

# *An 'Educated Heart' and Teaching Practice*

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**ABSTRACT:** One might refer to this as a simple paper—simple, but not to be interpreted as sub-standard in any lesser or derogatory sense. Rather, what we share is a reflection of sorts, a reflection that draws from our lived experience as lifelong, adult learners and adult educators. In this reflection, we speak ‘from’ the heart and ‘about’ the heart—about the interconnectivity of teachers and learners in the teaching-learning dynamic, and about the foundational needs of all members in any learning community to feel valued, validated, significant, and included. Guided by ‘heart’ in our teaching practice, we aim to illuminate and reclaim the critical importance of ‘the relational,’ between teacher and learner, in support of a learning community that provides safe and challenging spaces that invite inner exploration, critical reflection, and deep inquiry. Drawing from the words and wisdom of Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach*, we reflect on heartfelt learning moments as lifelong, adult learners and educators. We then extend our reflections by acknowledging the courage it takes and some of the challenges that call forth thoughtful navigation when we open to be guided by an ‘educated heart.’ We speak to how this courage may provide a pathway to spaces and places of learning where an educated heart may prove to be the most valuable resource that any teacher might develop and be guided by, in support of our own learning and the learning of those we are privileged to journey with along the way.

**RESUME:** Cet article peut paraître banal. Banal certes mais il ne peut être sous-estimé dans un sens moindre ou désobligéant. Ce qui ressort plutôt de cette analyse est tiré de notre expérience vécue en tant qu'apprenants et enseignants adultes. Nous nous y exprimons « du fond du cœur » et nous en parlons. Il est question de communication entre les enseignants et les étudiants dans un cadre d'apprentissage et d'enseignement dont l'approche est dynamique, et des besoins essentiels de tous ceux qui constituent un groupe d'apprenants pour qu'ils se sentent valorisés, reconnus, appréciés et intégrés. Le “cœur” représente le fil conducteur de notre pédagogie. Le rôle prépondérant du relationnel entre enseignants et apprenants est particulièrement mis en valeur afin de soutenir une communauté d'apprenants qui offre un environnement à la fois rassurant et à la fois complexe, et qui ouvre ainsi ses portes sur une analyse intérieure, une réflexion critique et une connaissance intrinsèque. A partir des observations et du discernement de Parker Palmer dans son ouvrage intitulé *The Courage to Teach*, nous; apprenants et enseignants adultes, réfléchissons mûrement sur les moments intenses de l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie. Nous approfondissons ensuite nos réflexions en reconnaissant qu'il faille du courage et que certains défis exigent une orientation judicieuse lorsque nous acceptons d'être guidés par ‘les instincts du cœur.’ Nous ouvrons ensuite ce volet sur le courage qui peut mener à des environnements et des endroits

pour apprendre et où les instincts du cœur peuvent se révéler être la ressource la plus précieuse; celle qu'aucun professeur ne pourrait élaborer et en être inspirée pour défendre notre propre instruction et celle de ceux que nous privilégiions tout au long de ce parcours.

Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The methods used by these weavers vary widely ... the connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts – meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, and shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart – and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able to that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning and living require.

—Parker Palmer (2007, pp. 11-12)  
*The Courage to Teach*

### *Introduction*

We continue to be guided and inspired by the wisdom of Parker Palmer who published the first edition of *The Courage to Teach* in 1998. Parker spoke to the passion that informs and drives excellence in teaching practice and to the courage it takes to render oneself publicly vulnerable, as educators, when teaching from the heart. Palmer (2007) also maintained the critical importance of “relational trust” (p. xvi) in our quest to co-create healthy, functional, safe, and challenging community space and place with our students, and to the power and potential of relational trust in “offset[ting] external factors that are normally thought to be the primary determinants of a school’s capacity to serve students well” (p. xvi). We believe that relational trust has the power and potential to mitigate tensions and challenges brought about by external factors that impact our work with undergraduate and graduate students in a School of Education. As adult educators and professors, we have learned that relational trust can only be achieved through living out thoughtful, purposeful, and courageous intentions, processes, and practices in the day-to-day work that informs and encompasses our teaching, research, and service.

To render ourselves vulnerable is to respond to the invitation, as teachers and facilitators of learning, to possess the willingness and ability to explore and make meaning of our own values, beliefs, assumptions, and practices. Parker Palmer (2007) referred to “explor[ing] the inner landscape of [our] own life [and to] learning how to negotiate that tricky terrain in a way that keeps trust alive” (p. xvi). We passionately believe that it takes courage to explore these inner landscapes and an educated heart to guide the inner exploration of students whom we are privileged to journey with along the way. Ultimately, what we speak of is the quest to live as undivided academics: where our inner beings and our outer actions as educators come together in such a way that “meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 56). Our reflections in this paper are guided by these values, beliefs, and intentions.

### *Heart Reflections*

Recognizing “the human heart [as] the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 2007, p. 4) provided a compass, of sorts, one to guide our work and relationships with one another, with our students, and with our colleagues. Beyond a doubt, the culture and context of university life and learning are challenging and do not always or easily support staying true and aligned to this commitment. We deeply believe, however, that relationships are the essence and bedrock of our work and that this work provides us great privilege and opportunity in support of our own, ongoing growth and development, not only as adult educators, but also as lifelong, adult learners. We remain grateful for the moments we have experienced along the way – moments that have touched our own hearts deeply and other moments that were sometimes uncomfortable, challenging us to step beyond the safe and the familiar to be present and to attend to the hearts and human needs of others.

### *Colleen*

It was July 1998. The letter read that I was to arrive on campus for 9 am to begin my first course as a newly minted, graduate student. I was filled with excitement and trepidation. What had I done? Was I ready for this? Who else would be there? What would be expected of me? Could I write an academic paper? Did I even know what an academic paper looked like? It had been so long! Would I have anything in common with others? Was I admitted on a technicality? Were they low in applications? Is this why I got in? Is it possible that a mistake had been made? Needless to say, my cup of self-esteem and confidence was not running over at that particular time in my life.

I packed a light lunch, vacillated on what might be proper attire, packed a pencil case and backpack of fresh supplies, and drove the 13.8 kilometers from home to campus – I had taken several practice runs to ensure I had the timing down perfectly. I was 46 years old, far to old to be feeling this angst and anxiety!

With every kilometer, I lost years off my age. When I arrived on campus, I felt like a 13 year old attempting to mitigate tensions that resided somewhere between connecting with some modicum of confidence and a feeling of complete despair. I eyed a desk near the back of the room. Perhaps no one would notice that I had 10 years over most others who had already arrived.

Needless to say, it was all about me in that I failed to notice a few others, closer to my own age, entering the class.

A young woman sensed my feelings of angst, caution, and despair. She sauntered over and with a warm smile said, “Hello, my name is Joan.” She extended a welcoming hand. She looked young enough to be my daughter. I knew I was too old for this. I responded to her welcome, “Are you as nervous as I am? I hope that whoever is teaching this course is worth all of the anxiety I am feeling at this moment.” She smiled … she paused … she then informed me that she was one of two people team-teaching the course. Oh my God, what had I done! I contemplated melting into the floorboards. I was failing miserably. It was only 10 minutes to nine!

Joan was wise enough to know that the worst thing she could have done at that moment would be to have walked away. Instead, she put her hand on my elbow and guided me gently to the coffee corner on the other side of the room. I recall her kind and thoughtful words as she shared her own ‘nerves’ that always ‘kicked in’ at the beginning of every course. She said that she was likely more nervous than I. She then asked, “What attracted you to graduate studies … what gets you excited about learning and about this program?” I shared that I had been working in a vocational college for several years and that I loved working with adult learners who had experienced many challenges whilst navigating the rocky terrain in having returned to school. I still remember her response; “You have so much to offer, Colleen … so much rich experience. We have a lot to learn from one another. This is exactly where you are meant to be at this moment. So, take your time and enjoy the journey.” I could have hugged her at that moment. Perhaps I did. I don’t remember.

An elderly woman soon joined us to say hello. She had an unruly mass of white hair and the loveliest, twinkling eyes. She introduced herself as ‘Eila’. I gauged her to be in her mid 70s. Thank goodness, there was someone older than me! She and Joan were the course instructors. I would soon come to understand that Eila was the senior/lead professor and Joan her TA. Joan was finishing up her PhD and Eila was mentoring her as a new Assistant Professor. Eila admitted she was both excited and a bit anxious about the class. Did I hear her correctly? These women were highly educated academics! Their role as course professors should leave them feeling confident and comfortable, should it not?

Eila then shared that, although she had been teaching for 45 plus years, she always felt this way at the onset of a course. She acknowledged that every group of learners brought her new insights and opportunities for growth and learning. It was her hope that she could rise to the occasion, be worthy, and meet the needs of eager graduate students, like myself – students she would mentor through the course and throughout our program. I remember being taken aback by this expression of openness and humility. What did I possibly have to offer this wise woman, a senior professor in graduate studies for so many years? Yet, she was exuding nothing less than authentic, candid, and heartfelt sincerity and vulnerability. Within a brief window of time, these two women had opened their hearts to welcome me in. I did belong here. No mistake had been made.

I was then introduced to another student who had just arrived. I recognized the 'deer in the headlights' look on this newcomer's face as she stood, motionless, in the doorway. I walked over and extended my hand and welcome. Her name was Dianne. She appeared frozen by the same feelings that I was experiencing. Did all of this happen almost 15 years ago!

Yes, the course was intense; there was nothing light or superficial about the content, process, or dynamics that ensued. We met daily for a full two weeks. We shared our stories, experiences, and significant learning moments – our life narratives. We made meaning of our experiences and made connections to paradigms, theories, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual lenses. Ontologies and epistemologies were explored. I struggled to keep all of it straight in my mind. This was a new language to articulate what we felt, believed, perceived, and experienced – a language of adult education and adult learning. We explored the literature and muddled our way through academic rhetoric that felt foreign. In retrospect, it was significant that we were all on a first name basis – professors and students alike. One might consider this a minor point but, within the context of our learning environment, this significantly impacted levelling some of the power differentials that typically exist between professor and student.

Indeed, power differences are unavoidable within this context as Eila and Joan crafted the course syllabus and assigned grades. They were paid to teach and we paid a pretty penny to take the course. Yes, there were differences in roles and responsibilities. With this said, this reality never impeded the relational aspects and dynamics of our interactions. We were never nudged or prompted to explore or to share anything beyond what Eila and Joan were willing to do themselves. And, the course was rigorous.

We remained eager to continue the dialogue well beyond the end of class time. This translated into conversations that extended into the 'wee hours of the morning' on more than a few occasions.

Although we all had our eye on grades we aimed to achieve, this being the reality and culture of higher education, attainment of an 'A' grade soon became a distant backdrop against a more prominent and meaningful agenda that focused on co-creating community, developing a sense of trust and safety with one another, and making commitments in support of our own and others' learning. Within safe space we found the courage to step beyond our comfortable and familiar to explore new, often ambiguous, and messy ground. A desire to dig deep, to risk, to challenge, and to ask the bigger questions ignited – questions that probed and prompted a deeper depth of inquiry.

I felt alive in ways that I had not experienced for quite some time. Passions were rekindled; new friendships were formed; and experiences were revisited, reflected upon, and understood in new and meaningful ways. New pathways were unfolding...new beginnings.

I am now that professor, welcoming newcomers into the program. Many things change over time but some things never do – the glazed-over, 'deer in the headlights', frozen stare, transfixed on the faces of students as they walk through the door, has transcended the hands of time. The words of Joan and Eila are tucked away in my heart; they are always close at hand. I often wonder what became of them. Is Eila still alive? She would be in her 90s by now. Did they have any clue as to how their warmth, wisdom, and welcoming spirits supported my transition from neonate graduate student to near elder (in age), Associate Professor, this being my learning journey of the last 15 years? I continue to carry the wisdom and the educated hearts of these two women with me, always. They serve as my mentors, gurus, and guides.

*Janet*

Reflecting on Colleen's experience of entering her first class brought me back to my first few days as a graduate student. While she worried about being too old to begin graduate studies, mine was the opposite experience. I thought I was far too young and too inexperienced! Despite my misgivings, I still felt compelled to apply. Much to my amazement, I was accepted into the Master of Education program in Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

The first day of school arrived all too quickly. It was a warm July morning; anxiety took root as I waited to board the train for the 100-kilometre journey to Toronto. While this, twice-weekly, train trip would soon feel like a normal part of my day-to-day, I wrestled with what I had gotten myself into – I was in my late 20s and three months pregnant with our first child, I pondered some of the same questions that Colleen did about 'ability' and 'measuring up' to the academic rigours of a graduate program. I was nervous. I fretted about my limited experience as an adult educator. I had only a few years of teaching under my belt – one year as a novice, teaching 'English as a Second Language' to education students at a university in China, and one additional year at an adult learning centre in Ontario. I would be a new mother in a few short months. How would I balance everything? How would I manage?

As I reflect back on my first day of class, 'hospitality' quickly comes to mind. Palmer (1998) reminded us that, as educators, we are called to foster openness and hospitality so that learners might courageously venture into oft-charged spaces of learning. In other words, as educators and learners, we hold the paradoxical tension of needing the security of safe and warm relationships in order to venture into the risky business of charting new learning terrain that might tip our world, nudging us to move in new directions. On that very first day, I experienced this gift of hospitality from both my professor and my fellow students – through their gestures of kindness and words of acceptance and inclusion. This made all the difference. Time and time again, when feeling especially vulnerable, I was reassured that I 'was' worthy; that I had much to offer, and that I 'was' welcome.

Evidence of hospitality emerged during the round of introductions in my afternoon class. Before the intros began, I had located an empty seat in the circle. I gingerly sat down, looking around at the faces of so many smiling strangers. I thought to myself, "What an impressive group of people. They all look so smart! I'm sure they each have tremendous background in adult education." As I listened to concise and articulate sketches of their diverse experiences in adult learning, to their questions, and to the learning aspirations they brought to this course, I became increasingly intimidated. Not only did they look smart – they were smart! Finally, and with feelings of trepidation, I took my turn. I, very hesitantly, outlined my background as an educator of adults and, apologetically, indicated that I really did not feel that I had many deep or interesting experiences to contribute. Lynn, our professor, smiled and gently said, "I really do appreciate the unique background you bring to our class and I'm sure that you have much to contribute to this community. We're so glad you are here." I could tell he meant it and, with those simple words of welcome, he offered me the warm blanket of hospitality I needed to take those tentative first steps into my graduate program.

I began to feel at ease up until the time came to review the course outline. One course assignment was to be completed in pairs. In pairs! Who would want to work with me? Again, my doubt about 'worthiness' reared its ugly head, only to be quickly erased by another gesture of hospitality. Just as our mid-class break commenced, a classmate approached me – a woman with whom I was particularly awe-struck during class introductions. She described her formal leadership position in a Continuing Education department at a university in Western Canada. She said that she had appreciated my introduction and thought we might make a great team. Would I consider working with her to complete the 'pairs assignment'? I readily agreed. I felt welcomed and valued, yet again, on my first day.

Colleen referred to power differentials between instructors and students. Yes, formal divisions, those defined and determined by roles and responsibilities, were present. However, she eloquently spoke about the movement ‘beyond’ power to a welcoming space of relationship, safety, and reciprocity. A space where, beyond differentiated roles and responsibilities, all were recognized and valued as ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’. We all have knowledge to share. We all have much to learn from one another. This, too, was my experience. From my first class and throughout the term, I noticed, with gratitude, that we shared power with each other. Lynn, like Eila and Joan, had set the stage for this type of engagement and, because of his efforts, initially and through the course, we continued to uncover the riches of praxis as we explored new theories through the lens of our diverse perspectives and experiences. Returning to the completion of the ‘paired assignment’ with my newfound friend, it would have been easy for me to defer to her significant expertise and, in turn, willingly hand over the reigns of power. Actually, I expected that this would happen and, in all honesty, I admit to welcoming the prospect – just tell me what to do! And yet, as I look back on the experience of completing this first assignment, what I recall is my partner’s generosity of spirit. She was keenly focused on what I had to say and, more importantly, genuinely interested in my story. She brought out the best in me. In turn, I hope that I was able to reciprocate.

Looking back on my years as a graduate student, I too felt nurtured and supported. I know I was very fortunate as Lynn and my other professors, throughout my journey, understood that we all come to a place of learning with hopes, fears, goals, and questions. As adult learners, we are vulnerable – highly attuned to gestures of power and intimidation and, conversely, to acts of kindness, generosity, inclusivity, and hospitality.

Now, I am on ‘the other side.’ I am that professor offering students the gift of hospitality as we, collectively, take up the learning journey offered within each course. While university pressures tell us to pick up the pace of learning, I deliberately slow down. I take the time to connect with each learner and to nurture the roots of that initial relationship. My focus is to communicate to each person that they are significant and a valued member in our adult learning community. I want each individual to experience the warm blanket of hospitality that was wrapped around me by my wise professors, so that they too will feel supported and encouraged to experience the freedom, the joy, the highs, and the lows that deep and engaged learning entails.

### *A Spirituality of Care, Compassion, and Community*

Parker Palmer spoke to the courage it takes to keep an open heart and to the interconnectivity and dependence that intellect, emotion, and spirit have on the other if we, as teachers, educators, and facilitators of learning seek to embrace, connect with, and respond to, in the wholeness of self and to the wholeness of humankind.

By *intellectual* I mean the way we think about teaching and learning—the form and content of our concepts of how people know and learn, of the nature of our students and our subjects. By *emotional* I mean the way we and our students feel as we teach and learn—feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us. By *spiritual* I mean the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching. (Palmer, 2007, p. 5).

Keeping an open heart may sometimes invite ridicule and judgment from others. One may be accused of being too soft, too personal, too open, and inevitably, too sensitive. Openness begets vulnerability and to be vulnerable is often perceived as weakness. To speak publicly of care, compassion, community, and of love, within the context and culture of academia, habituates a sense of discomfort for some – students and faculty alike. A colleague, when speaking to a large gathering of 350 students in lecture theatre was known to say, “I do not believe that establishing personal relationships with my students is foundational to the teaching and learning dynamic. I am here to teach; you are here to learn. All of this hype about teacher-student relationships is overrated and inappropriate.” We are saddened by this sentiment and ponder what fear or discomfort contributed to a senior professor feeling the need to separate himself from his students in this way and so quickly, at the commencement of a course. We say *fear* quite intentionally because, to exert such energy and intention to fragment and silo teacher-student relationships to this extent, one would likely be fearful of something and driven by a need to keep the self quite separate and potentially *safe from* students.

We also recognize that invitations and opportunities for deep, reciprocal learning are thwarted when a university culture devalues teaching and research that are guided by relational epistemologies and approaches, in favour of those that emphasize and reward independence, cognition, and an instrumental, mechanical, and rational orientation to teaching and learning.

We ourselves know it is risky business to cultivate pedagogies that honour different ways of knowing and being in the world, in our relationships with one another, and, particularly, when we venture into the arena of spirituality and adult learning. “Academics may fear that their spirituality will be ridiculed within the confines of academe as an embodied practice or discourse” (Shahjahan, 2005, p. 295). And yet, we are reminded, on a daily basis, that our students hunger for so much more. In a study by Astin, Austin and Lindholm (2010), researchers found that, for many undergraduate students, the underlying motivation for attending university was to reflect on the meaning and purpose in their life.

In turn, these students hoped that their experiences within their classes would help them to gain self-understanding and awareness so that they might grow spirituality.

### *Cultivating an Educated Heart*

Cultivating an educated heart cannot be reduced to tips and techniques. What we are advocating for invites us to dig much deeper, pointing to our quest to undivided lives as academics, where our inner and outer lives are congruent. Tisdell (2011) described this as the paradox of wisdom: we are trying to engage in the inner and transcendent cultivation of wisdom in order to reflect a practical wisdom in our daily life. We gently suggest that without doing this critical, inner work, we can become caught up in fast-paced ‘doing’ that our university demands of us; resulting in lives that are hurried, scattered, and possibility ‘soul emptying’. Even if our ‘doing’ is focused on a life of good works, Palmer (1990) spoke of a particular action – action required to cultivate and sustain relationships with our students. He asserted that this action would ultimately be an outward manifestation of our inner power. To put it simply, attending to the welcoming and inclusion needs of students who enter our classrooms at the onset of a course or program is not a ‘one-off’ event. This is an ongoing, daily practice, informed and shaped by the values we hold, by our beliefs and assumptions and, ultimately, by our willingness to open and embrace self-love. Only from a place of self-love are we able to offer authenticity of presence, a spirit of welcoming, and an unconditional loving regard to and for others.

It is important *not* to confuse self-love, in the way that we speak of it here, with misleading interpretations aligned to subversive individualism, narcissism, lust, or that which supports socially-destructive, anti-social forces (Den Uyl, 1983). To extend this notion, if we understand self-love and love of other as being antithetically located, they would then reside at opposite ends of a continuum. Indeed, locating self-love and other-love as opposing forces has deep roots in philosophy and theology. This is too simplistic an interpretation, however, in that:

There has been too much uncritical rhetoric by scholars and lay persons alike about the ‘problem of self-love’. This rhetoric has been misleading, because it creates the impression that all that is needed for social harmony is to replace self-love with a more benevolent passion, or that self-love is a passion that uniquely requires regulation. (Den Uyl, 1983, p. 60)

Eric Fromm (1939b-e) took up taboos surrounding notions of self-love and otherness in his critique of Calvinistic theology, Kant philosophy, and others. Calvin’s theology regarded “man [as] essentially bad and powerless ... therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions” (Fromm, 1939b-e, p. 1). According to Calvin, the self is wicked, nothing, and sinful. Fromm (1939b-e) referred to this doctrine as “rooted in contempt and hatred for oneself” (Fromm, p. 1).

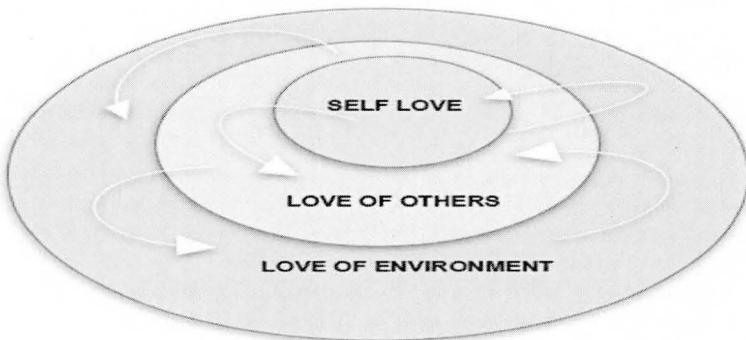
Kant also regarded a focus on self-love as a problem and attending to the happiness of others as a virtue. Fromm (1939b-e) believed, however, that Kant's philosophy conveyed "a greater respect for the integrity of the individual than did Calvin" (p. 2). Fromm elaborated on how these doctrines have permeated our social structures:

The doctrine that selfishness is the arch-evil that one has to avoid and that to love oneself excludes loving others is by no means restricted to theology and philosophy. It is one of the stock patterns used currently in home, school, church, movies, literature, and all the other instruments of social suggestion. 'Don't be selfish' is a sentence which has been pressed upon millions of children, generation after generation. It is hard to define what exactly it means. Consciously, most parents connect with it the meaning not to be egotistical, inconsiderate, without concern for others. Factually, they generally mean more than that. 'Not to be selfish' implies not to do what one wishes, to give up one's own wishes for the sake of those in authority; i.e., the parents, and later the authorities of society. 'Don't be selfish', in the last analysis, has the same ambiguity that we have seen in Calvinism. Aside from its obvious implication, it means, 'don't love yourself', 'don't be yourself', but submit your life to something more important than yourself, be it an outside power or the internationalization of that power as 'duty'. 'Don't be selfish' becomes one of the most powerful ideological weapons in suppressing spontaneity and the free development of personality. Under the pressure of this slogan one is asked for every sacrifice and for complete submission.

This picture, we must repeat, is in a certain sense one-sided. Beside the Doctrine that one should not be selfish, the opposite doctrine is propagandized in modern society: have your own advantage in mind, act according to what is best for you – and by doing so, you will also bring about the greatest advantage for all others ... [this] idea that the pursuit of individual egotism is the basis for the development of general welfare is the principle on which competitive capitalism has been built. (1939b-e, pp. 4-5)

By locating self-love as central and foundational to experiencing and living a deep sense of harmony, congruence, life balance and alignment, and by understanding self-love as being kind, caring, compassionate, and attentive to self, this spirit and energy abounds and ripples out to embrace our relationships with others and with all aspects of our environment.

Our own foundation of self-love also continues to be nourished and sustained.



The interconnectivity of all humankind and with all elements of our environment cannot be disputed when we open our hearts, intentionally, purposefully, non-judgementally, and forgivingly, to love ourselves. In other words, the self-love that we speak of here is not and cannot be contained; it spills forth and illuminates a brightly lit pathway to loving others. According to Aldous Huxley, English writer, visionary, philosopher, humanist, and researcher (1894-1963), extending kindness to one another was referred to as the greatest insight that emerged from his life work. In an interview with Laura Huxley, Aldous Huxley's wife, Laura recalled Aldous's response when asked by a group of prestigious colleagues about insights he had gained from his work. In Aldous's words: "It is a little embarrassing that after years of experience, study, and research and study, all I can tell you is to be a little kinder to each other" (Interview with Laura Huxley by Ganga White, June 1998). Huxley's humble revelation calls us to reflect on cultivating an educated heart and on what is critical in our own ongoing development and learning.

*Janet*

Part of my pathway in developing the inner wisdom required for the practical wisdom manifested in cultivating an educated heart is through my meditation practice. This has provided me a steady place away from the constancy of doing. It has also taught me the value of deep listening, and especially, listening to my inner voice. I try to sit in silence, for even 15 minutes a day, focusing on my breath and gently tugging my mind back to the present, over and over again. What I have noticed over the past four years of maintaining my practice is an increased ability to pay attention to my inner voice when engaged with learners in my class.

It will nudge me to slow down, or to pay attention to a particular learner who seems especially anxious. Indeed, with one group of learners, in the recent past, who seemed especially frazzled and fatigued every Friday, after serving as student teachers from Monday to Thursday, we began each class with 10 minutes of silent meditation. Like these student teachers, we all need to have the courage to simply pause, to breathe, and to attend to our feelings and emotions of the past day or week, before launching, headstrong, into the next task.

*Colleen*

For as long as I can remember, colour has always profoundly affected me. I play with colour whenever I can. It dances through the lens of my camera. Colour speaks to me as I build pictorial-art quilts that I create for others, warm myself with, or hang on my walls. Colour resonates deeply within me; it quiets me and calls me to my center. Colour invites me into a meditative state. I often sit, surrounded by fabrics that are filled with colour, texture, and design. I love all colours, from the bright to the subdued. Nature provides an indescribable array of colour and my love of early morning walks, surrounded by the palette of the outdoors, is how I begin most of my days. It is during these times that I reflect on the day ahead. It is very important to me to be thoughtful and intentional in my relationships with others. I call up happenings of the day prior, what I might have done differently, how I might have been present to another more completely and without judgement. I often discover that the most challenging situations or individuals are my greatest teachers. They call me to a better self and challenge me to confront my own beliefs, prejudices, and tightly held notions and assumptions. Dr. Jeff Jacobs, a valued and beloved colleague who died several years back, would say that those who challenge us most deeply are our greatest Buddha – they serve as invitations, if we remain open, to dig deep and to love unconditionally. These are thoughts that accompany me on my morning walks. I take these reflections with me into my day. Sometimes I hold true to these teachings. At other times, I struggle to find the deeper wisdom buried within. Regardless, however, this is the height I aim to achieve. I often bless myself, with the sign of the cross, on my way to campus in the mornings. I have always loved the symbol of the cross. It represents unity and tension, an interesting paradox. Sometimes I do this in the elevator, when I am the only one there. This helps me to focus, to be intentional, and to strive to be present to all others, whether in the classroom or in a quick hallway passing. The blessing is often accompanied with a short prayer, "Help me to be the best that I can be in my relationships with others today."

*Circling Back*

We began with a reference to this being a simple paper – a reflection on how an educated heart, one guided by kindness, care, and compassion, is a pathway to connecting deeply with others and to co-creating a sense of community. We spoke of the courage it takes to open and to be guided by love of self and to how self-love is a pathway to deep and meaningful connection with those we engage with and experience along the way. Although we are troubled by this lack of focus in society and, more specifically, within the context and culture of academia, we have experienced many individuals and moments where kind and caring community does exist. This heartens us. We also believe that the measure of true character and loving presence is most evident when we are called to extend love and kindness in times of trouble, turmoil, and tension. Simply put, it does not take much focus or intentionality to extend these virtues when with others who generously share values and practices of kindness and compassion.

These are difficult times in that faculty and students are continually evaluated by metrics that fail to recognize some critical elements that contribute to deep and authentic, relational, loving, human engagement. Care, compassion, kindness, and love struggle to thrive and flourish in an environment where competition, productivity, and individualism are promoted and rewarded as prized virtues. Brownlee and Berthelsen (2008) referred to a “factory model of education” (p. 406), where a dominant focus on content and identifiable, measureable, skills and competencies takes precedent. Emphasising “the role that external and internal relations play in the social construction of epistemological beliefs” (p. 405), Brownlee and Berthelsen (2008) argued that “teaching the tools of wisdom” (p. 405) played a critical role in pre-service teacher education. Drawing from our own experiences, we believe that the current, shifting landscape of higher education has the potential to call forth deeper and more humanist virtues that reside within us. We refer to virtues that are critical if we remain committed to nourishing genuine and authentic relationships with one another. To achieve this aim in our work and learning environments, being present to one another in all ways that are caring, compassionate, kind, and loving is our pathway.

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