentist I was highly sensitive and, therefore, would be more sensitive to the medications and pain, he really had no idea what that meant, and proceeded to give me four needles, accidentally hitting the connecting nerves. Needless to say, the pain was quite noticeable and my phobia of dentists is now stronger than ever. This reaction about my sensitivity is not unique. There was another instance when I was working as a Program Writer where one of my teacher colleagues remarked in a disparagingly smug way, “Wow, you don’t have to be so sensitive” and then laughed judgingly, reigniting the neuron of being different and that there was something wrong with me.

In my earlier experiences in life, I naturally delved into the realm of the unseen: the paranormal and psychic phenomenon. And as an adolescent, I gravitated towards the transcendentalists and existentialists, experiencing alienation and searching for the meaning in life; dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed emotionally, physically, and spiritually I took the road less travelled and spent time in monasteries and spiritual communities.

I will explore these experiences, ideas, and alternative dimensions, using transference dialogues, a method used from one of my chosen methodologies, alchemical hermeneutics; engaging into the unconscious realm through my dreams and psyche, and journals, poetry, and prose to connect with and reveal a conscious awareness of my feelings and complexes. I also will be uncovering and discovering the depth of my imagination and earlier experiences through self-dialogue, a method used in heuristic methodology, my second chosen methodology.

Elaine Aron (1997) contends that if ones experiences when growing up are hinged on positive emotional acknowledgements and supports, this can make a huge difference in how
one experiences being highly sensitive. Interestingly, this need to be acknowledged and seen is one that I struggle with in life. The idea and complex of feeling invisible comes up many times in my life, comparing myself with others, and seeing where I am lacking and insufficient. Even this thesis has presented challenges emotionally as I feel like I have not been able to meet the original deadlines I set out to accomplish. I will elaborate on this later.

Changes need to take place in the classroom (Crawford, 2009). Crawford writes that it can be stressful for the highly intuitive empathic child and “occasionally, the match of teacher and even school for the child is one that needs to be reviewed and possibly changed for the child to feel safe, calm, and focused on learning” (p. 32). What is overlooked in many schools is the environment or the physical structure or space where students spend much of the day learning. When I was a student and teacher, I was affected by the artificial space where I spent the day. Designing spaces that are movable and fluid are also important when we look at creating schools that include a respect for timelessness. This allows for the opportunity of a transcendent awakening where most intuitive empathic learners feel comfortable and where the timelessness and soulful quality of being is acknowledged. When I set up classroom environments, I make sure there is sufficient air flow by bringing in quiet air purifiers, changing the lighting by turning off the florescent lights and bringing in alternative light sources. I also add plants and bring in herbal teas and essential oils.

Most recently, I was the Coordinator and Educator in a learning centre for Aboriginal adults where I taught a holistic life skills and reflective and therapeutic writing course. With the funds I received from a government proposal I wrote, I purchased grow light gardens, with various tiers, where we grew herbs and edibles. I started conducting a small study on the healing effects of plants used in aromatherapy in relation to the energetic response of
reducing stress, increasing focus for study and learning, while at the same time improving health and creating a healthy lifestyle for individuals suffering from trauma and addiction. I always try to find ways and remedies to feel better, to be able to deal with the environment and emotional overloads.

It seems that mainstream and conventional approaches never seem to match my temperament and I am always seeking alternative approaches, therapies, and concoctions. That is why when I first came across alchemical hermeneutics as a research methodology, and Robert Romanyszyn’s (2013) work, The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind, I felt like I had discovered the divine elixir of research methodologies and researchers. Being drawn to the soulful, mystical, archetypal, poetic, imaginative, and transcendental element, alchemical hermeneutics fits the depth of my interests and transcendental searching and musings. Romanyszyn (2013) wrote that “The Wounded Researcher had many false starts, which I experienced as dismemberment of the work” (p. 59). This is how I have found my thesis journey, “many false starts” and the process of writing has involved many sheared pages, searing edits, and dissolutions of what no longer sings or resonates. My creative soul was sometimes jarred with the demands and alterations and changing demands of my physical, emotional, and psychic reality.

Reading Robert Romanyszyn’s (2013) book was a very slow process due to the complexity of the methodology. As well, the metaphoric, symbolic, and poetic language used called for reflective analysis and interpretation. Each section led to note taking, journaling, and the desire to go to the well of creative expression, needing to pause and stop through reverie and meditation. Therefore, the writing and rewriting of this thesis has been a very slow process. It has much to do with my inability to be strictly rational and linear as I am
always stopping and recollecting experiences and then pondering at length, a reflective practicing.

In education, there needs to be an inclusion of the transcendent and ineffable qualities that go beyond the traditional curriculum or subjects taught in school. Looking through the lens as a reflective practitioner (Bolton, 2010) and using an alchemical hermeneutic (Romanyshyn, 2013) and heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990), I will explore the soul and undercurrent of my essence. Highly sensitive, intuitive, introverted empaths are in the minority, and parents and educators should be aware that these students might experience alienation, depression, and even suicidal thoughts because of their depth of feelings and overwhelming experiences of life. We have a melancholic yearning for the sacred, spiritual and mystical (Kessler, 2000). In her work The Soul of Education, the late Rachael Kessler wrote:

When soul is present in education, attention shifts. As the quality of attention shifts, we listen with great care not only to what people say but to the messages between the words—tones, gestures, the flicker of feelings across the face. And then we concentrate on what has heart and meaning. The yearning, wonder, wisdom, fear, and confusion of students become central to the curriculum. Questions become as important as answers. (p. x)

The above quotation could have been written for those of us who are highly sensitive, empathic, and intuitive. As a highly sensitive introverted intuitive empath, I am basically affected by everything, seeing and feeling what most cannot or choose not to see or feel. The negative result is becoming overwhelmed and sometimes feeling unwell, physically, emotionally, and psychically, and having to take time off to get better and recuperate. This adds stress to my relationships and the work I am trying to focus on and complete. The
positive end of the spectrum is being drawn to the ethereal, looking for magic, beauty, and enchantment. And I am being blessed with an intuitive knowing or as the heuristic method describe it, a tacit knowing.

I have been a seeker for most of my life, being attracted to ideas and authors who were seekers as well, and who profoundly shaped my life. In one of Hermann Hesse’s (1960) famous novels *Demian*, which I first read in high school, Hesse is translated by W. J. Strachan as writing:

> I cannot call myself a scholar. I have always been and still am a seeker but I no longer do my seeking among the stars or in the books. I am beginning to hear the lessons which whisper in my blood. Mine is not a pleasant story, it does not possess the gentle harmony of invented tales; like the lives of all men who have given up trying to deceive themselves, it is a mixture of nonsense and chaos, madness and dreams.

(p. 8)

I did want to add that when I was searching for the above quote I had two different books each using a different translator. In the other edition instead of using the word “scholar,” the translators interpreted Hesse as writing, “I do not consider myself less ignorant than most people.” This caused me to spend hours trying to decipher which of the two might be closest to Hesse’s original intention and since I do not speak German I tried researching the Internet for the answer. I did not find an answer. Even though the wording differences are subtle, I believe the interpretation changes. This hermeneutic inquiry allowed me to go deeper into the meaning of the quote.

The transcendentalist Henri Thoreau (1962) speaks to my holistic views and values, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different
drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away” (p. 360).

There have been many other poets, writers, and composers who have found me, when I needed my life to make sense mirroring me and feeling like there was a place for me in the world.

This love of beauty and soulful seekers’ ideas are what resonate for me as an educator, student, and highly sensitive person. And both alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research are trying to get to the root of something essential and, in the end, are transformative and important vehicles towards an accepting arrival of myself.

As I noted earlier, throughout this thesis I will be tapping into the unconscious and unresolved memories and experiences, exploring my dreams and journals, using a transference field and dialogues. Through transference dialogues and dreams, I can bring the unconscious to the surface, into the conscious light. Alchemical hermeneutics allows me to do this:

Thus, in the hermeneutic act we are in the presence of Hermes, “who is associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond human understanding now into a form that human intelligence can grasp.” Hermes, then, is the mythic figure who inhabits “the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding.” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 219)

Along with the academic researchers’ findings, and other writers who have influenced my life, I will share my own personal expressions through journal writings, images, poem, music, short story, prose, written excerpts, and alternative concoctions and remedies that have helped and continue to help me as a highly sensitive person.

Hesse’s (1960) statement of not seeing himself as a scholar is one that I can deeply
relate to as I do not see myself as an academic. I feel I need to apologize to the reader for my
divergent thinking and sometimes nonlinear way of expressing my ideas. And throughout
this process I have asked: Why am I writing this thesis if I do not see myself as an academic?
Sometimes when I do research, I immerse myself into the ideas, losing the outer edges and
exact distinctions, and I forge into almost alchemical deciphering and a melding composite of
what I am trying to say. This can become a nightmare for editing the many drafts I write as
my mind works more like a spiral rather than a linear fashion. At one point, I find that I am
undefined, fragmented, and unfocused, and then the opposite happens. I am super focused,
losing moments in time, in the flow, and the ideas and intentions become like the light
emanating from the edges of a quartz crystal. I love the idea and experience of creating
something new and unique. I love expressing myself creatively. In my thesis, The Highly
Sensitive Seeker’s Soul in Education: A Healing Paradigm, I will love expressing it in my
own voice.

The Appendix is an HSP Scale Questionnaire developed by Dr. Elaine Aron (1997). I
am sharing this so that the reader might want to see where they stand in respect to their level
of high sensitivity. I answered moderately high to extreme on all of the 27 questions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

As a highly sensitive predominantly introverted intuitive empath, I have always seen the world a little differently than many of my colleagues and society on the whole. What are the main temperaments of educators and policy makers? In my search and research about why I have always felt like an enigma, different, and unseen, I have come across various writers and researchers who have explained bits and pieces of why I am the way I am. Using a heuristic and alchemical hermeneutic approach, I have intuited, delved into, questioned, uncovered, interpreted, and tried to find meaning behind the material presented.

As a student and educator, I have experienced the educational system catering more to left brain, linear, sensory extroverts. School works better for extroverts and linear thinkers rather than sensitive intuitive right brain empathic introverts. On the whole, and from a holistic perspective, I see school and academia lacking in soul.

Since I started writing my thesis, I noticed there has been an increase in books and documents published on the subject of sensitive(s) and intuitive(s), as well as empath(s). There are various names that are given by authors and researchers that reflect either their own personal paradigm or research focus: Intuitive Sensitive, Spiritual Sensitive, Highly Sensitive, Highly Intuitive, and Intuitive Empath. Like the light in a spectrum, we each hold pieces of our own unique rays of light that are either visible or hidden.

In Heidi Sawyer’s (2015) new book, *Highly Intuitive People, 7 Right-Brain Traits to Change the Lives of Intuitive Sensitive People*, she writes about her experiences as an Intuitive-Sensitive:

Intuitive-Sensitive people strongly question things—they question the meaning of life, right down to where they fit in, and this is something they’ve experienced for a
very long time. They can’t cope with the mundane—it’s painful for them, and they want to be part of something with meaning. More importantly, they want deep connection. (p. 22)

These concepts of “the meaning of life” and finding a sense of belonging and “deep connection” are ones that have resonated with me my entire life. This way of living involves a deep connection with life. Viktor Frankel (1959), a holocaust survivor and author of Man’s Search for Meaning, saw the importance of finding “the will to meaning” in order to be able to survive the concentration camps. He developed his own form of psychotherapy called logotherapy. Frankel writes, “According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man. This is why I speak of a will to meaning” (p. 104).

Elaine Aron (2015), featuring Alanis Morrisette, and other contributors, released a film called Sensitive, The Untold Story. With the making of this film, a foundation was established for the study of highly sensitive persons, for continued research and education. Hopefully before too long, the understanding and acceptance of these traits will be part of mainstream education and society. When the question of needing funding so the film could be made, I was happy to contribute a small part which helped to make this film a reality.

When I first read of the concept of being thick or thin-skinned, I was very intrigued as I had never come across these terms before. I discovered that they existed by doing an Internet search on being thin-skinned and highly sensitive as I literally thought I was thin-skinned and wondered if it was a medical condition. I also felt that there was added information that I needed to know as someone who was highly sensitive. Therefore, when I came across Jawer and Micozzi, (2009) and their book The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion I
thought I hit a gold mine. In an excerpt, the authors write about a woman who is sensitive and also has thin boundaries quoting an excerpt from an essay she wrote called, *Skill of Ecological Perception* from the book *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (1995) and afterwards they add their own empathic comment:

Another woman put it this way: “The Earth speaks to us through our bodies and psyches. She often cries, and many of us feel her tears and see her pain. I experience it as a force of nature of nature entering me, like light.” Such perceptions should not be taken lightly, waved away, or pathologized by those who don’t (or can’t) share their perception. We might instead consider the possibility that such thin boundary people are a kind of natural bellwether as their neurobiology tends to blur distinctions between the core self and the world “out there” that the rest of us take for granted. (pp. 449-450)

Many times I feel like the bellwether or canary in the coal mine as I notice subtleties in my environment that others do not and later are measured and proven by environmental quality assessments. In many schools and environments I have worked, I volunteered to be a health and safety representative and enjoyed making my working environment safe and healthy.

Judith Blackstone (2012), author of *Belonging Here: A Guide for the Spiritually Sensitive*, echoes the same sentiments and writes about the spiritually sensitive, which I am as well, by writing, “Instead of feeling like enclosed, separate entities, they feel permeable, like everything around them can come into them, and as if they can ‘leak out’ into the life around them” (pp. xi-xii).

In my experience, the world loves an extrovert: loud and boisterous, gaining energy as the classroom fills up with more students and the conversations become louder. Susan Cain states in a really informative interview with *The Guardian*, “Society has a cultural bias
towards extroverts” (Tucker, 2012).

I have noted a pattern, when the lesson begins and the teacher poses a question, the student with this predisposition raises his or her hand almost as soon as the teacher asks the question. Whereas, the sensitive intuitive introvert thinks about all of the possible answers that the question evokes as she looks at the teacher intently; not wanting to make a mistake and waits until she is ready to answer. In Marti Olsen Laney’s (2005) *The Hidden Gifts of the Introverted Child*, she writes:

Mrs Chan said she considered Julianne slow because she didn’t participate in class discussions, didn’t catch onto directions quickly, and frequently asked questions about assignments. The teacher also had Julianne stay in at recess because she took too long to do her work. Julianne’s mother staggered out of the classroom shaken. Unfortunately, this is a real-life example of the collision between an introverted child and a teacher with fixed expectations. (pp. 183-184)

I have to confess that there were many times, as a teacher, I enjoyed the lively rapid answers and the exuberant enthusiasm of students waving their hands trying to respond to the questions posed. I would see this as proof that my students were engaged and that I was a good and effective teacher as my aim was to try and engage all my students. When I finally got over my performance anxiety, I slowed things down, allowing for each student’s own natural ebb and flow rhythms and responses. These were my best classes, and because of my own temperament, and struggles with the education system, I was sensitive to the different types of learners, appreciating differentiated instruction and divergent thinking. I was not an advocate of fixed expectations.
I find that most schools and academia lack soul, where intuitive introverts are forced to struggle and experience alienation, and contend with feelings of low self-worth. There needs to be more of a holistic focus where the individual can experience a greater sense of self and soulfulness. Mainstream education mainly caters to sensory extroverts and intuitive introverts are expected to comply and adapt. Not only is this discriminatory, but also potentially threatening to one's self-confidence, authenticity, and soul. The late Rachel Kessler (2000), teacher and author of *The Soul in Education*, and founder of PassageWorks Institute, addressed the need for a more soulful, social-emotional, mindful, and engaged teaching approach. She came up with Seven Gateways to the Soul in Education:

1. The yearning for deep connection
2. The Longing for silence and solitude
3. The search for meaning and purpose
4. The hunger for joy and delight
5. The creative drive
6. The urge for Transcendence
7. The need for initiation. (p. 17)

When I first came across Kessler’s ideas, I was searching for education that mattered and was meaningful. My experiences in the teacher education program, and afterwards as a secondary school teacher, were not very holistic. What is not surprising is that when most educators and researchers look at temperaments in education, they rarely include the highly sensitive intuitive introverted empathic soul as being part of the landscape. I did come across a number of journals and articles that looked at introversion and extroversion and how these personality traits affected learners.
**Introversion and Extroversion**

In an article entitled Introverts and “Extroverts Require Different Learning Environments,” by Schmeck and Lockhart (1983), published in *Educational Leadership*, an interesting fact noted is that introverts “are more sensitive than extroverts to pain, more prone to fatigue, and their performance suffers more when they are excited” (pp. 54-55). In the article, Hans Eysenck (1983) looked at human behavioural traits and personality traits. In researching this thesis both he and Raymond Cattell (1984) are referenced in many of the educational and trait theory publications. Eysenck, looked at what learning environments work best for introverted and extroverted temperaments researching the “inherited differences between people in the ways their nervous systems function” (Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983, p. 54).

No one is completely introverted or extroverted and, therefore, it is important to find a balance and be creative in how one sets the classroom environment. Reading other researchers' findings on challenges and characteristics of an introverted nervous system is important to add in one's research. Even though introversion is not the same as being highly sensitive, there are more highly sensitive introverts than extroverts. Elaine Aron (1996) writes “In my studies I’ve found that 30 percent of us are socially extraverted” (p. 98).

In the following article by Nussbaum (2002), *How Introverts versus Extroverts Approach Small-Group Argumentative Discussion*, they looked at introverted and extroverted grade 8 students in relation to how they were able to present arguments in groups. The same study was repeated with student teachers. The researchers noted in the younger students that the extroverts were more attacking and more conflict-oriented compared with the introverts who were more collaborative. They also noted that introverts are wired to avoid punishment
and negative stimuli and if they lose an argument, they see it as a social embarrassment. This might be one reason why they work collaboratively with others so as to avoid conflict. This was a very controlled quantitative study using different assessments and tests for accuracy. Introverts shared less in a large classroom setting compared with smaller groups. Also, extroverts were more attached to their ideas because they were more confident. Introverts were less confident with ideas and more inhibited. Introverts and extroverts need different approaches in the classroom. Because of being quieter, introverts are not as confident raising ideas. The researchers are not confident that the information is conclusive and see the need for more research especially on ways for introverts to increase their confidence and extroverts to be more co-constructive. It adds another layer of credibility regarding introverts' issues surrounding lack of confidence, an area which I have dealt with and still experience.

In Elaine Aron’s (2010) book called The Undervalued Self, she writes about how many times people rank each other when it comes to self-esteem, and especially if someone is highly sensitive, they rank themselves less than others:

First, although no one performs well or feels good when overstimulated, highly sensitive people become overstimulated much more easily than others because they are so aware of everything going on around them. Thus when taking a test or being observed they may do worse than others and worse than they themselves expect…sometimes they care so much that criticism causes their overall self-worth to drop drastically. (pp. 92-93)

I still find that even with the increasing literature on introversion and extroversion, it still has not reached mainstream education. In an article entitled “Actors and Act-ers: Enhancing Inclusion and Diversity in Teaching and Teacher Education Through the
Validation of Quiet Teaching.” Collins and Ting (2010) write that student teachers, especially new teachers who have a quieter disposition compared to the more talkative and overtly confident, should be encouraged to find their own way of being in the classroom, instead of just following the disposition and lead of the supervising teacher. “Many new teachers, particularly new teachers, approach a lesson as actors. They act the way they think a teacher must act in that situation. They “‘play the role’” of teacher” (Collins & Ting, 2010, p. 4). Instead of being encouraged to follow the method espoused by their practice teacher they should become act-ers finding their own style that works for them. Collins and Ting make the following recommendations:

Therefore, an important value for teacher education is to encourage student teachers to become act-ers as their practicum unfolds. In this way, teacher educators can maximize the potential in their student teachers by focusing on and developing their strengths rather than risking frustration and discouragement by over stressing areas of weakness. They can entertain the idea of quiet teaching and validate it for their students when appropriate. (p. 6)

As a former secondary school and adult educator, students seem surprised that there are types of personalities, like introversion and extroversion, that can affect the way they learn and perceive. I saw the introverts in my classes giving a sigh of relief, glad that there was nothing wrong with them because they did not feel comfortable working in large groups or because they needed more time to absorb and process information. Imagine what brilliance we might see if students are encouraged to be themselves and their sensitivities are allowed to flourish. Narratives and reflective journals are a way for students and teachers to share their experiences about feeling different in the mainstream corridors and society at large.
Not surprising, when I was a student teacher in one of my practicum experiences, I was paired with an experienced extroverted teacher who had no desire to bestow any pearls of wisdom my way. She was loud, rude, and quite boisterous. On my first practice meeting with the students, her recommendations were that I walk into the classroom and act like a bitch. This was the way of getting control in the classroom. I observed her interaction with the grade 9 students who were all boys and I was very nervous because my approach and stance were entirely different. I had a quieter and more of a student-centered approach which did not work well with the majority of the class. Though there was one student who was quieter than the other students and at the end of my student teaching experience gained more confidence by my presence and affirmation. I saw his qualities and he was not accustomed to being seen or heard. I am happy to say my other two-practicum experiences were entirely different and everyone involved, the students, the practicum teachers, and myself, were all respectful of one another and the experience was enjoyable. It was the practicum teachers who made the difference. They were both happy to impart their knowledge and share helpful teaching strategies and it showed by their students' kindness and enthusiasm to learn. These accounts of student teaching experiences are important in that if the faculties of many education centres espouse these ideologies and they are the beacons of education, it is not surprising that those of us who are highly sensitive, introverted, and intuitive, will not be encouraged to flourish both as teachers and students.

When I first started taking online courses, I found that having to post comments and respond to the threaded discussions a little intimidating. I also noted there were students who monopolized the discussions and were always posting and commenting. The need to constantly go online and interact was exhausting, especially since we were being evaluated.
An article by Daughenbaugh, Daughenbaugh, Surry, and Islam (2002), entitled “Personality Type and Online Versus In-class Course Satisfaction” looked at introversion and extroversion in respect to online learning. The article addressed many of the same issues I experienced. The research stated that sensory extroverts seemed to like online delivery better than intuitive temperaments. They were surprised by their findings, “Completely opposite from what we had hypothesized, the data indicated that students rated as extroverts, rather than introverts, showed a stronger preference for the ways in which information is presented in online courses” (p. 2). They hypothesized that online courses would be better appreciated by introverted, intuitive, thinking, perceiving personalities though the opposite was discovered.

There were some distinct differences between the sensory and intuitive type where the intuitive compared to the sensory preferred online to traditional in-class courses. The reason why extroverts preferred online courses compared with introverts is because of the opportunities for chatting and also because of the posting of the threaded discussions. The researchers suggested that faculty should be more aware of addressing the different learning styles; there should be more student interaction such as online face-to-face and group projects. It reaffirms the need to have more research done on how temperaments affect education. Though it still does not go deep enough into how intuitive introverts learn differently, especially considering the author’s conclusion about the need for more student interaction. Even though Daughenbaugh et al.’s article was written in 2002, it still shows a lack of understanding in academic circles about the meaning of the sensitivity temperament by confusing the terms sensory and sensitive. Here is the excerpt I am referring to: “We found that the intuitive, rather than the sensitive, personalities preferred the online course environment to more traditional, in-class situations” (Daughenbaugh et al., 2002, p. 2).
The final article on introversion and extroversion is by Hanley (2005) called “Shyness and the College Admission Process: Who is Being Left Out?” This article was written for the *Journal of College Admission*, the author is a counsellor at a Jesuit school in the United States who commented on how difficult the college admission process was for those who were shy and self-conscious. Hanley explains the dilemma by writing:

Those of us working in high schools know something special about each of our students, yet we realize that for some of them it won’t be gleaned from a forty-five minute college interview. It is in coming to know them over time that we learn that the meekest can, often enough, speak with the most powerful and influential voice, but the dilemma of how to convey this prevails. (p. 16)

As part of this shy and almost inhibited personality temperament, he says many of these students do not take part in extracurricular activities, which may not reflect positively on their overall score. The concern is that many of those who do the interviews may not truly understand the differences in peoples’ temperaments and see the introverted student as being flawed or needing to be more gregarious. The author himself can relate because he too is introverted. The article pointed out that even though extroverts are more visible and outward in how they choose to manifest their ideas and talents, the contributions of introverted persons throughout history is quite remarkable. Hanley wrote about the fear and nervousness students experience as they have to face the college admission process. Introverts who may not look or act as confident as their extroverted applicants should have a chance to express their unique views and perspectives.

**Highly Intuitive, Sensitive, Empathic, and Empath**

Catherine Crawford (2009), the author of *The Highly Intuitive Child: A Guide to*
Understanding and Parenting Unusually Sensitive and Empathic Children, wrote that sometimes children who are highly intuitive can experience stress and difficulties with their peers at school. In the following experience, Crawford shares an observation and experience:

One of the issues that can contribute to the stress experienced by intuitive children is feeling out of place socially. I often hear these children complain about feeling different from their peers. Seven year-old Tracy repeatedly came home from school complaining to her mom, “I feel so different, Mommy. Why can’t I find any friends who are more like me? Maybe you can find me a school that is more spiritual. Maybe I’ll find kids who are more like me there.” (pp. 52-53)

Elaine Aron (1996) has researched and written extensively on the highly sensitive person, which constitutes approximately “15 to 20 % of the population” (p. ix). In her book, The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You, she includes Jung’s perception about highly sensitive and those who are introverted:

That Jung wrote about HSPs is a little-known fact (I did not know this when I began my work on the trait.) For example he said that “a certain innate sensitiveness produces a special prehistory, a special way of experiencing infantile events” and that “events bound up with powerful impressions can never pass off without leaving some trace on sensitive people.” Later, Jung began to describe introverted and intuitive types in similar ways, but even more positively. He said they had to be more self-protective—what he meant by being introverted. But he also said that they were “educators and promoters of culture…their life teaches the other possibility, the interior life which is so painfully wanting in our civilization.” Such people, Jung said,
are naturally more influenced by their unconscious, which gives them information of
the “utmost importance, a prophetic foresight,” a “prophetic foresight.” (pp 36-37)

From my own thesis research, it seems many temperament theories focused on the
behavioural aspect of an individual’s interaction with their environment and never really
looked or enquired beyond the exterior and/or immeasurable experiences. It seems that when
most educators and researchers look at temperaments in education, they rarely include the
soul as being part of the landscape. That which cannot be measured has an unquantifiable
value; it is immeasurably important. As someone born with high sensitivity, this affects my
personal life. As well, my brain processes information differently than most people. I believe
my voice and others who are less represented should be given representation. I feel very
strongly about these ideas that I have experienced in my own life as an educator and student.

As a highly sensitive introverted intuitive empath and educator, I see the need for a
more soulful education. Based on the already existing research literature on how intuitive
introverts experience mainstream education, I see there is a need to continue researching the
problem as well as including more of an in-depth perspective about the temperament of
sensitivity and spirituality. This is where I see a gap in mainstream education. I believe that
mainstream education follows a very left brain extroverted sensory paradigm and I believe
there needs to be an awakening, a paradigm shift in how we view education.

According to Heidi Sawyer (2015), author of *Highly Intuitive People*, most intuitive
sensitives have a “right brain preference that is thought to be the basis of heightened
sensitivity” (p. 31). She goes on to write that “Highly Intuitive People often have elevated
cortisol levels: they have more connectors to the nervous system and thus a higher propensity
to create cortisol levels” (p. 32). And because of this increase in cortisol receptors, many
highly sensitive struggle or have struggled with adrenal fatigue and increased levels of anxiety and stress (Sawyer, 2015). I personally am affected by these conditions which can sometimes make it difficult to follow the everyday rhythms of normal society. The following, Sawyer writes, is the result of not listening to their intuition:

When they get to the point of feeling emotionally overwhelmed, though, they withdraw completely—into their own world, and away from others. This is the point at which every Sensitive individual needs recovery time. Their nervous system is now in overload, and they need to withdraw into the background in order to gather both their thoughts and their physical health. Without this withdrawal, the Intuitive-Sensitive will find that their health starts to become compromised. (p. 34)

Dr. Judith Orloff (2009) has written extensively on being an empath and highly sensitive. She writes:

Empaths are highly sensitive, finely tuned instruments when it comes to emotions. They feel everything, sometimes to an extreme, and are less apt to intellectualize feelings. Intuition is the filter through which they experience the world. Empaths are naturally giving, spiritually attuned, and good listeners. (p. 106)

In Karla McLaren’s (2010) book, The Language of Emotions: What Your Feelings Are Trying to Tell You, she writes about being an empath and having empathy and deep emotions, and how society does not really encourage this disposition:

Empathy makes us sensitive and intuitive, but it is also a double-edged sword. Empaths can get right to the center of any issue (they often feel what other people refuse to acknowledge), but in a culture that can’t figure out what emotions are, let alone to deal with them, strong empathy is a difficult skill to possess.
certainly feel the emotions that are all around us, but awareness of the healing capacities inside those emotions are rare. (p. 4)

Being a seeker who is highly sensitive, intuitive, introverted, and an empath, in the education system with a divergent and holistic mindset, can be quite exhausting. Having a nervous system that is acutely wired to take in and react to stimuli on high gear affects me. And now there are MRI images that show how our brains react differently. In the scientific research article by Acevedo et al. (2014), entitled “The Highly Sensitive Brain: An MRI Study of Sensory Processing Sensitivity and Response to Others’ Emotions,” the information presented is supported by considerable data and research methods for those who would like more information from a scientific perspective. We are seeing more research and published works on these traits and attributes and, therefore, I believe that others who have the same disposition may be better understood and accepted in education circles and society at large.
Chapter Three: Methodology

As a highly sensitive empath and reflective educator and person, I looked at myself using an alchemical hermeneutic and heuristic research methodology. I also incorporated ideas from *Reflective Practice* by Gillie Bolton (2010) as they were ones that resonated with me as an educator and philosopher. It was difficult to choose methodologies that fit the scope of this thesis because of the dialectical and personal depth of material discussed and presented. What was essential was to find methodologies that allowed for my own personal reflective unravelling, observations of phenomena, and luminous ponderings that came from my intuitive, empathic, divergent and introverted, creative and sensitive predisposition. It was imperative that this research include the essence and quality of the soul and ultimately a transformation and a transcendent healing of the self and education.

Alchemical hermeneutics and heuristics are relatively new methodologies that both come from a depth psychology orientation and a phenomenological perspective. The research methodology, alchemical hermeneutic, was developed by Pacifica University Professors Robert Romanyshyn and Veronica Goodchild (2013). I gathered knowledge on this research methodology from Robert Romanyshyn’s (2013) book, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind*, and also articles and reviews that helped to explain this complex methodology. The difficulty in finding a methodology that fit my sensibility and temperament led me to alchemical hermeneutics. Even though it is geared more for a psychoanalytical treatise, I am applying it to educational research and my thesis.

In reference to the Heuristic methodology, I used Clark Moustakas’s (1990) book, *Heuristic Research Design, Methodology, and Applications* and also other research articles and essays. Focusing on the depth of my recollections and self-reflections as a highly
sensitive, intuitive, and empathic being, like the phoenix metaphor and the philosopher’s stone, I see this thesis as the product of a changed alchemy of myself.

One of the purposes of alchemical hermeneutics research methodology is to speak about the importance of the soul in the work, to keep the soul in mind. In his life, Robert Romanysyn (1999, 2013) experienced mourning and loss and looked at these human emotions through a soulful lens. Romanysyn’s (2013) work seems very melancholic, with a sense of yearning. He writes about the limitations of language and the important use of metaphor and poetry when referring to researching with the soul in mind. In the *Pacifica University Methodologies and Procedures Manual* (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2013), alchemical hermeneutics is defined as:

> A new research framework proposed by Robert Romanysyn (2007), posits that one is chosen by the research rather than the reverse, as in traditional hermeneutics. As an imaginal and depth-oriented methodology, the task of alchemical hermeneutics is to make philosophical hermeneutics more psychologically aware. ... In the alchemical hermeneutic approach, transference “dialogues” take place, in which the soul of the work is invited into dialogue with the ego’s intentions. Reflection, reverie, synchronicity, dreams, visions, revelations, and all manifestations of the mundus imaginalis are sources of data. The researcher is transformed as the research progresses, and therefore the work is considered alchemical in nature. (pp. 4-5)

The idea behind much of this methodology is that “one is chosen by the research.” This is very important and is another reason why I chose this methodology, since it allows for more of a creative, reflective, soulful, and mystical dimension. I have always been intrigued by the concept of alchemy as it involves an esoteric and spiritual dimension.
In Romanyszyn’s (2013) research book on Alchemical Hermeneutics, he reiterates the same idea, when he writes that:

a researcher is claimed by a work through his or her complexes, and indeed if there is one theme that runs throughout this work, it is that in re-search with soul in mind the topic chooses the researcher as much as, and perhaps even more than, he or she chooses it. (p. 4)

Being a highly sensitive empathic introverted intuitive is who I am, it is innate and how I am wired. My thesis topic chose me. Through these chosen methodologies, I can come to a better understanding of my educational experiences and myself.

Some important elements and terms of alchemical hermeneutics come from depth psychology: the imaginal approach, transference dialogues, active imagination, and psychoid archetypes. Transference dialogues emerge from the imaginal approach and are based on Jung’s (1997) active imagination (as cited in Lachman, 2012). In Gary Lachman’s book, *Jung the Mystic: The Esoteric Dimensions of Carl Jung’s Life and Teachings*, he defines active imagination as:

A method of consciously entering into a dialogue with the unconscious, which triggers the transcendent function, a vital *shift* in consciousness, brought about through the union of the conscious and unconscious minds. Unexpected insights and self-renewal are some of the results of the transcendent function. (p. 117)

A basic definition of psychoid archetype is an archetype existing in-between the realm of the psyche. Psyche involves the unconscious and conscious realm of the mind. Psychoid is a connection between psyche and matter. Romanyszyn (2013) writes that Jung saw “the psychoid archetype is a non-psychic reality” (p. 42) and that “the psychoid archetype is neither
matter nor spirit” (p. 35) which takes us into the area of the mystical and soulful.

I find the psychoid realm fascinating with its depth of layers and understanding. It beckons me to dive deeper into my unconscious, my psyche and soul, reaching for what is not easily attainable, like a primordial cosmic soup looking at the origins of the universe and life. Romanayshyn (2013) writes:

The soul of the world then is the light of nature, a dark-light, luminosity in the darkness of matter. In this regard, Jung’s turn toward the archetype as a psychoid reality to which his studies of alchemy had to lead extends the unconscious into nature ... and that the unconscious is not just in us but that we are in the unconscious of nature, and that at the deepest levels of our psyches, we retain some dim remembrance of once, very long ago, having been a part of the world’s dark-light.

(pp. 38-39)

This speaks to me of the unconscious in nature, sitting watching sparks of light crackling around a fire, under a star lit sky; echoing a sense of wonder and unity with all of life. These events are etched in my psyche and collective unconscious. These transcendental reflective awnings are ones that resonate with me deeply.

Romanayshyn (2013) further expands on the idea of the symbiosis of dark-light:

Before I continue with Jung’s reflections, however, I want to offer a reverie of this dark-light. Is it the memory of this darkness from which we have so laboriously extricated ourselves that frightens us still—perhaps by its sweet seduction—into turning on the lights? In the face of this archetypal darkness, do we rush our in-sights in order to banish the memory? Or perhaps, is the memory of this darkness a bittersweet one, which leaves in its trace a sense of longing, a desire to return to what
was once known, or better yet, inhabited and has been left behind? (p. 39)

This memory that Romanyshyn (2013) writes about, in my opinion, is so primeval and hard wired in our psyches that as humans we came from a place so far removed from our present reality. Like when we spend time in the woods in connection with nature, which we are a part of, or near the ocean, there is a part of us that knows we are not separate. The sad reality is that many never think about “what was once known or better yet, inhabited and has been left behind” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 39).

Also within this research methodology, Romanyshyn (2013) chooses the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to represent the soulful archetype of this methodology:

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be regarded as an archetypal pattern that informs research with soul in mind. Research that makes a place for the unconscious in the process reverts or is led back to this myth. The researcher who keeps soul in mind works under the spell of Orpheus and Eurydice. (p. 48)

I too am a researcher under the spell. As someone with a deep yearning and soulful connection with music and song, the following excerpt stirs an emotional chord. Orpheus, “sang songs that were said to awaken the soul to its forgotten inner melody and to connect the awakened soul to the song of creation” (p. 51). I keep looking for music and sounds that will soothe and heal me. I find some compositions and sounds that work for a while but then even they are not what I am looking for. The music I am looking for (heuristically) is my own, the one I am waiting to compose and create. I am waiting for myself, a common theme of mine. I can relate very deeply to Romanyshyn’s (2013) following quotation:

There are those moments in research, moments that can feel like depression, and if one attends to them, if one keeps soul in mind, then one in such moments, when the
soul of the work has been lost, one is being drawn into the underworld, the unconscious of the work. (p. 54)

In writing about my sensitivities, I can sometimes forget the importance of not wallowing in self-pity and allowing the subject to speak without the ego’s need to be seen and justified. There needs to be balance and an honest accountability of the work, especially when my sensitivities are heightened, and my skin and boundaries are thin and broken open. I find that when I am disconnected and alienated, I become entrenched in a deep sorrow, rekindling past embers of sadness, loss, and mourning like those written about by Romanyshyn (2013) and Moustakas (1990). It can be likened to a sort of dismemberment experienced by Orpheus as Romanyshyn (2013) writes:

In such a moment, the complex character of the work opens onto the unfinished business of the soul of the work. The work that comes through the Researcher’s complex is no longer about him or her. The wound becomes a work that is part of a larger story when the researcher has been forced to let go of what he or she needs the work to be, when the researcher is compelled to let go of his or her naïve narcissistic attachment to the work. (p. 55)

The researcher needs to let go of the work and stop projecting. This is easier said than done, though this is where the transference dialogues come in and the researcher goes into the unconscious and has conversations with an imaginal figure important for the soul of the work to come out.

When Romanyshyn (2013) looks at Orpheus and Eurydice, he describes the turning away of Orpheus as “the backward glance” (p. 56). This backward glance that changes the fate of these two forlorn lovers is an important metaphor and analogy for my own life, which
has been a backward glance of self-doubt, second-guessing, and never feeling like I am enough. As a highly sensitive, highly empathic introvert, my role as the eternal student and divergent and dysfunctional educator feels like a backward glance. Moving forward with confidence is not easy for me, forever questioning, second-guessing, and dancing the eternal debate. Romanyshyn’s (2013) depth of emotion and complex methodology exemplifies why I chose this methodology allowing for my own poetic, reflective, creative, and individual expression to make sense of my sensitivity and feelings of being disconnected. Heuristic research, like alchemical hermeneutics, is a slow and deep process. Moustakas (1990) writes that:

> Heuristic inquiry is process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The answer is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social and perhaps universal significance. (p. 15)

As part of this process I am to become one with the question and inquiry and remain with the question until some light is shed—until there is illumination. Why has it been difficult for me to work in a mainstream environment of secondary schools and large venues? What is missing in me, wherein I have always felt invisible, searching and seeking for my missing piece, a seeker, a misfit, out of step, and out of tune with others? Is something missing in how educators view students' personalities and temperaments?

One of the steps in the heuristic process is self-dialogue where “one faces oneself and must be honest with oneself and one’s experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 17). This can be
compared with the transference dialogues in Alchemical Hermeneutics where the ultimate truth or uncovering essence is ultimately revealed and I show you who I am, and you are welcome to do the same. Moustakas writes:

An example of self-dialogue is presented in Varani’s (1985) heuristic investigation of the psychological dimensions of mystery. In the initial phase of his study, Varani maintained a journal in which he recorded dialogues with himself as a way of entering into the phenomenon of mystery. He immersed himself in the topic and clarified for himself its nature, meaning, and essence. (p. 18)

Varani’s (1985) self-dialogues were on the subject of death and dying. I will also explore these themes from my own particular identified temperament and resulting experiences. Moustakas also wrote about grief and loss, which is shared by Romanyshyn (2013) in his development of the research methodology of alchemical hermeneutics. Both research methodologies examine the existential and psychology of the human condition, looking at it from a phenomenological and deeply personal lens. I will also explore these themes from my own particular identified temperament and resulting experiences.

Another step in the heuristic research methodology is tacit knowing which means, “We can know more than we can tell” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20). Sometimes we know something though we do not know how we know it. As well, the methodology looks at intuition by saying that “intuition makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reasoning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 23). I am highly intuitive and many times I arrive at a conclusion or understanding of something without following steps of logic.

The heuristic method is about the discovery of searching, seeing, finding, and self-realizing, which ties in with phenomenology of how things are seen and perceived.
Romanyshyn (2013) writes, “The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is about this process of losing and finding, about this work of transformation in which the other becomes a psychological reality, a matter of soul” (p. 59). Here we see how alchemical hermeneutics is similar to heuristic research as they are both looking at the depth of human emotions, the process of how losing, which can be translated as a type of loss, and finding and discovering the alchemical interpretation of one’s soul and transformative essence. Both the alchemical hermeneutic and heuristic research have dialogue as part of the research process. Alchemical hermeneutic uses transference dialogues, which involve the imaginal and unconscious, using the medium of dreams, ancestral connections, and other methods discussed earlier. Heuristic has self-dialogues, which involve “facing oneself and one’s experience relevant to the question or problem” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 17). And part of the alchemical hermeneutic method is about interpreting and transforming what one sees on a soul level. Clark Moustakas writes, through heuristic inquiry, that he is “actively awakening and transforming himself” (p. 13). He also writes:

Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inward freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics. ... Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic research. (p. 13)

Dr. David Hiles (2001), from the Psychology Department of De Montfort University, presented a paper on Heuristic Inquiry and Transpersonal Research, wherein he provides further information on Moustakas (1990) heuristic research:

The heuristic inquiry paradigm is an adaptation of phenomenological inquiry but explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher, to the extent that the lived
experience of the researcher becomes the main focus of the research. The researcher really needs to feel passionate about the research question (West, 1998a; 1998b). Indeed, what is explicitly the focus of the approach is the transformative effect of the inquiry on the researcher's own experience. (p. 3)

The researcher’s experiences and the “the transformative effect of the inquiry on the researcher’s own experience” (Hiles, 2001, p. 3) is the main focus of this research methodology. Here is another similarity with alchemical hermeneutics wherein both methodologies involve deep introspection, self-reflection, and ultimately a transformation or alchemy of self.

Moustakas’s (1990) heuristic research methodology involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. This research methodology allows the researcher to fully apprehend and explore what Socrates infamously espoused regarding the importance of examining life and knowing oneself. Like a reflective practitioner, Gillie Bolton (2010) writes, the “Reflective Practitioners write for self-illumination and exploration” (p. 4).

Exploration involves questioning and shedding new light on what seemed already understood and formulated and, in some cases, forgotten. Remembering what has been forgotten, the untold is what education, in my opinion, needs to be about. Bolton (2010) writes, “‘We need to attend to the untold’ (Sharkey 2014)” the unexamined, “education is finding pathways to what we do not know we know” (p. 8). This idea ties in with the phenomenology of the unseen and the in-between, concepts I appreciate as a highly sensitive introverted empathic seeker. As well, Bolton’s "through-the-mirror writing” (p. 8) is a method quite fitting for educators and uncovering the unseen.

Bolton (2010) writes that “the metaphor of reflected practice is limited ... yet through
the mirror is creative: right through the glass to the other side of the silvering” (p. 10). The back and forth questioning in alchemical hermeneutic and heuristic research resonates with me as an educator and researcher. The idea of looking—looking at, looking beyond, looking through—is what I am proposing as a highly sensitive educator and reflective practitioner; to look beyond the mere lens.

Romanyshyn (2013) writes “The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is about this process of losing and finding, about this work of transformation in which the other becomes a psychological reality, a matter of soul” (p. 59). Both alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research are looking at the depth of human emotions, the process of how losing, which can be translated as a type of loss, and finding and discovering, the alchemical interpretation of one’s soul and transformative essence. Both alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research have dialogue as part of the research process. Alchemical hermeneutics uses transference dialogues, which involve the imaginal and unconscious using the medium of dreams, ancestral connections, and other mediums. Heuristic research uses self-dialogue which involves “facing oneself and one’s experience relevant to the question or problem” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 17).

What I find intriguing throughout this journey of thesis writing is how the soulful essence of loss and finding in the methodologies mirror my own personal life journey. This process involves a transformation of letting go and seeing what is revealed. Romanyshyn (2013) writes “In the same way, the researcher who works with soul in mind is the work. He or she lives it as it is being done, suffers it and in the end is transformed by it” (p. 71). Part of this transformative process is the alchemy of the soul and like Marie-Louise von Franz states “the blindfolded man represents the stumbling search for the truth” (as cited in...
According to Romanyshyn (2013), re-search is a moving backward, almost like falling upon itself to reveal “what has been lost, forgotten, or left behind” (p. 76). He also writes:

In the poetics of the research process, mourning is a natural activity of soul, an activity in which the ego is not the center of the work. An imaginal approach to research is a poetics of the research process in which the researcher has to “die” to the work so that the unfinished business in the soul of the work can speak. (p. 82)

Mourning is an important part of this research methodology. (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 82)

As a highly sensitive empathic intuitive, I have always felt an affinity with the melancholic temperament. Not everyone who is highly sensitive, empathic, and intuitive shares in this melancholic disposition though for me there is something about reaching deep beneath the surface and touching what is hidden and misunderstood and bringing it forth towards the light. This is how I view education, taking what is hiding, hidden, unknown, misunderstood, out of everyday sight and view, and illuminating it, bringing it to the light. Both alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research align with these ideas and perceptions.

Romanyshyn (2013) states:

The difference between research and re-search involves the soul’s method or way of learning and knowing. Research as re-search is an education, or drawing out, of the ego-mind by soul where re-search is a searching again for what has been lost, forgotten, neglected, or otherwise disregarded, a searching again that is a dismembering of the ego’s hold upon the work in order re-member the unfinished business in the soul of the work. (p. 60)
The complexity and depth of these research methodologies echo and highlight a complex of mine that I always seem to make things more difficult than they need to be. The modern predominant perception of the world is that things follow a linear, pragmatic, and seen reality. Instead, I have always perceived the world from an intuitive nonlinear understanding that the paradigm of the psyche and soul are real. Throughout my early and secondary school years, I felt a kinship with the transcendentalists, like Emerson (2003) and Thoreau (1962). When I was first introduced to Jung (1971), I was entranced and the heuristic tacit knowing of my intuition responded with a sigh of illumination and recognition of finding part of what had been missing all of my life. My secondary school English teacher in grade 11 taught us about archetypes and symbolic knowing, a way of interpreting the depth and meaning behind literature. I felt so grateful to have had educators who were truly innovative and inspiring.

“Re-search” is connected with the idea of the seeker who is always looking and seeing and sometimes as a reflective intuitive highly sensitive person one finds she is standing in-between. I have always been fascinated by the in-between, a reflective slide-in-between and through-the-mirror, allowing for the uncovering of ultimate meanings. There are some adolescents who also experience this nebulousness, indecisiveness, and difficulty fitting in. I have met them. For me it took the form and expression of alienation and existential angst, dread, “fear and trembling.” Later when I studied philosophy in university, particularly the Existentialists, reading Nietzsche (1974), Kierkegaard (1983), and Heidegger (1976), I felt like I was coming home. I finally was able to feel like I belonged, though this too would be short-lived when the reality of feeling overwhelmed affected my physical and emotional reality. I was already delving in the spiritual and psychic manifestations of seeing
nonphysical entities in my roommate’s room and friend’s apartment. This connects with my interest in the idea of seeing the unseen. The heuristic research methodology looks to uncover and discover what is hidden, the ultimate eureka.

The work of my thesis and the challenges of being highly sensitive, empathic, and intuitive in one’s physical and emotional reality have affected my experience in education and living in the world. In a piece called *Living with the Dead Re-collections of an Unfinished Life*, Romanyszyn (2012) writes the following:

> Under the spell of Orpheus, this work on research became a testament to re-search as a key part of the soul’s curriculum. The book on research recovered how in the soul’s manner of education we are all re-searchers. Searching again for what has already made its claims upon you, psychological education becomes a work against forgetting, of remembering what has been lost, forgotten, abandoned, repressed, and of being re-membered within those larger, archetypal patterns of which one is not the maker. (p. 1)

Having a propensity for things that lay below the surface, in the depth of the matter, the unseen, is an area which has slowed me down in life, staying stuck in a perpetual backward glance. Orpheus could have moved forward in his life, with the love of his life Eurydice, if only he had trusted life. I sometimes find I am spinning my wheels of life on the hidden road less travelled, instead of on the well-travelled path. Though as a positive quality, this allows for my self-searching and self-awareness, what Moustakas (1990) calls “indwelling.” In the heuristic inquiry, Moustakas writes about “the investigator’s internal frame of reference, self-searching, intuition, and indwelling” which “lies at the heart of heuristic inquiry” (p. 12). He offers an example of a researcher named Roads who enters into
dialogue with nature, “with trees, plants, animals, birds, and the earth” (p. 12). The following excerpt is taken from a work called *Talking with Nature* by Roads (1987):

“How can we write of unseen realities, hint of unheard concepts, or even demonstrate the practicality of inner truths, without disturbing the Slumbering Self within?” (Roads, 1987, p. 22). Let go and fall into the river. Let the river of life sweep you beyond all aid from old and worn concepts. I will support you. Trust me. As you swim from an old consciousness, blind to higher realities beyond your physical world, trust that I will guide you with care and love into a new stream of consciousness. I will open a new world to you. Can you trust me enough to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current? (As cited in Romanyshyn, 1990, pp. 12-13).

This level of trust and consciousness that the heuristic researcher is told is his if he just lets go, is one that I struggle with as well.

The predominant modern perception that the world is linear, pragmatic, and empirical, whereas the paradigm of the psyche and soul which I am comfortable with, “takes seriously the notion of the unconscious” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 49) where the transference dialogues take place in order to uncover what is hidden from the self, the alchemy of the soul. In the essay, *The Metaphor of Alchemy and the Alchemy of Metaphor: Working in the Space Between Presence and Absence*, by Romanyshyn (2009), which he wrote for the British Association of Psychotherapists, there is a section called “Language and the Unconscious” (p. 3). In it, Romanyshyn writes about the importance of nature in therapy, and how the consciousness of nature is seen in the unconscious of the psychoid archetype:

Those “fiery sparks” are what were once called the “*lumen naturae*,” the light of nature. With the psychoid archetype, then, the unconscious at the foundation of depth
psychology turns out to be the consciousness of nature. In the psychoidal depths where psyche and nature are one, in the unus mundus the complex human psyche is led back to nature and as such is led back to its nature. ... The psychoid archetype lays a foundation for an ecological therapeutics within which the suffering of the individual can no longer be divorced from the sufferings of nature. As I argued in a recent article, the melting polar ice caps, for example, enter the therapy room with the patient. (p. 3)

This is an eco-holistic view of psychotherapy. I believe if Jung were alive today he too would have extended his therapy to healing the planet. Romanyshyn (2013) sees psychology lacking in its linear and literal minded language, where “the shadow of the unsaid haunts our saying” (pp. 5- 6). According to Romanyshyn (2013), the language of the poets is more accurate in getting to the real meaning, the heart of the matter.

I also see much of mainstream education lacking soul; void of a creative spark. Looking at the ideas of being highly sensitive, empathic, intuitive, and introverted through the lens of the reflexive mirror, into the looking glass, is seeing—into and beyond. This is how I view education, and the need for language in the education circles to provide a space for the poetic and soulful.

Romanyshyn (2009) writes a synopsis of the ideas I am looking at and am called to in my life and in my thesis. The following is a very reflexive idea and one that provides an explanation for both methodologies chosen for my own perception as educator and person:

Indeed that is what a metaphor is and what it does. It is a perspective that mirrors the one who makes the metaphor. Every metaphor implicates the knower in the known. Every metaphor is a confession of sorts and as such every metaphor tells us as much
about the metaphorician as it does about what is “metaphored.” (Romanyshyn, 2009, p. 13)

And, finally, from the same essay:

In the depths one has to learn to see with different eyes, with eyes that are accustomed to the dark light of the underworld, with eyes that are able to see the absence that always haunts presence, the invisible in the visible as the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty would say it, the rose that in its blooming is already beginning to fade. It is a matter of e-ducation, of being led out of ourselves and into those subtle realms of the psyche, a matter of the heart, which is the organ of the imagination, an education, then, in the humanities and the liberal arts, in history and mythology, in philosophy and literature, in art and music, as well as the sciences. (Romanyshyn, 2009, p. 16)

With the above quotation, I am reminded of holistic education and timeless learning where the imagination and the transpersonal traverse. Using these methodologies, I will be able to bring the unconscious, soulful, mystical, archetypal, poetic, imaginative, and transcendental element into my research and life, through dreaming, journals, reverie, and depth dialogues.

Romanyshyn (2013) wrote, “The Wounded Researcher had many false starts, which I experienced as dismemberment of the work” (p. 59). This is how I have found my thesis journey, “many false starts” and revisions and alterations. My creative soul sometimes jarred with the demands on my physical, emotional, and psychic reality. My journal entries will elaborate more on the details of my experiences. This process has taken me longer than most. Reading Robert Romanyshyn’s (2013) book was a very slow process due to the complexity of the methodology and Romanyshyn’s metaphoric and symbolic and poetic language.
Though to be fair and true to each section, I found I was voraciously taking notes and journaling, needing to pause, recollecting experiences through reverie and meditation and going to the well of creative expression through writing and rewriting.

Throughout this thesis, there will be tapping into the unconscious of the transference dialogues and active imagination. Through transference dialogues and dreams, I can bring the unconscious to the surface, like Orpheus ascending into the light of the conscious.

Researching this thesis, I immersed myself into the ideas; sometimes losing the outer edges and exact distinctions, forging into alchemical deciphering and a melding composite of what makes me unique as an educator, student, and person, through an alchemical hermeneutic interpretation and heuristic arrival of myself.
Chapter Four: Methods and Creative Expression

I am a highly sensitive intuitive introverted empath. As such, I am an expert on how being this way has affected my personal life. I am easily stressed, and being thin-skinned has also added to the difficulties I have had and continue to have. There are also gifts that come with being highly sensitive, such as noticing many subtleties that others might miss and being called to creativity. Feeling and sensing things deeply allows for a unique appreciation of life’s enchantment and magic. I resonate with the idea of being an alchemist, not in the traditional sense, though when I think about melding divergent composites within myself, I slowly unearth hidden layers of unseen and untold phenomena. Romanyshsyn’s (2013) writes, “To write down the soul of one’s work is to be an alchemist of meaning. The researcher as alchemist is one who attends to what is not said in what one has said” (p. 320).

Many times I feel like a failure and phoney for even attempting to accomplish some of my wishes and dreams. Heidi Sawyer (2015) writes about imposter syndrome:

Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon that impacts successful women in particular. And there’s a raging outbreak of it among Intuitive-Sensitives! Imposter Syndrome is where people cannot internalize their accomplishments and believe that some day they are going to be exposed as a fraud; proof of their success is dismissed and trivialized. (p. 85)

Actually, many of my dreams or wishes have remained unchallenged or un-attempted because I fear that I am not good enough to fulfil or complete them.

This lack of confidence has been with me my whole life. I believe I inherited part of this from my upbringing where even my parents, who were extremely talented as opera singers, stopped their pursuit of fulfilling these lifelong dreams because of life’s difficulties,
fears, and lack of self-confidence. These emotions and feelings of inferiority are felt somatically and even now as I write these words the deep sadness and emptiness in the pit of my stomach is stuck in my throat making it hard to breathe. I suffered from these feelings of emptiness and depression especially as an adolescent and contemplated suicide many times. Sometimes the depression would be so black I would feel like I could not get out of the abyss. I felt a kinship reading the existentialists who wrote about alienation and utter despair. They also offered beauty, hope, meaning, connection and understanding. In Paul Tillich’s (1948) work *The Shaking of the Foundations*, he wrote “The pain of looking into one’s own depth is too intense for most people. They would rather return to the shaken and devastated surface of their former lives and thoughts” (p. 59).

As well, Gillie Bolton (2010) writes about “the educative value of stories” (p. 204) and sees the cathartic power in writing. The art and process of writing makes us aware of the hidden; it brings awareness to the surface (Bolton, 2010, p. 207). As teachers, Bolton sees the value in writing stories for professional growth (p. 211) allowing for more creativity and unique perspectives and perceptions. Using alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research has helped me unravel the unspoken and unseen layers waiting to be discovered and un-earthed.

Many times life can be messy; not everything fits inside a neat and tidy compartment. In my experience, many educators and administrators like the land of neat and tidy compartments. The unseeable that lives in the in-between sheds a light into the dark corners of the empty vessel. Filling the alchemical chalice, I challenge my doubt of being enough, to not postpone living. Between lies the sliver of light, the slice of a light beam; the in-between is where the creative lives for me.
Transference Field: Creative Expression Short Story

I wrote the story (see below), *Seeing the Unseen* (2011), when I was living in Yellowknife, and I kept hearing and seeing a phrase, *seeing the unseen*. Something about the juxtaposition of the words encapsulated my personal struggle with feeling invisible and unacknowledged my entire life. It enkindled in me a hearkening and almost recognition of sorts, a synchronicity or beckoning to resolving my complex of invisibility. I had a similar reaction when I read Heidegger’s (1976) work, *What Is Called Thinking*, and he quoted a line from one of Hoelderlin’s poem, “We are a sign that is not read” (p. 10). This resonated with my own feelings of not being heard or seen. Something inside me wanted to go beyond the words, a hermeneutic uncovering and heuristic discovery of the words seeing and unseen. It struck an alchemical chord urging a story to be written and helping to heal feelings of loss and not belonging. In essence, I wrote this story as a creative expression utilizing an imaginal place from my unconscious. When I am working through issues and feelings of overwhelm I tap into my creative space to release and restore healing and as a resolution.

* * *

*Seeing the Unseen through Alchemical Hermeneutic and Heuristic Eyes*

*Solace Re-Storied in Imaginal Space*

Softly the snow fell onto the white oak trees. The various shades of the colour white illuminated the crumpled dancer’s dress. She sat with her deep lined hands holding what once felt like flight. Where did time go? Catching a glimpse of a falling star, Solace’s heart skipped a beat. The grandfather clock rang 3 chimes and slowly she attempted to pick herself up. Simon curled up on the purple velvet plush pillow, which sat beside the tall dusty bookshelf. Solace reached for a cigarette and looked at her wedding ring—she saw the
reflection of his eyes, recalling their first dance as husband and wife. The forest held their secret, deep in the woods, with the dancing borealis overhead. The full moon was their invitation. Solace closed her eyes, slowly drifting, falling deeply, into an unconsciously transporting sleep.

She landed inside a pool of white sticky substance. She gasped at the size of the black spider that started to spin her into his web. First her arms and then her legs were encased in this sticky tight fitting enclosure. She tried to open her eyes but they too were tightly shut. Her mouth and nose were covered with a thin silk like texture, though she could still breathe. Her heart was racing. Then suddenly she felt like she was propelled inside a great big white light, where everything around her was luminous, unable to see the source, she called out.

The grandfather clock chimed 3 times. Her eyes opened, somewhat happy to be able to see her familiar surroundings. She lay still, confused by what had just happened. Simon was licking her face and she realized he was probably hungry. She picked up the cane that lay beside her and slowly made her way towards the walnut kitchen cabinet. The circular woven red and green carpet felt warm beneath her damp cold woolly socks. After feeding Simon, she noticed that the carpet felt warmer than usual. As well there was a glow that emanated from beneath the cracks in the flooring. She had never noticed this before and wondered if maybe she was imagining it all. Maybe her eyes were playing tricks on her. Maybe she was still asleep. She hadn’t seen anyone for months so possibly the isolation was creating a sort of imaginal realm, an in-between psychoidal reality. If the warm feeling and glow was an illusion it certainly wasn’t an unpleasant one. Simon also noticed something different about that particular area underneath the carpet and floorboards. He first treaded softly over the carpet and then started scratching on the surface and meowed. Solace picked
up the cat and held him close to her. She moved the carpet away and couldn’t believe what she saw.

There were 3 beams of light that emanated from beneath the floor. Simon jumped out of her arms and was trying to play with the light. Right next to each beam was a shadow that moved as the light moved. Where was the light coming from? Solace was deeply entranced by these beams of light; she couldn’t take her eyes off them. They almost seemed to be communicating with her. Then as she peered deeper and tried to get closer, her back gave way and she fell on top of one of the shadows.

The room started getting very cold and this ominous feeling spread until all of the light was gone and the room was in complete darkness. She grabbed the comforter, which was on the floor and wrapped it around her. She felt her way to the candles and kerosene lamp and lit them both. Both flames were very bright. She started shaking, feeling as though she was losing her mind and wasn’t sure what was real anymore. She always had a very active imagination but now it seemed to overtake reality. Tears started rolling down her reddish cheeks. As she turned to see where Simon was, the light from the lamp shone on the front cover of her Parabola magazine and the titles “Seeing the Unseen, On Seeing the Truth, and Visions and Illusions” were highlighted. She remembered she had written the words seeing the unseen in her journal a few nights ago. When she was younger she had many experiences that some would call psychic phenomena. She was able to sense if someone had died in a room and how they died. She had a gift of seeing what others couldn’t or wouldn’t want to see. Some would say this was a gift. For many years though, she felt overwhelmed by the experiences, and saw many things that were not from the earthly realm. The last psychic experience she had was when she lived in Montreal. It was so disturbing and
exhausting she prayed that this ability be taken away. Maybe it was time to share many of these untold stories. Maybe the unconscious wanted to rise to the conscious level and be seen. She remembered her therapist saying she needed to “learn to see differently and that a transformation needed to take place” if she wanted things to change. She had lost her map and destination awhile ago. Time and space seemed to have warped outside its trajectory course and she was sent spinning out into her own galaxy, into an unknown territory where very few knew how to find their way back home. Tomorrow she would break her solitude and in the morning drive into town.

She was finally able to fall asleep, as Simon laid his head on the pillow beside her. She dreamed of a faraway ocean where a dolphin named Lily would come and visit her. Lily had the most beautiful blue sparkling eyes and serene smile. Together they would swim with agility and grace in the deep turquoise waters. Her husband would join them and once they reached the shore Lily would shape shift into a soft white and caramel longhaired medium size dog with black floppy ears. Her beautiful magical blue eyes would shine with love and joy as they all watched the orange sun slide into the calm deep blue waters.

Solace woke up to the sudden bang outside her cabin door. It was still dark and she could see the large moon trying to slip through the bamboo curtains. Simon arched his back and jumped off the bed, slowly making his way to the door ready and anticipating the next sound. Solace sat motionless with the comforter covering her head, hoping it was just the wind that pushed the branch against the door. She tried to fall asleep again, wanting to get back to the beach, to hide away. The observer within encouraged her to stay awake in the now; the deep knowing; the awakened consciousness behind the unfolding story.

She wasn’t sure if the former manifestations of light and shadows were hallucinations
or maybe they were glimpses of other dimensions, and she was given the ability to see again.

Just at that moment the journal fell open to the page with the words *seeing the unseen*. The insight came to her that her ego was getting in the way.

In the way of what, she wondered. She started visualizing words and thought she should let them come without judgment or analysis. All she knew is she needed to get out of this cabin and drive into town. She needed to get a fresh perspective. Once again the words *seeing the unseen* showed themselves like a stream of consciousness...beams of light and shadows, transformations, seeing, unknown territory, shape shift, unfolding stories, light and shadows, glimpses of insight... Glimpses of insight... glimpses of shades of truth and light.

She needed to look at the idea and meaning behind the word *glimpses*. The word seemed almost like a clue to something important. She went to the bookshelf and dusted off one of the many dictionaries and looked up the word. She read that it comes from the word “glimmer” which means “to shine faintly or unsteadily.” She certainly felt unsteady, and for a while she felt that the inner spark in her was dwindling. She could hear someone say that she needed to have a *glimmer of hope*.

Solace felt an inner shift take place. Something was starting to take shape. The forms are starting to show themselves. The light or glimmer is illuminating the unseen, as revelations are understood. She felt a deep calm start to come over her. Waves of light were shaping themselves into words that she used to recite by heart but had forgotten: “*Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside awakens.*” She read this from Carl Jung’s letters. Yes, she thought, this is an awakening that is taking place in the present moment, the now. And this revelation is like a spark of light that illuminates the way for her to see. She thought of Thomas
Merton’s words from his book *Love and Living*: “The ‘spark’ which is my true self is the flash of the Absolute recognising itself in me.”

She stepped back and remembered her thoughts at the beginning of the day. How she watched the snow softly falling onto the white oak trees, while her deep lined hands held the crumpled dress of her former self; the dancer that would take flight. She now understood the meaning behind her seeing and visions. Deep in the forest woods the moon beckoned her to come and visit. Catching a glimpse of a falling star, Solace’s heart skipped a beat. She was being asked to reconnect with the universe, its beauty, and its expansion. The guilt would finally have no more dominion over her peace of mind. As she heard the wolves howling at the full moon she kissed Simon and put on the white dress. She kissed the picture of her Lily. She looked into her husband’s eyes that were imprinted on her heart, soul, and mind’s eye and told him how much she loved him. She felt like she was finally free from the nightmarish spider; telling it that it didn’t have the power to bind her in its web and devour her. She was able to face the shadows of her unresolved and projected fears. Her inner light no longer darkened by the shadows and cold. As the story unfolds, it finds its way back to its inception, to its source.

Solace struggled with endings. Yet she never stayed anywhere long enough to build a continuum or a community. She wondered if she should have stayed at the monastery, Our Lady of Guadalupe, in New Mexico or the religious communities, Madonna House in Pembroke Ontario or the Oasis Della Pace in Medjugorje, Herzegovina and Rome, Italy. It would have answered the deep call for a spiritual life. Though she felt she never really belonged anywhere. She was a loner and needed her time alone. Her husband understood that of her.
After a deep and restful sleep and a warm breakfast Solace put on her blue parka and warm boots and walked outside through the deep snow. She made her way to the tallest tree in the forest and sprinkled some tobacco and other herbs and offered a prayer to the deceased. She thanked the Creator for the revelations and for the dark night of the soul. Today would be the beginning of a new day.

* * *

I realized after working on this short story, my love of creative writing was reignited. When I was growing up, I spent many hours entering into a creative and imaginal space and found writing and music were my forms of creative expression. I was also still grieving the loss of my dog, Lily, and through the creative process of bringing her back to life, so to speak, it allowed me to reconnect with her as though she was still with me. Dealing with loss and death has been a recurrent theme in my life. I believe it is because of my sensitivity, and predisposition for the melancholic, as well as an inherent yearning for what lives outside of the ordinary everyday reality. This creative story is a medium and method to tap into the unconscious of the subject of this thesis. Through the process of writing this story, I was able to tap into my soul and essence. In the story, Solace is struggling with being an eternal seeker who, like me, is a highly sensitive intuitive empath who does not fit in the world. She represents my creative and spiritual self. The symbolism of the spider, the dark; and the faded dancer’s dress, are all coming from my own dreams and unresolved life. Unlike me, she has the ability and evolved consciousness to follow the signs that are calling her towards a new life. She is not hindered by her unconscious fears and embraces life’s losses. There is something about being able to write a story and resolve issues of the psyche. When Solace is able to reconnect with the universal beauty and face the shadows of her unresolved and
projected fears, as the author of the story, something in me shifts in the real world. And when Solace realizes that maybe it was time to share these untold psychic stories that had remained hidden for so long, this thesis is the venue. The story did go through alterations as I omitted sections and added new insights using alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research. I believe this story was waiting to be shared in this thesis. My thesis is seeking solace in restorying an imaginal space in the active imagination. According to Lachman (2010) active imagination is:

A method of consciously entering into a dialogue with the unconscious, which triggers the transcendent function, a vital shift in consciousness, brought about through the union of the conscious and unconscious minds. Unexpected insights and self-renewal are some of the results of the transcendent function. (p. 117)

**Introduction to My Creative Processing Using Alchemical Hermeneutics and Heuristic Applications**

Throughout this thesis, the use of reveries, personal journals, transference dialogues, reflective musings, poetry, heuristic dialogues, and images are ways for entering into the active imagination and bringing about a personal healing paradigm. A way of allowing an alchemy of hermeneutic interpretation and creating my philosopher’s stone and discovering who I am as a highly sensitive person and educator. In the following pages, I will share some journal entries, poems, reflective narratives, images, and prose that brought to light some of my feelings and experiences as a highly sensitive introverted empath. Weaving through the transference fields and heuristic musings, I aim at reflective practice and alchemical solutions. The journals follow a chronological order. As a wounded researcher, I created a space of mindful and spiritual reverie, waiting for illuminations from a heuristic place of hide
and seek, and inviting the psychic ethereal realms through dreams, forest walks, musical notes, alternative remedies, and waiting for the angels and trees, and my own unconscious, to commune through transference and self dialogues. And with my losses and feelings of ineptitudes there were souls both in this realm and beyond that helped make sense of my own lost soul and woundedness holding up a soulful lantern where the light aided my conjuring and alchemical remedies for absolution. Regarding my chosen methods, Romanyshyn (2013) writes that it “depends largely upon his or her individual type” (p. 158) as well, the drawings or scripts or methods chosen are a means “into the work’s undreamed possibilities” (p. 161). Like alchemical hermeneutics, Moustakas (1990) writes, “In heuristic investigations, I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest” (p. 11)

The purpose of transference fields where dialogue takes place “is to loosen one’s hold on the work” (Romanysthyn, 2013, p. 136). The wounded researcher enters the field not knowing what the thesis is about, asking the question: What is this work really about? allowing space for the potential of the work to take place, an “imaginable space” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 137). Carl Jung (2013) said a way to get in touch with the unconscious and imagination is via play (as cited in Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 137). Entering into the space of play is not easy for the adult ego and “resistance abounds because the ego does not play; it does not want to get lost in the play, and that is the challenge” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 139). And the purpose of play is to open a space for communication with the unconscious “for the work to speak” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 141), and in this case, I am the work. Writing about my personal experiences and perceptions as a highly sensitive, intuitive, thin-skinned empath, and seeker in education, I feel things differently than most people in the world. I feel
more at home in the in-between, the subtle, the place of potential, rather than the fixed empirical, solid reality.

Using alchemical hermeneutics and reverie as a way into the imaginal landscape, brings about a transference of seeing, and a heuristic way of finding the soul of the work. When Romanyshyn (2013) writes, “Here we are beyond a psychology of projection and are in the presence of those for whom the work is done, for those ancestors, for example, whose unfinished stories seek expression through us” (p. 146). This speaks to me about my parents’ unfinished stories, the unsung operas, arias, and concerts that were waiting to be performed. The purpose of the transference dialogues is to step back and allow the unrequited voices a place for the unexpressed and unknown to become known. “Both reveries and dialogues are ways of letting go of the work ... beyond the margins of what the researcher wants from the work” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 146).

The purpose of heuristic research is to investigate human experience (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). It begins with a question and then investigates self-awareness and how one experiences the self and awareness (Moustakas, 1990, p. 11).

Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13)

As a heuristic researcher, my personal experiences and story is important, “In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14).

I reread many of my journals written as I was growing up. As I was poring over the
many words I had written, a common theme kept resurfacing, that of not feeling like I was
good enough, lovable, and that I was marred. Elaine Aron (1996) writes, “I was convinced
that I had a fatal flaw that I had to hide and that doomed me to a second-rate life” and that
“Well meaning parents and teachers probably tried to help you ‘overcome’ it, as if it were a
defect” (p. xiii). These descriptions by Aron were ones I was all too familiar experiencing. In
many of the journal writing, there was a lament, a lack of self-love, and not belonging in this
world. What was essential for me was getting out of my head if I wanted any real
transformation or transcendence. I feel that according to societal views what we end up doing
in the end holds value for our egos and world accolades. I am definitely a wounded
researcher with a seeker's soul who has been trying to deal with being highly sensitive my
whole life. When I first saw the words highly sensitive in my favourite bookstore in Victoria,
BC in 1996, Munro’s, there was instant acknowledgement. It really was a synchronistic
moment, I felt the world finally saw me and understood I existed.

**Highly Sensitive Seeker**

The recurrent theme of being a highly sensitive seeker in search of belonging and a
sense of home is one that presents itself in various disguises throughout this thesis. I am the
subject of my thesis as the highly sensitive seeker, always looking and seeing, standing in-
between, never arriving, always in search of home. I have always been fascinated by this idea
of in-between and when I was entering into adolescence, my father said I was neither fish nor
meat. Still to this day I can hear this phrase spoken by my father, which is loaded with
symbolic meaning and poetic significance as it was around the same time I first read T. S.
Eliot’s (1963) poem *The Hollow Men* with my grade 11 English teacher alongside Joseph
Conrad’s (1960) *Heart of Darkness*. In section V of the poem, the three stanzas repeat the
word “Between” ending the stanzas with the closing words “Shadow.” I personally found this poem haunting, prophetic, and apocalyptic. The idea of in-between or between has a life message still being played out like the shadows waiting to be acknowledged and seen, embraced by the light. Before my father passed away in January 19, 2016, I did share with him my feelings surrounding the phrase of being neither fish nor meat. And he felt bad that I carried this stigma with me all these years, the stigma of never feeling like I was enough or that I always felt incomplete. This particular poem is one that has followed me throughout my life as it is etched in my memory and psyche. For the purpose of this thesis, I will only include the fifth section of the poem.

**Section V—The Hollow Men**

*Here we go round the prickly pear*

*Prickly pear prickly pear*

*Here we go round the prickly pear*

*At five o'clock in the morning.*

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom*

Between the conception

And the creation

Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

\textit{Life is very long}

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

\textit{For Thine is the Kingdom}

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

\textit{This is the way the world ends}

\textit{This is the way the world ends}

\textit{This is the way the world ends}

\textit{Not with a bang but a whimper.}

The in-between goes through-the-mirror, in-between the depth of existential inquiry where the body is made of flesh, skin, and bone. Through this process, my subjective self has an outlet and a way to explore the many emotions and experiences that need to be expressed. There is something about finding what once was lost. For me, there is a connection with the seeker who is continually searching for something, a calling from the depth of one’s soul.
What am I looking for? I feel that if I find it then I will have found the piece that is missing in my life. There is a missing piece wanting to be found since I was quite young. When I was a little girl, I would leave home going on searches for something. I would return home feeling sad and empty. I did not know it then, but I was already a heuristic researcher on my own quest trying to understand my loneliness as a highly sensitive seeker, and like the alchemical heuristic researcher, I was following the calling of my soul. As an adolescent and young adult, my searches would sometimes yield great discoveries in bookshops where I would be lead to just the right books and authors. I would take what I call my seeker’s soul pilgrimages, searching for various places that resonated with my spiritual, aesthetic and need for beauty in nature. When I landed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I felt like I was home. The natural landscape was so beautiful and the colours of the sky and earth melted my heart. I could see why someone visiting the earth would land there.

*Blue Sea Rising* is by an American Southwest artist named Frank Howell (1997). I love the electric ethereal blue energy. It is like the luminescence of a soul. I discovered Howell while I was in New Mexico studying spiritual direction, Jungian dream analysis, and practicing meditation and contemplation in a Benedictine contemplative monastery. The stunning landscapes and healing vortexes were truly enchanted and sacred.

I wanted to move to Italy when I was 17 and for many years after that I would travel there until I was 23 when I applied to the conservatory of Rome. I loved the beauty of the architecture and the Mediterranean velvet blue sky. I loved going to the art galleries and then going back to my aunt’s apartment, built in the 1300s. I would gaze at the Coliseum which was diagonally across from my window while writing songs on a guitar I bought in the same city. I took these photos (see Figures 1 and 2) while looking out my window and on one of
my many walks in this beautiful magical city. Being in Rome was a very pivotal point in my life. I travelled there between the ages of 16 and 23, one of my many seeker’s pilgrimages. I even returned to recuperate from dengue fever when in Thailand.

Figure 1. Coliseum picture taken from my apartment window in Rome.

Figure 2. Coliseum picture while on walk in Rome.

Rome was such a striking city though I missed the wild and raw nature of Canada. I would listen to Joni Mitchell’s (1971) *A Case of You* and weep melancholically.
During my formative years, opera was sung in our house by both my parents who studied at the Conservatory of Rome where I would later audition and get accepted. If I had accepted, what would my life look like? In my imaginings and spiral note books, a creative spark still pushes the envelope of my many parallel realities.

**My Memories in Life and School Affected How I Saw My World**

School was never a place where I felt comfortable. When I was quite young, I went to a Catholic school with nuns. I was quite a sickly child seeming to catch everything that went around and would spent much of the year at home. My first year there I remember being strapped. One of the nuns placed my hand on the bible and said I lied even though I did not. She then asked me to stand in the corner while my classmates watched me. School was not my favourite place. I tried to be creative and when I was in grade 2 I invited the school to watch a skit where I improvised and played all the characters. Looking back, I can hardly recognize myself back then. I am not sure where I found the courage or boldness to tell the teacher I wanted everyone to assemble in the gym because I wanted to share my skit for the school. I felt I had to develop a thicker skin and for a few years in elementary and junior high I was part of a gang of girls who were the toughest in the school. Instead of picking on people and starting fights, I would stand up for those who were bullied and felt like I had to protect them. To this day, I do not quite know how I came up with the courage to pull this off.

In junior high, I was also the class clown, trying to get people’s attention. I started smoking when I was in grade 6 even though I remember hating the first puff and thinking I was going to be sick. Most of my friends already had boy friends and I wondered why I did not. Maybe it was because I was a tomboy and always felt like I was not as attractive as my friends who were all taller than me. When I was a young girl, I was called names by one of
my best friend’s parent because my skin colour was darker than my peers. I would experience this same feeling many times in my life. I always felt like I did not fit in and when I first watched *Rudolph the Rednosed Reindeer* (1964) with the misfit elf, I cried because I felt like I was one too. I would also cry whenever I watched *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939) and afterwards would go up into my room and practice singing *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (Harlun & Harburg, 1939). I spent many hours in my room crying, feeling like I was different.

My high school years were mostly spent in the music room and English classes. My grade 11 English teacher taught us how to analyze and go beyond the surface. He introduced us to archetypes and we were encouraged to look for them in works we studied and read in class. In the classroom portable, our desks were arranged so that we were all connected and could see and hear each other, yet there was an opening at the front where he would sometimes stand and walk in the inner circle so to speak. When we read our text, he would seal the opening with his desk and be one of us.

As a teacher, I would also use the same classroom design. Now that I look back on it as an adult it was like we were entering into Hesse’s (1978) *Steppenwolf’s* magic theatre and the sign on the door of the portable read: “Entrance not for everybody.” How true and symbolic, it was. As a seeker, I have always been looking for something. I still do not really know what it is I am hoping to find though it is quite archaic and seems to be buried somewhere in my unconscious. He never rushed our answers and understood that not everyone was an extrovert. He waited until we were ready to contribute. Everyone felt like they had something to say and we knew he would always listen intently. We voraciously took notes and underlined the archetypes and symbols. I could have stayed there for the entire
school day, taking in his insights and analysis. His love of literature was contagious and every day we would drink from the deep well of understanding.

**Dreams and Psychic Phenomenon Toward Healing and Awareness**

The importance of looking at the message in the dreams is important in alchemical hermeneutics. Romanyshyn writes (2013):

> Dreams have a place in a method that would keep soul in mind. The alchemical hermeneutic method trusts the wisdom of the dream in this way. It opens that path of dreaming the work, trusting that at times the dream knows the work in a way that the researcher does not yet know it. It is not that the dream is the work. Rather, it is a way of seeing the work, of coming to know it. And the alchemical hermeneutic method holds that dreaming is as legitimate a way of investigating one’s work as thinking is.

If we are such stuff as dreams are made on, then so too is our work. (pp. 279-280)

With this reference in mind, I will present dreams that have been poignant in my life and that have traversed into my work presented in this thesis.

When I was younger, my dream state experiences were not always pleasant. I was plagued with nightmares and night terrors when I was a child and up until my adulthood I would leap out of my bed with the visions of the dreams playing out into my waking reality. Sometimes it would feel as though I had a hard time distinguishing between imagination and reality. I was told that when I was a little girl, I would sleep walk and my mother would find me in the middle of the hallway in front of the stairs. And many times I would also call out her name as I was frightened.

Many of my repetitive night terrors involved a large black spider, which would appear right in front of my face, and I would physically leap out of bed trying to run away
from it. I feel sick when I feel closed in. Spiders are not open but face down closing in on their prey. A few times I would think I was awake and they would be right next to me on the bed and again I would leap off the bed turning on the light to check to see where they were. I was so sure they were there. Many who are highly sensitive are awakened by these night terrors as children and, for some, like myself, they have continued into adulthood especially when under terrific stress. In my fearful or phobic mind when I think of spiders, I feel utter terror and I lose my breath feeling like I am being suffocated, sucking life out with the illusion of creating beautiful webs in order to attract the victim to devour it. The spider image was also used in my short story Seeing the Unseen which represented the shadow element in my life as well as fears that I still have not fully embraced and dealt with.

I also had repetitive house dreams and one in particular involving an elaborate house. In one of the rooms, there were 18 to 20 pianos with a small performance hall on the top floor. The feeling of the beautiful old concert hall with these old pianos were all mine and I would love going to each one and playing the old ivory keys as they were all unique. It was utter and complete joy. And I would say if we did not sell it, we could have performances with my parents and brothers. In this recurrent dream, I would always feel sad because the house was being put up for sale. Also in this dream there were many other beautiful designer rooms with lavish bathrooms and couches. As I would walk around the house showing it to prospective buyers I could not believe how each room was more incredible than the last. I would have dreams of many houses that were being put up for sale. Each of the houses was unique and they each had their own stories and past.

As was noted earlier, the theme of never feeling like I was at home or that I belonged was being played out through my dreams. Even though in real life I have owned homes in the
places I have lived, my unconscious was/is still not fully buying the idea that I have ever fully been at home. And, therefore, the next experience I recount about what I had undergone in my youth is not surprising with this light of information.

When I was around 11 or 12 I dreamed for three nights straight that I was visited by aliens. They did not feel like dreams but more like visitations. They felt so real. The last night one of the aliens said he had to leave. I told him I did not want him to leave. He said he would be back for me. I was so deeply sad and once again I felt abandoned. I felt a deep connection with the films *E.T.* (Spielberg & Kennedy, 1982) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Phillips & Phillips, 1977). There is a sense of magic and enchantment evoked from this realm of the extraterrestrial and what lies beyond the surface of the everyday reality. I also understood *Poltergeist* (Marshall & Spielberg, 1982) and *The Exorcist* (Blatty, 1973) as I had personal experiences and encounters. As someone who was able to see spirits and ghosts from an early age, I felt a connection with the other realms. When I lived in Montreal, there was an experience where my roommate and I both saw from our peripheral visions small demon-like creatures. When I saw them scurry, I could not believe what I saw. I asked my roommate and he too saw what I saw as we both described the same thing. It was at this point that I prayed to not be able to see these visions and apparitions. As well as being thin-skinned and highly empathic, I was able to pick up entities that had passed on and how they died. I found that being this way interfered with my experience of the day-to-day. I wonder if this could possibly be why I found it hard to be happy as I am always picking up on energies and subtleties that are not visible to others.

As a teen and young adult I had experiences with the paranormal that made living in the day-to-day difficult sometimes. I went to various monasteries seeking peace, spiritual
direction, and retreat centres. There I felt like I was understood and seen. I understood the invisible and unseen elements. When one of my friends at school entered into a deep suicidal depression, I tried to help her. We used to practise telepathy and we would take turns sending and receiving. I was far better at receiving than sending. She started seeing holocaust and hellish-like images, which she could not turn off and it was affecting her sleep. I had the brilliant idea of asking her to telepathically send me all of the ugly images so she could be free, not thinking how this would affect me. It was at this point that I entered into a dark depression that lasted for months. I could not eat and started suffering panic attacks not being able to leave the house. In my mind, I saw the visions that had tormented my friend. She was now fine. I had to take a leave of absence from my studies due to my deep depression and anxiety. My parents were worried and took me to emergency where a doctor prescribed valium. I had never taken pharmaceutical mood enhancers before and I literally thought I was dying. My heart was beating faster and I found I could not breathe as I was falling into what felt like a deep hole. I could not call out for help though found myself automatically starting to pray and when I said the words “Jesus help me” I saw these outstretched arms surrounded by light and I was cradled inside this safe glow. Interestingly, I found something about this experience was similar to my experience with my alien encounter. I felt like I was saved. I want to add that this was not my only negative experience with mood and anxiety pharmaceutical prescriptions.

When I was older, a therapist I was seeing prescribed a drug called celexa, which I also reacted badly to. I became extremely emotional, as my heart started pounding in my chest; I could not stop crying and felt suicidal. I went back to this therapist and told him of my experience and he said I was overreacting. Afterwards when I shared this experience with
my family doctor and showed him the amount prescribed, he was quite upset. He said it was
too high of a dose for someone as sensitive as I was and that he should have prescribed a
much lower dose than most people. Many doctors are still not aware of people like me who
are more sensitive to drugs and other chemicals and life in general. As sensitives, we are
more “sensitive to medications” (Aron. 1996, p. 189). Getting back to my story, after a deep
sleep and my miraculous experience, I woke up and the sun was shining and I was
completely fine. Somehow that morning all of the torment I had experienced for months was
wiped clean. The fear and anxiety was removed by just surrendering. It certainly was a
healing spiritual experience; I made the unconscious conscious. I started seeing a therapist
who taught me meditation and breathing techniques. And soon after I discovered yoga
classes and knew this was the beginning of a new life for me. This was another healing
paradigm shift in my life.

Some of my dreams, for me, can be called healing dreams. They are similar to deep
spiritual healing shifts or synchronicities and, when I awaken, something just changes. It is
like my shared short story, Seeing the Unseen, I enter through what can be called a
transference field and I experience a healing paradigm and the part that needed healing is
healed. There was this one dream I had, years ago, and before I went to sleep I had asked for
a psychological healing, a shift in perception, as I had been depressed for awhile. In my
dream, there was this door and I knew that when I opened and walked through it everything
would be different when I woke up. It was. My sense of being had shifted, and I felt happy.

Reflective Journal

Darkness is associated with sadness and light with optimism and buoyant energy.

Like Plato’s Allegory of the Cave I fear I am chained and afraid to turn my head and focus on
the light (see Figure 3). As I think and ponder about the fears and need for transcendence, I write:

    Beyond Transcendence: incandescent blue

    Through the cave where enlightened travellers dared

    I follow the shadows toward the source of light

    Figure 3. Picture taken by me of light through shadows in-between.

    I have had an affinity with the cave for many years now. Going deep within to uncover what lies behind or below the surface has always intrigued me. This need to be reflective and slide in between and through-the-mirror allows for uncovering of ultimate meanings. My whole life I have always been called to go toward the deep end. Funny because I have a fear of drowning and whenever I made my way into the deep water I would start to panic and quickly swim back to where I could stand on level ground.

**The Importance of Enchantment and Imagination in My Life**

    As a highly sensitive intuitive empath, the importance of enchantment and imagination in my life helped form and shape my perception and what I value in the world.
When I taught secondary school students English and Humanities, we had great moments of epiphany and heuristic moments. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, epiphany is defined as: a “sudden realization: a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence” where the beauty of being transfixed became a momentary enchantment. Why am I so fascinated with enchantment? When I first watched the film ET (1982) by Steven Spielberg, I was instantly enchanted; the deep connection between something beyond the ordinary mortal human. Actually, it was more than that. It was an alchemical knowing, recognition, and I was touched. Enchantment is the suspension of sequential time, transfixed and spellbound, as in when I meditate and I experience wonder and a moment of pure presence. Meditation can open the portal toward enchantment: the moment of pure presence. Creativity and the medium of artistic expression through art, music, film, dance, and other artistic venues can also take me to the moment of pure presence. Within the imagination, creativity and the element of beyond can also take place. The element of surprise, the heuristic eureka moment is when you feel like what was lost is found again hearkening back to my never-ending search for home. Maybe the Garden of Eden is really part of our psyches and Jung’s archetypes really do come from the collective unconscious. And my search for home is not only a personal search but an ancient calling, a remembering from my oldest ancestors of what we lost and that is why the yearning feels older than time itself and bigger than me. And that is why when I am in nature I feel reconnected to what I lost.

The following images (see Figure 4) speak about how when I am in nature the feelings of isolation and disconnection dissolve and the trees and healing spectrum of light alchemize and become my elixir.
Transference Dialogue on Enchantment and Loss of Home

- **Gabriella**: This calling, this sensed feeling of loss is like a disenchantment, a place, a piece, a sense forgotten that wants to be remembered, and hopefully healed. Is this a calling from my home, my lost place?

- **Self**: You carry your parents' and ancestor’s sadness of loss and home. In your mother’s womb you felt your mother and father’s separation from a place they loved, their family and birth place. When they came to Canada, they left who and what they knew and with their leaving they left those who remained behind, a sadness that broke everyone’s hearts.
Your father’s heart never healed when he left his village at the age of 15 and went to the city of Rome and then to Toronto.

- Gabriella: What can I do to heal this deep sadness? Now that my father is dead he no longer feels this melancholic sadness. He is now with his mother and father and deceased brother. Though now with his death, he left my mother behind, and all of us who love and miss him. Is this a perpetual sadness that will never be over when more loved ones will leave and create another loop of sadness? I feel so sad and I don’t know what I am being asked to do? What does this dialogue have to do with enchantment and loss and home and this archaic deep separation and sadness? I don’t think my Self has all the answers. Can I call on someone else? Someone who is not tied to this realm of space and time, someone or something from beyond the veil? I will wait and see if anyone or anything appears and answers my questions. I am going to walk in the woods and just wait. Maybe I can ask nature? (After a long and beautiful walk in the woods in North Vancouver, I just returned from my walk and I brought my cell phone and filmed my dialogue which I will transcribe as my Self in nature as that’s where I found the answers.)

- Self: We separated our self from nature and that’s where the disconnect happened. The magic is here. The magic is all around us. This is where we belong. And that’s why there is this sense of loss, that we lost our home. This was our home. This, here in nature is where we belong. And that’s why there’s a disconnect. And that’s why when we are in nature there’s an enchantment. There’s a magic. It’s not even magic. We call it magic. But it’s, it’s, what it’s supposed to be.

- Gabriella: So is magic what it’s supposed to be? So this sense of loss that I’m writing about in my thesis; this dialogue I am having with my Self. This dialogue I’m having with… Who is it?
– **Self**: Let the answers find you. It’s in the unconscious; it’s actually in the conscious level. I am called to appreciate this beauty in nature where the ducks have given birth. (I am looking at ducks and their ducklings; beautiful images) This nature is Molly (my dog who I am walking with).

– **Gabriella**: This nature is me. Here in nature I am in heaven. This is paradise. Thank you.

The importance of the Imagination cannot be underestimated. Through enchantment, meditation, and self-awareness, we can connect to a greater sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. As well, through intuition and the active imagination I am traversing unknown territory. Even though I am highly intuitive and creative, sharing these transference dialogues as personal voices, there is the internal critic judging the authenticity and value of adding them in this thesis. Revealing who I am is against all my better judgment and remaining hidden and quiet, behind the scenes so to speak, is more natural and safe. Romanyshyn (2013) writes about the importance of intuition by writing, “Moreover, ignoring the place of intuition in the process can and does have detrimental effects, especially for researchers who are intuitive types and who process information in this fashion” (p. 293).

**Poesy and the Deep Well**

I like the sound of ideas. Certain eloquent ideas are poetic: the literature of sound; the sound of literature; the pebble in front of the blind seeker. I always sense the pebble before it gets stuck in my shoe. And then like the heuristic researcher, I exalt in tacitly knowing the feeling of eureka, even if for only a day or maybe even a week, I can feel brilliant, full of light and full of what is good and beautiful. I am entranced by the beauty of the words that jump into my random and piercing thoughts. There are piercing blue ideas like my deceased Lily who can still never be completely released. Her beauty can never be matched by any other. As a reflective practitioner, I have permission to “access the deep well
Even though music is sound, it seems to express silence in a way that words can never convey. Poetry can sometimes express the depth of emotion and, of course, images as well. Deep inside the well the uncoiled spiral lies dormant awaiting sunrise:

Deep inside, below, above, through and out

I see your expression

You sit so stoic not what I expected

I didn’t know you were capable

I didn’t know you

The Road Less Travelled and Learning Self-Acceptance

I am sharing this picture of me in nature in the American Southwest where I felt so alive and connected with life and meaning (see Figure 5). The red earth and mountains touched me so deeply allowing me the grace to discover that I belonged somewhere.

Figure 5. Sitting in the American Southwest, in Sedona, Arizona.
I will share journals I have written that connect with and reveal a conscious awareness of my feelings and complexes. These personal journals are ways for entering into the active imagination and bringing about a personal healing paradigm. It is a way of allowing an alchemy of hermeneutic interpretation and discovering who I am as a highly sensitive person and educator. They brought to light some of my feelings and experiences as a highly sensitive introverted empath. The journals follow a chronological order. As a wounded researcher, I created a space of mindful and spiritual reverie, waiting for illuminations from a heuristic place of hide and seek, and inviting the psychic ethereal realms through dreams, forest walks, musical notes, alternative remedies, and waiting for the angels and trees, and my own unconscious, to commune through transference and self dialogues. And with my losses and feelings of ineptitudes, there were souls both in this realm and beyond that helped make sense of my own lost soul and woundedness holding up a soulful lantern where the light aided my conjuring and alchemical remedies for absolution.

**Journals 1-19**

*Journal 1, December 29, 2011*

There is an urging, a space that feels unloved inside. It seems almost like emptiness, not belonging. I yearn for love beyond understanding. The self compliance of certain individuals awakens a hollow self importance that evokes a sad and empty feeling in me. I miss conversation with my parents. I wish I could meet them in a healing sanctum where we could have nourishing foods, comfortable rooms; a place where time can go back to when they were physically strong. I read somewhere that words have a frequency that can evoke healing. How is the frequency of words measured? Is there a device that measures how they affect the human spirit? I love the words
healing sanctum, Sanctus, promise, surrender. I love open fields of tall colourful herbs and trees. I have also always had a sense of foreboding? And it seems many who are empaths and intuitive sensitives share in this attribute. The holidays always seems to bring with it feelings of sadness.

**Journal 2, July 1, 2013**

An unexamined life is not worth living. I have lived this Socratic oath and have always questioned the meaning of life, wanting to understand why. Looking for meaning and connections; the importance of purpose, the beyond: beneath the unexplored, beauty, transcendence, and the subtle; within the paradox of the unaccustomed, the pebble in the sand, the discord, the leap of faith, all these are partials of where my focus has taken and possible awakenings towards consciousness. Remembering early memories of school, a place with lined desks and chairs, sterile scents, alphabets along the walls trying to perfect scribbling over and over again where the alphabetized teachers standing tall with a pointer stick and a strap in the other uttered drills. And then, out of the blue my heart and soul saw the open window and this beautiful tall tree spoke to me—telling me it knew me and I would be okay. Like when the alien spoke to me telling me it knew me and someday it would come back and take me HOME. I feel akin with the disheartened, the Existential Seeker; the one who hears the faraway beat of a distant drummer.

**Journal 3, February 22, 2014**

(Written on flight from Toronto to Yellowknife)

It seems that the world is still not that aware of sensitive persons. I still feel like my aesthetic sensibilities are not represented in most places. Does an airport reflect the
city or town it finds itself in? Why was I unable to accomplish more things in Toronto? I worry about my father and pray he will be able to recover from his physical difficulties.

I am grateful to God for allowing me the time spent with mom and dad though I wish I could have had more in-depth conversations with both. The reality is that I am affected by my environment and I had moments when I found myself unable to be more effective.

Journal 4, March 17, 2014

Feeling low in energy and spirit, not feeling the most optimistic, a feeling I have most times before spring. I want to hide. I feel easily overwhelmed.

I seem to be affected by all the seasonal changes though there is something about spring where things that were buried and not accomplished come to the surface. So many times when I lived in Toronto I would feel this way. I almost don’t want the winter season of hibernating to end. I am not ready nor do I have the fortitude to take off my protective layers. I am not accomplished. I still am below the surface—I am not enough. This is also the season of Lent, death of Christ and resurrection. Lots of sad memories archaically, ancestrally, and personally, which is the opposite of what most humans experience: new beginnings, new blossoms, new life.

Journal 5, March 18, 2014

I have been giving away my elixir: the elixir of life that sustains my heart speaking ancient memories.

Journal 6, March 22, 2014

Listening to Ludovico Einaudi’s Two Trees, thinking of my father, the thought came
to me, wondering how it is going to end.

*Journal 7, March 23, 2014*

Today the sun is bright as I am reading Romanysnshyn; the thought came that I need to go back to the ocean. I am battling deep fatigue—thinking about visiting my parents and thinking they too should go “back” to the ocean. I remembered thinking the same thing many years ago as I was visiting my father’s brother who was battling cancer at the hospital. I had asked him days before he died if he wanted to listen to the waves of the ocean and he said he would love that. I was planning on bringing in a headset so he could hear and feel the waves, hoping he could be healed by just listening to the ocean’s waves. The year my uncle died I thought of the importance of nature and healing and came up with the idea of a healing eco-structure called Ecosanctuaries where those who couldn’t get out could hear, see, smell, and feel nature. Like many of my ideas my Ecosantuaries is still waiting to be born into the world.

*Journal 8, April 2, 2014*

Transference is big for me. When people say they are unwell I am affected by them. I can feel someone’s headache or upset stomach or that they are fighting a virus. I am thin skinned and have thin boundaries.

*Journal 9, April 15, 2014*

I must find a way to work on my music—my own compositions and use them in my thesis as an imaginal approach and a way to contact the alchemical elixir that nourishes my being. Also create my own scents with combined essential oils of plants and herbs and trees as a way to initiate transference and self dialogues.
Journal 10, April 19, 2014

(Repetitive dream of school as a substitute teacher)

In this repetitive dream I am always called to go to the same school where the teachers are not welcoming and the students are supposed to be challenging. I always seem to get lost trying to get to the classroom and inevitably I am late.

When I open the classroom door the students are sitting lined up in rows and many times the teacher I am supposed to be covering is sitting at the back or front of the class. In this dream there is also a huge staff office where the principal is in his office and he gives me the schedule for the day. Empty and hollow and when I wake up I feel like I am a failure.

Journal 11, (Easter Sunday) April 20, 2014

Since my thesis was approved I have fractured my spine, dealt with constant personnel changes at work, and watched my father become more frail and dependent. Being far from family has not been easy.

Journal 12, April 21, 2014

My relationship with my family is strongly rooted in guilt and the issue of never enough. The season of spring is a very emotional time for me. Somehow I feel there is an ancestral archaic connection with these emotions in that I have inherited many of them from unresolved lives. The 40 days of lent, suffering and the sacrificial lamb and then Easter, the expected celebration of the resurrection where lots of food was spread out to be consumed while the depth of emotion and the spilling over of extended family was mixed in. Feelings of sadness would taint all of the plates of food and I would always feel guilty and rarely be hungry as I would feel
overwhelmed and my senses would be over the top.

**Journal 13, May 16, 2014**

I am sitting on a plane flying to Toronto to visit my dad in the hospital. I was actually planning on leaving the following week though my mother called me at work saying my dad was gravely ill and I should fly out today instead. They will be doing a blood transfusion later today to increase the level of his haemoglobin as it is quite low. They have also been giving him oxygen. It is interesting to note that a friend of mine who is a medical intuitive did a reading for my father a few weeks ago as I was concerned about his health and she said he needed oxygen. She also said he would benefit from taking chlorophyll though I wasn’t sure if it would interact with the blood thinners he was on.

I wish I had listened to her and followed through on her advice though it’s easier when you have access to hindsight. I was praying and sending out intentions for my dad’s recovery, and asking him, using distance healing, whether I could act as a conduit and vessel for him to be healed. “Daddy, what can I do for you? I want to be a vessel for your healing.” We are all connected, life never ends, my soul, your soul, everyone’s soul: The highly sensitive seeker’s soul. I was feeling connected to everything and everyone and praying the words that love never ends as I was praying to Padre Pio and Saint Francis. “Daddy, we will listen to music again with eyes closed, in appreciation.” On the cover of my journal book I am writing in, the words I choose hope are written. I so want to listen to music again with my father again; with the sunrays shining through the window. I want him to come home and not die in the hospital.
Journal 14, May 25, 2014

(Toronto Humber River Church Street Hospital)

I am sitting with my father who is in the hospital since last Wednesday. He was moved from another hospital where they found his kidneys were not working effectively.

They started him on dialysis on Friday. Today is Sunday and they won’t be giving him dialysis today. This is a very old hospital and the rooms are rather scary. My dad is so lovely and wonderful with the nurses and they are allowing him to prick and probe. My heart is breaking. Since I arrived from Yellowknife I have been doing reiki and changing some of the stones in his medicine pouch as well as bringing in some dried herbs.

Journal 15, June 4, 2014

Dad is in room 630 on the critical care floor for renal patients. They brought in a new patient next to him who looks quite ill. Just 5 minutes ago around 10:10 am a man who was brought into the room next to my father room 631 went into code blue. I saw him when they brought him in and he looked deathly ill. I pray that dad will be able to be moved into the rehabilitation unit soon. They have already put in a request that he be moved.

Journal 16, June 11, 2014

Glad my dad was moved a few days ago into the rehabilitation area though he is still having problems breathing. I am waiting with him in a nuclear medicine room so he can breathe in radiation particles from a mask and when they put him into a chamber they will image his lungs. He is getting tired of all of these protocols since he first
entered the hospital in May from different doctors with their own specialities.
Various doctors are always running more tests and poking him with needles. I so
want him out of the hospital where he can finally be free. No more nights in the
hospital room.
We have to decide if we want him to continue doing dialysis. Some general doctors
don’t see the point whereas the renal specialists are encouraging him to continue. He
does seem clear headed after having started dialysis.

*Journal 17, June 18, 2014*

Will be flying home tomorrow after 6 weeks, dreading having to leave my dad in the
hospital. Though there are rumours he will be discharged on July 3, as they want him
to be strong enough to use a walker and be more independent. He asked me what time
my flight was tomorrow and his eyes were teary. I hugged him and told him he would
be home soon and I would visit him at his house. I would be flying home the last
week of school and I still had student reports to write and end of the year reports for
our funders.

*Journal 18, June 28, 2014*

Feeling a little lost and not quite grounded. Feeling very different—everything is
different.

*Journal 19, August 2, 2014*

I hate not being acknowledged; the same core issue of being unseen, invisible, and
feelings of being unworthy. My dad and mom call me their treasure. When I hear them
call me this, I feel as though I am worthy as a daughter. I know I am a good person and
that I have treated others ethically and lovingly though as having value in societal terms
of being recognized, I have never experienced this. I remember when I was a teacher in Toronto and I was coaching students for a musical after school; helping them with their vocals; accompanying them on the piano; playing by ear, one of the students heard me sing and said, I should be a singer, as I was so talented. I guess this was an acknowledgement of my voice. And being accepted in the Conservatory of Rome to study opera was also an acknowledgement of my voice.

I am using self-dialogues as a way of facing some questions that surface from the journal entries. Moustakas (1990) writes that “In self-dialogue, one faces oneself and must be honest with oneself and one’s experience relevant to the question or problem” (p. 17).

**Heuristic Self-Dialogue 1**

- **Gabriella:** Why am I here? Why do I have such a need to be acknowledged?
- **Gabby:** I think it has to do with being seen since I feel like I am invisible. It also means being accepted. The problem is that I don’t really put myself out there since I fear being judged or criticized. I have never shared my musical compositions with people I know as I don’t think they are good enough to share. This is the spiral of feeling less than and feeling that if others heard or read my writings of prose and poetry and music I would be made to feel even worse than I already feel about myself. It is a self-fulfilling cycle of never feeling I am or will be good enough.

- **Gabriella:** I don’t trust that I am enough.

**Journal 20, August 10, 2014**

As a highly sensitive intuitive empath child, I found the educational system challenging. In grade one I was strapped by a nun who told me to stand up and face the class. She said I was a liar because when I put my hand on the bible it said I was
not telling the truth. I was humiliated, shamed, ridiculed, and not heard. This was one of the many examples when I was not heard, not listened to, and not seen. I remember I had a dream soon afterwards with my family where everyone except me was rising up to go to heaven. I was not worthy or good enough to go to heaven. That same day I was sent home and my dad gave me the strap because of what the nuns supposedly said I did.

They were mistaken. It was soon after this experience that I became an advocate for those who were bullied and mistreated in school. I swallowed my sensitivity and acted tough.

Being belittled and disempowered are issues I still carry with me today. When I had my T7 vertebrae compression fracture which was extremely painful physically it also affected my height which is another one of my issues. Many of my close girl friends when I was growing up were taller than me at 5 foot 8 and 6 feet and I was the shortest of the gang at 5 feet 4 inches. Losing height affected me psychologically and added to my feelings of being less than. Even today as I am writing this I am feeling weak. When I was younger I would get sick quite a bit and miss school. I didn’t feel as strong or healthy as my classmates and later on as an adolescent I would deal with the physical, emotional, and mental discomforts of school by skipping classes and acting like the class clown or rebel. I was a non-conformist. The core issue that there is something wrong with me and I am weak compared with others and I keep thinking I should be stronger and I should be able to do better. I wonder if other highly sensitive intuitive empaths feel like they have to pretend to be something other than they are in order to be accepted. It seems so.
The following poem was written at a time in my life when I had deep self-loathing about the need to pretend in order to be accepted. It also reintroduces the recurrent theme of feeling nebulous and in-between.

**Poem: I Wear My Veil of Pretence**

I wear my veil of pretence  
Though that’s not what you see  
Who do I think I am?  
Hiding  
Suicide friends knew me well  
Disclosing personal truths that are now gone  
Only holding onto the unattainable  
Who do I think I am?  
 Fucking the honesty and wearing the phoney  
Mystical shamming I’m good at damning  
Burning your laughs and smiles  
Loving the hypocrite I won’t let you see me  
Backfire loser  
Sapphire bruiser  
Nothing can stick  
It’s all a shtick  
Created for shiny  
Laughing like hippy  
Don’t tell your age  
Your wrinkles won’t tell  
And your gray hair pretends honesty  
And modesty  
You pretend to be humble  
Yet really babe you (me) I’m tangoing wearing my veil of pretence  
Tense pretensions  
You say you’re a yoga teacher
You talk dropping big words and names
Substance less your sagging not so pretty
How’d you get to be such a good liar?
So good at self deception
You never get close to anyone
Lily Lou you were my angel
Now you are gone
Even that I can’t accept
Saying you’ll reincarnate
So I don’t have to accept you’re gone
Gone, Gone, Gone…
Like the shiny hippy days
Which were not mine?
Even that was a lie
Too young and too old
Always in between
The shower won’t clean
Nothing will redeem me
Lost in the in-betweens
The razor seems so shiny
Yet so silly to speak of such foolishness
No commitments no definite
Keeping it all open ended
The eternal leave of absence
Not gone; not present
It’s all living in between
The veil is an excuse
The indecisiveness
Is, is, is, is
Not
Not
Journal 21, August 27, 2014

It is in my porousness and non-defined boundaries that germs seem to be welcomed into my space. Why am I always affected by others? I came into work today with a shard of light and reservoir of positive elixir. I was open and others confided and reached out to me. I gave away and remained unprotected to everyone I met. Today there seemed to be an avalanche of germs and my immune system was on high alert. In the end I felt like I had spoken to too many people in person and on the phone. I felt my energy leaving me as I was getting ready to leave for home and one more person came into my office asking if I could look over some personal documents. I said I was really tired and she said it wouldn’t take too long. As I was walking with her to her office I asked her if she was sick with a cold and she said she was. I told her I didn’t want to enter her office. I could feel the germs.

Journal 22, August 30, 2014

Feel like I am losing my mind. Like I have no merit or worth and that I am insignificant by the very virtue of how others see me or do not see me. Elaine Aron who is the psychologist studying and popularizing the term highly sensitive person (hsp) also noted that many people who came to her for therapy also had an
undervalued self. (Look at expanding this idea and see if there is a high correlation between hsp and undervalued self.) Reality is changing. Something yesterday shifted and I don’t feel the same. I feel totally alone. I have no one I can speak to about how I am feeling and about how completely insignificant I feel. I know I just wrote this above though I need to make it clear how this feeling of being utterly alone and disconnected from everyone on this planet is my reality. I am afraid of the abyss and I don’t know why these feelings have come back into my life. If colours could only lead me out of the dark and empty abyss I would paint my skin, my eyes, my walls and everything all around me. Seeing the hardened layers of pretence and lies, the grey skies are shutting me in. Seeing the trees outstretched, the birds reach my soul yearning for expression and release. There needs to be a searing and dissolution of what no longer sings, allowing a place for the creative soul to exhale.

Journal 23, September 20, 2014

Last night I had a dream that I happened to find some lost pieces of luggage and a backpack when I was descending down a natural landscape trying to get to another place. When I first saw the items I was surprised as I had forgotten they had gone missing and like the idea of eureka was quite happy I accidentally stumbled upon these items. I woke up in a good mood when I thought about this dream. It made me think about the unexpected joy of finding what had been lost. This made me think about my second thesis methodology, heuristic inquiry. Heuristic: To find. Comes from the Greek etymological word: eureka. As a Seeker I have always been looking for something. I still don’t really know what it is I am hoping to find though it is quite archaic and seems to be buried somewhere in my unconscious. I have always
resonated with the potential of attaining something; the potential of finding what I have lost. This sense of loss is one that I carry with me most times and when I happen to experience joy I am elated with this feeling. I have always been on the search for the undiscovered, the mystical and unnamed. As an educator it gives me happiness to share this searching for the ineffable and feelings of eureka where we can look and see and feel the awe and wonder of something never experienced before, something new.

Journal 24, December 13, 2014

What is my purpose now? Where should I be putting my attention? Who am I? Why am I alive now? Why do I feel such a deep archaic melancholic yearning? Thinking of death and sadness and my dad? Immune feels like it is fighting something. Soul feels some deep wounding. Yellowknife and my work are not resonating with me now. Feel like I want to cry. It’s difficult to write thesis. Why am I here on this planet now? I am sad and depressed and want so much to be joyful and feel as though life is meaningful. Something is missing. Study healing arts at Langara College in Vancouver. The program is called Integrative Energy Healing. A thought came to me that maybe I should teach unfolding. My calling is to understand the misunderstood, to feel empathy for those who are shunned and silenced especially the sensitive and alone. I feel like my entire life has been a journey of undoing or unravelling, and a yearning for an opening that can heal my projected expectations of my shortcomings and failures. Interestingly I have never fully surrendered to falling apart. Yes, I have fallen into depression and negative spaces though there is a part of me that is forever holding the light of an eternal hope or spring. I am always seeking to be saved. Yes,
that’s it. I have been seeking to be saved. And now my dad is so very sad. I feel he is very unhappy. My heart is breaking. Am I supposed to be in Toronto now?

*I can only know what I know: reflexive mirroring and alchemy.*

**A Healing Dream**

*A wise man said “Use your hands.”*

*He said this repeatedly*

*I saw many light-winged angels all around*

*I almost felt like I was one of them*

**My Mantra for Today**

I can only be who I am

I can only see what I see

I can only feel what I feel

**Journals 25-27**

*Journal 25, March 29, 2015*

I just read an excerpt from a book about Merton and it brought me back to my path in life when I would spend days in the Trappist-Cistercian monastery in Orangeville. I would love the valleys and the wooden old houses that painted the landscapes. I am sad. I always seem to get sad around this time of year, the week just before holy week. I grew up with ambiguity my whole life…and nebulosity.

*Journal 26, April 5, 2015*

People have been telling me who I am for most (all of my life) I allow others to define me and my life. Allowing others to tell me when I do things and how I must be feeling and thinking.
My whole life I have always done things and looked at it from how it has affected other people. I seemed to never be able to really enjoy something for long periods of time. Just this morning as I was writing and editing my methodology section of my thesis I read a passage that framed things from a negative place, which I always seem to do.

I thought of Dr Ricci’s comments when he read a section and how I kept writing how I didn’t know enough, and was always belittling my self and making my self smaller. As I am moving within the study of alchemical hermeneutics, I am undergoing alchemy of my self, from a place of lack and void, to a place of ability and giftedness. It is a slow process, like the methodology but its real.

I am not giving anything else up … postponing, putting other people first. ... My whole life I grew up with the knowledge and guilt that my mother gave up her opera and career for us…for me…I was not planned. She was hoping to dedicate her life at that point to her career.

The use of transference dialogues allows me to reflect and enter into a deeper dialogue using an imaginal approach via the unconscious so as to elaborate on an unresolved emotion and experience from a shared journal entry. Romanyszyn (2013) adds:

In this manner, transference dialogues bring the body into the work. They heal the split between body and mind. They engage the researcher fully as an embodied mind. With soul in mind, one truly does suffer the soul of the work. (p. 157)

The importance of looking back and remembering is part of healing. Romanyszyn (2013) writes:

Recovering origins is always a work of an-amnesis, a work not just of remembering
but also of un-forgetting. The difference here is between a horizontal journey in time, back to a past that has been left behind, and a vertical descent into moments of time, in which the past still haunts the present. It is that work of making more conscious what was, and still is, unconscious in a past that weighs down upon and waits within the present. (p. 114)

The following transference dialogue is one which hopefully through being brought to light and remembered may be healed.

**Transference Dialogue About Sacrifice**

- **Mother**: I am pregnant now? What about my dream?
- **Gabby**: I am sorry Mommy. What can I do?
- **Mother**: It’s okay, it will be okay.
- **Gabby**: Why do I feel wrong?
- **Mother**: I don’t know why you feel wrong. You are not wrong. I am wrong. I am the one who created you.
- **Gabby**: I don’t want you to leave the opera you love so much. You have so much talent. You deserve to be completely happy, to be complete, whole in every way.
- **Gabriella**: And now you have lost your singing voice on top of everything else. I want to help you find it again.
- **Mother**: Yes, I always thought that was the one thing I would never lose.
- **Gabriella**: Together we will find it. I will not forget how important this is for you.

**Journals 28-39**

*Journal 28, April 12, 2015*

I was deliberating and demeaning myself about my loss of height and how much
shorter I am compared with many other people since my back injury and a thought just came to me that it’s not about other people. My life is not about other people. It is about me!

Stop comparing myself to other people! Stop being afraid what other people think! My life is about me! It is my life!

Journal 29, April 24, 2015

The earth is going through major shifts. Personally I am feeling so emotional, Raw and vulnerable. We are being exposed and needing to face up (I am).

Journal 30, April 26, 2015

As far back as I can remember I have always struggled with low self-esteem, not feeling good enough, and with a crisis of identity, asking the question about my purpose in life. I have been attracted to the sacred, spiritual, and intangible.

Journal 31, May 13, 2015

On a plane after saying goodbye to my elderly parents, I am feeling sad and loss. What is life? Why does life involve loving and leaving? Why do we get close, only to eventually have to feel loss, and shed tears for those you love being torn away from you? Why build, only to see it fall apart and crumble? What am I missing? What if I held onto life so tightly that death could not sever it? Can I speak to those who have passed on so I can understand, so I can accept what seems so impossible to resign in myself? In this last visit something was unearthed, a revelation and deep feeling of something not feeling quite right. Both my parents felt it this time. What is this feeling? I feel it most times. Does life ever make sense? Sometimes in those moments when synchronicity happen, and everything just falls into place, it’s like magic.
Okay, here I am, feeling so empty. Which archetypal figure fits into the work as a highly sensitive seeker? The magician and the wanderer fit my personality.

**Journal 32, October 8, 2015**

I just made a realization that the reason why I find it hard to be happy and joyful is because I am programmed to see what is missing; what is lacking; what has been lost; what can never be found or replaced. Seeking meaning and finding something which was thought to have been lost or that was important for one’s understanding and self is especially important for the highly intuitive, spiritual, empathic and sensitive soul.

When we think about what is meaningful, we are held by the meaning, and given sustenance. The alchemical arrival of myself after the hide and seek metaphorical game is what this process has been about for me.

**Journal 33, November 24, 2015**

My skin is darker than white, olive like, feeling less attractive from others. Being thin skinned makes me more affected by comments and looks. I have always felt like an outsider; different; less than; not as good. I am invisible at the same time. Who am I? Thinking of my deceased, talented, funny, childhood friend, who was hospitalized at 999 Queen Street West and I didn’t go see her when she was there because I was jealous. Jealous because when we were friends growing up I would always be second and would be supportive when she needed me. I was afraid she would take something from me and I would be less than—even less than I already felt. I helped her audition for a school play, offering my feedback and practiced with her vocally. When it came to auditioning the music teacher asked me if I would audition and I said I would as a dog. When I think about this I feel so sad for my younger self. Why did I put myself down? The thought that goes through my mind is my mother’s voice saying “I could
have been an opera singer. I was really talented.” Am I punishing myself for being born and being responsible for taking my mother’s dream away? I was always in the shadows, never feeling good enough, second to everyone. When I told my parents that I wanted to study music, they said, no you are the Journalist and your brother is the musician. Little Gabriella never felt like she was good enough; and now what about big Gabriella?

Journal 34, November 15, 2015

I spoke with my mom and dad today, and I feel oppressed, the energy is being drained from me just like the dream I had early this morning where my dad was complaining about poor circulation on his hands and there were spots whiter where there was less blood flow. I held his hands and did energy work which seemed to help but completely exhausted me. This is how I feel when I visit there. I give too much of my own energy. This is one problem of being a sensitive intuitive empath.

Journal 35, November 23, 2015

I am ready to be born again through the skin of the snake. Shedding what no longer belongs to me NOW. Not an easy weekend or day today. Stamina and immune are low. Not complaining, just stating the facts for me. Archangels or higher assistants show me the way, so I can break free and find strength and joy. I am dealing with extreme fatigue and trying to strengthen my immune system.

Journal 36, November 26, 2015

I keep looking for music and sounds that will soothe and heal me. I find some compositions and sounds that work for a while but then even they are not what I am looking for. The music I am looking for (heuristically) is my own, I am waiting to compose and create. I am waiting for myself. Yes, waiting, a common theme of mine.
Journal 37, November 28, 2015

Using any kind of chemicals like those found in commercial cleaning supplies and clearing plugged drainage systems affect my skin and it feels like my skin is burning. I also start getting agitated and angry, first because people don’t believe I am being affected by what most people use on a daily basis, and secondly because I can’t get away from it. Voicing my feelings and opinions does nothing to change the reality of what I feel. Here is a situation where I feel invisible and it reinforces my experiences of feeling unworthy and unseen. I hate having to be so sensitive. On a positive note about my sensitivity, last night we went to see a concert by King Crimson in Vancouver and I was a bit worried because I knew it would be loud and filled with people. I really enjoyed my self. The days prior I researched some homeopathic remedies which would be good so I wouldn’t feel overwhelmed and brought with me some grounding stones and essential oils.

Journal 38, December 2, 2015

I just read a Facebook post about E-coli and celery. Right away I started feeling nauseous and fearful because I had eaten some celery last night. When I read or speak to someone about illness—especially bacterial or viral, I am affected by what they say. I am so thin-skinned and easily suggestible. Why am I like this? Is there a psychological reason? Can I stop being like this? What are the advantages in having this quality of easy suggestibility?

Journal 39, December 3, 2015

I don’t believe I will ever find my community; a place where I feel like I belong—where I am part of a group and I can be myself and be seen. I was part of a small woman’s circle when I lived in Yellowknife. Ironically we started meeting 9 months
before I left. I also met with a small group of people who practiced toning once every 2 weeks. I met the originator of the group at the Yellowknife Wellness conference about a year and a half before we left and she sent out an email to say she was starting these vocal toning workshops. I have always been interested in sound therapy. When I went for my yoga certification many, many, years ago in Toronto, for my paper as part of the training I wrote a paper about the healing benefits of sound and voice. It’s interesting now as I am reading about my experience, I see a pattern where it’s not simply that I don’t belong anywhere, it’s that I always end up leaving or the group disbands. As a teacher I taught at many schools and I always connected with a few teachers though there was really only a handful where I felt like I might have belonged if I had stayed. I took a few leave of absences due to my husband’s work and our sense of adventure. I always felt a connection with most of my students. It comes down to the idea of impermanence. The philosopher’s stone is a way of achieving permanence, perfect health, immortality, which cannot be attained while on this earthly plane. The magic elixir is what I have been seeking my entire life, a way I can heal my imperfections and brokenness.

T.S Eliot’s (1963) *The Hollow Men*, speaks to my search and resonates with my shadow: collecting the elements of self that remain hidden, unseen and unforgiven.

**Heuristic Self-Dialogue 2**

- **Gabriella:** Why do you like the concept of in-between?

- **Gabby:** It is where the magician and the mirror live. It is the land of possibility where I can be myself. I want to be touched by an angel. I want to see the truth and be real. You look at me and I look at you.
– **Gabriella**: And what do you see?
– **Gabby**: The light, the source, love, beauty, enchanted; everything I see in nature.

**Journals 40-43**

*Journal 40, December 28, 2015*

At 3:20 in the morning my father called out my name after he slipped and fell. It was a very emotional experience. When I heard my father call my name, Gabriella, I was already awake and ran down the stairs as quickly as I could and found him on the floor. There was blood all around him, and I scooped down quickly, and slowly positioned myself where he was resting on my knees, holding him up as the blood was coming out from the top left corner above his eye and from the top of the nose and out of his nose. I kept grabbing tissues to try and stop the bleeding as he was shaking. I was so afraid he might go into shock and lose consciousness and I kept praying to Padre Pio and St Francis and Archangel Raphael. I also telephoned my younger brother who lived close by. My dad said, I think we should call an ambulance. I was holding him up against my knee, continuing to apply pressure above his eye, while he was applying pressure over his nose, and I was speaking with the ambulance dispatcher who was with us on the phone until the ambulance arrived. I had never experienced this before and was definitely shaken up though my adrenaline had kicked into fifth gear. When the ambulance came I quickly ran upstairs and woke up my mother and told her what had happened and the ambulance would be taking dad to emergency and then put on my jeans and a top and went with my dad to emergency. They kept him overnight. I was so afraid and was so glad I was there at the house so I could hear him calling my name. Thankfully we were able to
go home and celebrate his 90th birthday on New Year’s Eve a week later.

*Journal 41, January 7, 2016*

I feel like I am missing elements in my body.

*Journal 42, January 8, 2016*

What am I looking for? I feel like I am looking for something though I don’t know what it is? I am searching for something: the perfect song; a divinely answered message through a card reading; the ultimate answer, just waiting to be discovered. Why do I always feeling like something is missing? As I now listen to Henryk Gorecki’s (1992) Symphony No. 3 I am being touched by the universe unfolding; a tender farewell; a nostalgic yearning; grabbing at my heart; my life, my life, deeply touched by this tremendously beautiful music; the notes so perfectly put together. I feel lost and want to be found by meaning and beauty. Please find and save me. This is my prayer as I listen and yearn for depth, for a beauty of some sort of truth. Why do I feel like I am not a part of this world; I am separate and I want to scream, I am here. I am.

*Journal 43, January 9, 2016*

I went to see a certified hand analyst, another term for palm reader. She was very interesting and verified a few of my own understandings of myself. She said I was a Seeker and an Illuminator. She also said I was stuck in my head, and suffered from ruminating, and because of it ended up not finishing many projects I started. She also said that I brought light, illumination; to many people I came in contact with.

The image of the Hermit is how she described Illuminators. She said I was both air and fire. The image used of a medieval man carrying a lantern up steps to illuminate.
Figure 6 shows a drawing I created of a female hermit carrying a lantern. I am the hermit.

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 6. Picture and drawing by Gabriella of the Hermit.*

The hand reader said I had a rare gift marker of Persephone, saver of lost souls. I remember reading about this mythological and archetypal figure as a teenager and always felt a kinship with her, especially about her having to visit the underworld of Hades. I naturally delve deep and feel as though I am somehow a bridge between both worlds. My Life Purpose is School of Peace—Bringer of Peace. The negative side was that I feared being in my body. Need to find inner peace in myself rather than searching outside for it. Life Purpose for me is being a Healer. I will find my tribe when I start practicing my healing modality. I also have issues of Power where I am being overpowered by others. My soul life purpose is being a Path Shower.

As I shared earlier, I have always been drawn to the mystical and esoteric. Something about the ethereal claims my attention. The problem with being a spiritual seeker
with all these attributes and “gifts” who is also highly sensitive, is that it does not create anything of real substance. Actually, that is not entirely true. I have just been shown examples that because of my intuition, and awareness of subtleties, I am able to know when something is off and needs attention. Many times I will notice what others miss and sometimes these small nuances and seemingly insignificant details can make a real difference in people’s lives. At the same time, being so intensely attuned to what is off and missing only reinforces what is off and missing in my own life. This is where a healing paradigm is calling an awakening in consciousness. I need to recognize myself in order to move beyond, towards self-acceptance and the ability to stand in my own skin. The ultimate question to ask myself is: Am I evolving as a human being? And what might that look like as a highly sensitive intuitive empath? As a conduit for receiving changes in internal and external environment my intuition can see a subtle movement and shift in consciousness where the soulful recognizes the signs that are calling to be read.

Heuristic Self-Dialogue 3

(David Bowie is dead)

– **Gabriella:** I am affected by the death of David Bowie. The shock of hearing he died in the early morning hours. I couldn’t believe it. Why can I not make sense of life?

– **Gabby:** It all seems so messy. It all feels so ugly and lonely.

– **Gabriella:** But why does it affect you personally.

– **Gabby:** It is the shock of death. Being startled by loss is so difficult to process. Like when Lily was hit by a vehicle and the shock of the phone call in the middle of grocery shopping to go to the vet’s office where my husband would take her. As I was driving I was praying to please not let her die. And then when we were there and the vet said her
pelvis was fractured and it would need time 6 weeks to heal.

There was no need to fly her off to Edmonton as they could handle the situation in Yellowknife. He had given her painkillers and he said for us to go home.

– **Gabriella:** Though that wasn’t the end of it.

– **Gabby:** No, it wasn’t. In an hour the Vet called our home and I heard my husband cry out, no, how, what happened? And the vet said it was too much for her and she went into shock. There was nothing they could do.

**Journals 44-48**

*Figure 7. Picture of my beautiful father in nature which he loved.*

**Journal 44, January 19, 2016**

My father (see Figure 7) passed away in the early morning hours of January 19, 2016.

When my cell phone rang in my office I was in a deep sleep. Running from the
bedroom I picked up the phone, and walked over to the stairs so as not to wake up my husband.

My younger brother said dad is dead. I felt sick to my stomach and grasped the banister on the stair case. I gasped as the shock hit hard and even though I had been preparing myself for years of when I would have to hear these inevitable and painfully inalterable words, I went white. Looking back, I would give almost anything to be able to have his energy back. I still can’t believe he is gone. With his passing, it feels like he has taken something that we both shared away with him. The piece of him that he shared with me is gone. The world has lost another beautiful soul. My fragile and majestic father, as loving as the dependable sun rise and as deep as the moon. What am I mourning? I will never be able to share our experience again.

The story we shared as father and daughter is written; the book is closed, the end. The in-between where I loved to exist—the place and space of potential—the future possibility of my dad and I, exists no longer; unless we can continue our relationship—our story, from another level—another plane. I will wait and hope.

While on a plane from Vancouver to Toronto to see my family on the day my father died the thought that death is freedom came to mind, freedom, because he would sometimes say that his life was like a prison sentence, day in and out, having to go to the hospital for dialysis treatments. Now he is free. His soul is in the light. My father is a diamond.

Journal 45, February 26, 2016

On the flight back home to Vancouver from Toronto, I thought about the words my dad spoke to me when I was a teen, that I was neither fish nor meat. The reality is that
I am in fact neither, I am my own unique alchemically, evolving, composite. I am more than I ever thought possible, not in the idea of material or accomplishments of goals, but more in relation to energy. Energy and alchemy: the sun, moon, and stars, like music and sound. Though even with this reframed thought, there is an emptiness that washes over me, a dull ache that won’t leave.

*Journal 46, March 6, 2016*

I am always seeking to be saved. Yes, that’s it. I have been seeking to be saved. And now I feel like I am broken open.

Open to the full realization that I have always lived out of others reality of me. Whether it was though my parents, my jobs, my relationships or my spouse, I have never lived life solely for me. Is this normal? Do most people who are afraid, live lives for others and not for themselves? I am afraid of being alone. I am afraid of being abandoned.

This loss that follows me everywhere I go, that never allows me to make any decision where I will be abandoned, is the reason I have never lived a life of authenticity. I must have learned this lesson early in life and it has hindered me my entire life. I thought it was about the fear of my father dying and the pain of loss that I would feel. Though now that he is gone, something in me is being called forth, a yearning for uncovering the truth; unfolding the layers of unlived years, of authenticity, the alchemical source of the philosopher’s stone. Does this have anything to do with alchemy? It certainly has to do with doing research with soul in mind. What would happen if I lived from my authentic core? Would I be alone? Would I finally go mad or maybe I would finally not feel like an imposter. I would finally not live a life of
quiet desperation and could finally come out of hiding, no longer lingering in the unseen.

_Journal 47, March 8, 2016_

Nothing makes sense anymore. My sensitivity and how I am affected by so many things is so very tiring. I don’t know.

_Journal 48, March 9, 2016_

Stream of consciousness: Simplicity; alchemy; psychoid archetype; imaginal realm; shaman; being HSP; thin skinned; beyond the veil; tunnel of light; purple velvet jacket; velveteen rabbit; sleep dream image; the Alchemist. The feeling in the pit of my stomach of missing—it aches—the lack of it is so archaic—ancient—ancestral.

My sweet dad is gone—yearning to find where he has gone and pull him back together from corpse no longer buried in the ground. Bringing him back to life—mixing the alchemical ingredients to create life from death. The heuristic search of finding the missing heartbeat that stopped suddenly in mid movement. The alchemy of aching sorrow; this loss is one that I have felt eons and times before.

What consoles me is the belief that my father was accompanied to heaven by beautiful angels. The painting shown in Figure 8 is my own watercolour of two angels in flight accompanying my father to heaven.

Nature is where I feel most at home and it is where I am healed. “No matter how isolated you are and how lonely you feel, if you do your work truly and conscientiously, unknown friends will come and seek you” (Jung citing an Alchemist, Letters Vol. II, p. 595).
Figure 8. Picture from my painting of spirits accompanying flight to heaven and quote on individuation.

**Conclusion**

I love never endings. And I never normally go through the proverbial front door. Usually I enter through the side or back door. Maybe it is because I hardly ever follow a linear route, preferring to go sideways and stepping back, taking backward glances and using my peripheral sight, I accept the subtle and open-ended invitations. Even now as I am winding this thesis down, I am forever looking for what I might have missed, what I forgot to include, or what needs beckoning or attention. Since writing about my sweet Lily, we are blessed to have found another SPCA beauty called Molly. As well as being a seeker and holistic, I feel an affinity with spiritual consciousness and the beauty and the magical enchantment of being a highly sensitive introverted intuitive empathic alchemist.

And at the end of it all, through all of this introspection and reverie, where am I now? Who am I after this journey as an alchemical hermeneutic and heuristic researcher?
What am I left with? Where is my home? The idea of home is an important metaphor and concept for me, metaphysically and existentially. Like when I think about the story in the *Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939) and Dorothy finally realizes that home is a place inside of her. And she repeats “there’s no place like home,” it is like she has found her own philosopher’s stone. Even she took the spiral journey to the Land of Oz, the yellow brick road that brought her home to herself. Like my own journey, the writing of this thesis as a highly sensitive researcher has not been a direct route. The once upon a time of fairy tales and myths, always end up taking a journey back or forward to a place called home. Though what is certain is that a journey must take place either in an imaginal or tacit dimension.

When a person dies, does their story end, and all that is left is our memories of them? Or perhaps as a sensitive intuitive empath, in the case of my father, is there a way, a way to heuristically discover a new way home where we can still talk and share our new ways of being and becoming. Romanyshyn (1999) wrote:

For so long I had lived with my grief as if I were a ghost, an invisible presence haunting the outer margins of the world. But now in this moment, in the very darkest hour of the night, I felt witnessed by the world, seen in my sorrow, no longer completely alone. And out of this darkness, I heard these words, spoken by the night itself, by the ocean and the blackness surrounding me: “We are all so far from home.” (p. 9)

As a wounded researcher with soul in mind using alchemical hermeneutics, I constantly felt the pull of another topic throughout writing this thesis, that of death and loss. Maybe this pull is not really separate from my phenomenological view as a highly sensitive highly intuitive empath. Maybe it is also a message to try and focus on what is, rather than
what is missing. And celebrate who I am, just as the word Yahweh means “I am who I am.” And with this acceptance of who I am and what is, since I have exposed myself for others to see, maybe I can stand in the light rather than present a reflection of what is unseen. What grows in the light evolves differently than what grows in the darkness. At the same time, as an introvert, I do see things differently than an extrovert. I can hold back a little and wait, comfortably seeing through the lens of shadows and emotionally cutting lines, like the deep and beautiful long notes of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki’s Symphony No. 3, Op. 36: I. Lento. Here I am as I am.

**Reflective Reverie**

Seeing myself from an alchemical stance—a distant star envelopes me and takes away the yearning. In the alchemy of my subconscious, algorithms—surrender-release—music—song—dance—time. I must nurture myself—pause and reflect. I am the monk in a forest with a round pewter door handle, where the fairies, like sparks, dance as I go into my creative chamber, my ecosantuaries. Soft purple velvet crocuses are coming up through the dark charred embers, swirling like faint stars. Inside and through the corridors, chambers are lit with bridled joy as Satan sits laughing. He was mistaken, lost, and now is found through forgiveness and healing. Satan is forgiven and healed. He is now able to look at the Creator and accepts himself. I am the one who needs to forgive and accept myself—no one else (see Figure 9).
Figure 9. Pictures of and by Gabriella moulding of philosopher’s stone.
Chapter Five: Where Do We Go From Here?

Looking back on my thesis, I am reminded of Orpheus’s infamous backward glance, the “searching again that is a dis-membering of the ego’s hold upon the work in order to re-member the unfinished business of the soul of the work” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 60). This “unfinished business of the soul of the work” as a highly sensitive researcher and educator is an opportunity to notice that something else is being called forth, something that might not easily be seen through academic lens. Throughout my thesis, I have been delivering a personal discourse through reveries, dreams, journals, transference, and self-dialogues using alchemical hermeneutics and heuristic research methodologies. Having laboured longer than the 9 months of gestation and delivery, this thesis has been a long and slow process. I have struggled with the idea “that dreams do not wait forever” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 122).

Through my deliberations on loss and being unseen, I must move forward and take a leap of faith, instead of holding on and staying in the dark. I feel enriched having had the opportunity to study Robert Romanyshyn’s (1999, 2009, 2012, 2013) work. He has added such richness to my own personal outlook and understanding. And it has raised my own consciousness, opening a healing dimension for my life as an educator and highly sensitive intuitive empath. As a spiritual and mystical seeker, there was something about delving deeper because of the chosen methodologies that made the process enriching and even blessed. The synchronicity in these thesis pages, and alchemical meetings of Orpheus, Eurydice, and Persephone, sharing the journey towards the underworld and unconscious; as well as the spiral manoeuvring of Dorothy, like me, were all trying to find their way home.

As part of my thesis, I chose to draw a female hermit and I was surprised how easily the drawing came to me. I think if I would have spent more time drawing throughout this
process of thesis writing, it might have been easier to enter into transference dialogues. Not surprisingly, Romanyshyn (2013) advocates that for the soul to enter into the work there must be time for play and reverie (p. 137).

I noticed that when I drew the figure, I stopped thinking and just allowed my hand to draw naturally. It also brought to mind a few dreams I had where I was naturally drawing and painting, and in each dream I would be surprised at how good the artwork was that I had created. I had not given these dreams too much importance until now. Maybe this is another alchemical gem that has surfaced thanks to alchemical hermeneutics. The idea that many times we get in our own way is definitely true in my case. As I expressed in my thesis, I care too much about what others think. I think this is connected with how I undervalue myself. Dr. Elaine Aron (2010) wrote that “many people who are highly sensitive undervalue themselves, basically because they do not understand why they feel so different and think they have an invisible weakness or flaw” (p. 1).

Finding ways to move forward and accept myself rather than comparing or ranking myself with others is a positive resolution. In McNally’s (1982) doctoral dissertation *The Experience of Being Sensitive* referred to in Moustakas (1990) work, she presents “two themes—the pain and anguish in sensitivity, and the awakening of wonder, awe, and feelings of love—” (p. 68). The following comes from the positive attributes of being sensitive:

The person is touched inwardly, and there is a flow of life. The body is full and alive, glowing and at ease. Love, awe and wonder are the major feelings. There is an oneness, a peace and a light, upward energy. In a state of heightened awareness, the senses are sharpened and the person feels accepting, confident, strong, and important. It is a moment of inner awakening and of being alive. From this deepening and
unfolding of the inner self, the person is moved toward a fundamental sense of communion with others. (As cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 69)

The calling towards a holistic and healing paradigm where the active imagination and contemplative soul feel at home is one that I hear, and that strikes a deep resonating chord. I see there is a need for continued research, including more of an in-depth perspective about the temperament of sensitivity and spirituality. I believe there needs to be an awakening, a paradigm shift in how we view education.

Through the research of this thesis, I came across many titles that defined my temperament: Highly Sensitive Person (Aron, 1996); Spiritually Sensitive Person (Blackstone, 2012); Intuitive Sensitive Person (Sawyer, 2015); Empathic Sensitivity (Carlin, 2014); and last but not least, the Quiet Introvert (Cain, 2012). This following quotation from Susan Cain (2012) encapsulates so much of how I have felt personally in the world of life and Education when it comes to the glorification of the extrovert:

It makes sense that so many introverts hide even from themselves. We live with a value system that I call the Extrovert Ideal—the omnipresent belief that the ideal self is gregarious, alpha, and comfortable in the spotlight. The archetypal extrovert prefers action to contemplation, risk-taking to heed-taking, certainty to doubt. He favors quick decisions, even at the risk of being wrong. (p. 4)

Cain (2012) adds that regarding introversion and sensitivity, society regards it as a “second-class personality trait, somewhere between a disappointment and pathology” (p. 4).

I came to another important realization about my story, and the story of others that I hold in my mind. Just as I am evolving and my story has changed, the same holds true for the story I have of others. How I perceive others and myself can change. And that is the healing
paradigm shift, the alchemical restorying. My story is an evolution that draws from elements known and unknown; elements that have not been created yet and are waiting to come into full consciousness. This healing paradigm shift also applies to my definition of myself as a highly sensitive intuitive empath and seeker. I am not fixed by these definitions. They help to make sense of myself and communicate to the world, but they do not define me. I am still being birthed as an evolving human until I die. This brings to mind Freire’s (2001) idea that “The best starting point for such reflections is the unfinishedness of our human condition. It is in this consciousness that the very possibility of learning, of being educated, resides” (p. 66).

I see the need for a more soulful education and have noted this gap in education circles. Even though I am in the minority, parents and educators should be aware that people like me exist. I want to acknowledge that holistic educators are bridging this gap, though it still needs to be more a part of present day curriculums and mainstream education. I was grateful to have had a few teachers in elementary and secondary schools who encouraged my creative and divergent thinking. They saw the spark in their students and from their own oriented depth, compassion, and empathy allowed us to see our own values and insights beyond the value of grades and tests.

I cannot stress enough the importance of allowing for a divergent unique voice in education circles. This is where being highly sensitive and an intuitive empath can be incorporated.

Moving forward from here, I am not the same person I was when I started this thesis. Coming out into the light, revealing what was once unconscious, veiled by doubt and unworthiness, I have opened a new door and perhaps, like Persephone, I can venture back and forth when needed. I am thin-skinned, and I am deeply affected and touched by the seen
and unseen. As I give a deep sigh, one of many, and exhale, I carry the lantern and light my way with the light of the moon.

*Figure 10.* Female Hermit, by Gabriella Lappano.
References


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USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM).


United States: MGM.


Appendix

Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE (HSP Scale)

INSTRUCTIONS: This questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential. Answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale:

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1. Are you easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input?
2. Do you seem to be aware of subtleties in your environment?
3. Do other people’s moods affect you?
4. Do you tend to be more sensitive to pain?
5. Do you find yourself needing to withdraw during busy days, into bed or into a darkened room or any place where you can have some privacy and relief from stimulation?
6. Are you particularly sensitive to the effects of caffeine?
7. Are you easily overwhelmed by things like bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens close by?
8. Do you have a rich, complex inner life?
9. Are you made uncomfortable by loud noises?
10. Are you deeply moved by the arts or music?
11. Does your nervous system sometimes feel so frazzled that you just have to go off by yourself?
12. Are you conscientious?
13. Do you startle easily?
14. Do you get rattled when you have a lot to do in a short amount of time?
15. When people are uncomfortable in a physical environment do you tend to know what needs to be done to make it more comfortable (like changing the lighting or the seating)?
16. Are you annoyed when people try to get you to do too many things at once?
17. Do you try hard to avoid making mistakes or forgetting things?
18. Do you make a point to avoid violent movies and TV shows?
19. Do you become unpleasantly aroused when a lot is going on around you?

20. Does being very hungry create a strong reaction in you, disrupting your concentration or mood?

21. Do changes in your life shake you up?

22. Do you notice and enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, and works of art?

23. Do you find it unpleasant to have a lot going on at once?

24. Do you make it a high priority to arrange your life to avoid upsetting or overwhelming situations?

25. Are you bothered by intense stimuli, like loud noises or chaotic scenes?

26. When you must compete or be observed while performing a task, do you become so nervous or shaky that you do much worse than you would otherwise?

27. When you were a child, did parents or teachers seem to see you as sensitive or shy?