

PLANTING SEEDS:
A JOURNEY OF RETURNING TO HOLISM
WITHIN ADULT LEARNING

by

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Abstract

This paper explores my process of integrating my spirituality and commitment towards living holistically within my practices of teaching, learning, and writing. The focus of this paper was inspired through a process of recognizing shifts in spiritual growth that were deeply impacting my educational experiences. These experiences moved me to explore the notions of holism and spirituality within adult learning through my personal understanding of awareness, acceptance, and interconnectivity with self, others, and the world. There is increasing awareness in the field of adult education surrounding the importance of addressing the spiritual domain and a holistic approach to learning. This paper examines diverse bodies of literature and explores holistic process as a means to contribute to these conversations. This research is rooted in the qualitative methodology of poetic inquiry. Through this paper, I reflect my story and learning process through the medium of concrete and visual poetry, utilizing shape, image, and metaphor as a means to deepen my understanding of a holistic approach to learning. In sharing my process of creating concrete and visual poems, or what I term “seed prayers”, I share my experiences of spiritual growth within the spheres of teaching, learning, and writing, and my journey of engaging in research as contemplative practice, holistic learning process, and an act of prayer.

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A Beginning

*In Aboriginal thought,
the Spirit enters this earth walk
with a purpose for being here
and with specific gifts for
fulfilling that purpose.
It has a hunger and a
thirst for learning*

(Battiste, 2009, p. 15)

Like the shaped bowl of Marie Battiste's quote, I consider myself a container that is constantly filled with awe and gratitude at being given the opportunity to experience the miraculous journey of a human lifetime. As a student, educator, and researcher the penetrating questions surrounding the purpose of my life and what it is that I am here to learn, experience, and contribute follow me into every learning and educational environment I encounter. These processes of learning, teaching, and researching have grown through my understanding that, for me, spirit is not relegated to a particular area but is the core of all aspects of life. Throughout my Master's degree in Adult Education, I became interested in embarking on the process of learning and writing in a way that was congruent in tone, content, and process with my experience of an all pervasive spirituality. Deep questions surrounding the role of spirituality in adult education at this time began to surface in my learning and writing. What relationship could be made between spirituality and a holistic approach to adult learning? How were educators, learners, and researchers integrating their experiences of spiritual growth into their learning environments? What was my own personal experience of this? What might it look and feel like to engage in teaching, learning, and researching in a way that honored my commitment to living holistically?

The more I asked these questions, the more it began to feel as if I were speaking to my higher power, which I call Great Spirit. Battiste (2009) offers the belief that we all have “our own learning spirits who travel with us and guide us along our earth walk, offering us guidance, inspiration, and quiet unrealized potential to be who we are” (p. 9). In celebration of my own “learning spirits”, it is with gratitude that I offer up this paper as an exploration of my experience of coming to understand myself as a spiritual being throughout my academic journey and what it has meant to engage in learning, teaching, and research in a holistic way.

I could never have predicted the diverse dimensions of learning that Great Spirit would take me on throughout the last three years of my life. I stepped foot on the University of British Columbia campus with hopes to further my understanding of adult learning and to advance my career opportunities. I am now looking back at those soft imprints marvelling at the journey of spiritual awakening that simultaneously seeped into my life alongside my academic pursuits. In addition to the learning inherent in undertaking my Masters and navigating my first college teaching position, my personal spiritual practice deepened immensely and I found myself transforming in ways I had never imagined. During this process I was called to take a leave of absence from my studies to travel to a spiritual centre in Southern India where I experienced profound shifts in awakening to a new perception of life. Upon returning to Canada and continuing my studies, the process I was undergoing continued to subtly yet radically transform my life. Throughout these shifts, I began to experience the understanding that life truly is an unfolding process.

The campus grounds of the University of British Columbia, where I have been engaging in my studies and research, are embedded in the ecological terrain of old growth forest. Countless times, as I made my way to and from classes, I was called to be in the company of

these tree spirits. Often, with my thoughts rattled from an overwhelming amount of new vocabulary and my body fatigued from sitting or staring at a computer screen, I would come to these gentle beings as a way to heal and reconnect with myself, my higher power, and the earth. I experienced these creatures as true holders of wisdom and I marvelled at the knowledge they held in their long standing existence as witness and provider to those of us engaging in the academic experience. When it came time for me to begin writing a final paper, it felt natural to come back to these tree spirits for they embodied holism in a way that I could never explain in language as well as offered me a metaphor from which I could begin to try. I quickly became drawn to the elements that neighbored tree spirits in an ecosystem so interconnected that it blurred the boundaries between where one aspect of creation ended and another began. As I wrote, elements of nature found their way onto the page as metaphors I could return to for support, structure, and sustenance throughout my learning journey.

Rooted in the terrain of a qualitative narrative approach, poetic inquiry also began offering its lush bounty towards my exploration. My learning journey yearned for an earth bound form from which it could root and grow. The method that gave shape to my inquiry was based on shape itself. Like an unexpected new sapling, the mediums of concrete and visual poetry unearthed itself from the pulp of my computer screen, pushing beyond germination into visible light. The process of shaping poetry into symbolic form was very organic for me as I began to follow an inner call to write in a way that felt more holistic, creative, and connected to spirit. Shaping language quickly became a vehicle for me to bring more awareness to the writing experience. The organic shapes that were emerging were offering me a feeling of wholeness and connectedness. The feeling of being held deepened as I explored the process of creating them as a means to pray. I began to think of these poems as “seed prayers”, for the creation process

reminded me of the experience of planting seeds, with both attention to the moment and intention towards future sustenance. Upon sharing my “seed prayers” with my research committee, I was introduced to the areas of literature known as concrete and visual poetry; the formation of language or words in such a manner that the arrangement itself becomes intrinsic to the meaning of the poem. The worlds of concrete and visual poetry have offered me a garden into which I could plant seed prayers, bathed in the pollen of many voices with the gentle whispering of Great Spirit traveling through our collective song.

It is a great relief in life to accept the impossibility of understanding. In comparison to the long standing tree spirits that have, without judgement, witnessed changes that have occurred over multiple human lifetimes, my academic journey is both brief and narrow in perspective. However, growing awareness surrounding the humility inherent in the process of research has deepened my gratitude at being given the opportunity to endeavour to contribute a small piece of towards the interconnected whole. In undertaking this paper I wish to acknowledge our Mother Earth. From the land on which I began studying, to the blood, breath, and spirit filled body that types the final documentation of these words, no aspect of this journey would have been possible without her. Also, to the people who have lived here for countless generations, on this land where I now study, and the wisdom of their example of connectivity, I say thank you.

I now offer the following seed prayers. The first, shaped as a seed, speaks to how my process of spiritual awakening has permeated my experiences of teaching. The second seed prayer grew within me up from the roots of Phil Lane Junior’s poem. Phil Lane Junior is a member of the Yankton Sioux and Chickasaw Nations and the founder of Four Worlds, an international institute at the University of Lethbridge dedicated to holistic, spiritual, cultural, political, environmental, and educational development (www.globalhealing.net). My poem

branches out from Phil Lane Junior's words and expresses my yearning to engage in my educational experiences holistically. Throughout this paper I will include the shaping of others' poetry as a form of expression that enabled me to speak to my spiritual journey.

*great
spirit, i say
“i love to teach”,
there is truth growing
in the garden of these words,
there is an experience of teaching
yet it is such a duet with the long tendrils
of learning, entangling space into the impossibility
of knowing which limbs belong to which trunk, there
is an experience of teaching yet i am no longer certain
who or what is the teacher, should i tell them our secret,
that you have stepped into the hall corridors of my heart
and begun to clear out the cluttered drawers of my mind,
that within each sentence that i serve you exists freedom
to see and hear and smell and taste and feel the face or
or word or moment that surrounds each face or word
or moment, should i tell them our secret, that we are
studying each student with more tender and intricate
wonder, that we are charting more nuances of the
heart’s beating with each word written, that we
are growing more attuned to each ridge of
each seed of prayer that is planted, great
spirit, i say “i love to teach”, there
is truth growing in the garden of
these words, particularly in the
tiny seed of the word
love*

<i>there are so</i>	<i>many ways</i>	<i>of perceiving</i>	<i>great spirit</i>
<i>that at times</i>	<i>i feel lost in</i>	<i>the reflective</i>	<i>centrifugal</i>
<i>rings that</i>	<i>surface when</i>	<i>the ice hardens</i>	<i>on the freshly</i>
<i>cut fallen</i>	<i>trees as they</i>	<i>surrender their</i>	<i>peaceful climb</i>
<i>to transform</i>	<i>into chips and</i>	<i>paper so that</i>	<i>we may educate</i>
<i>and entertain</i>	<i>thought upon</i>	<i>thought with</i>	<i>a myriad of</i>
<i>theories and</i>	<i>ideas,</i>	<i>in reverence to</i>	<i>the fallen trunk</i>

that supports this very sentence another seed desires to be planted
on this page, pulped and blanched in a mill,
like a dot of black pepper, a line of soot,
it is the notion of holism, great
spirit, which i yearn to return
to as i teach, research,
and learn, that the
whole tree exists
in a way that
simply cannot
be understood
by the isolation
of its bark or of
each ring of growth
...each fibrous molecule...

These roots were written by Phil Lane Jr.

<i>Look at those</i>	<i>trees standing</i>	<i>over there;</i>	
<i>the alder</i>	<i>does not</i>	<i>tell the</i>	<i>pine tree to</i>
<i>move over;</i>	<i>the pine</i>	<i>does not</i>	<i>tell the fir</i>
<i>tree to move over;</i>	<i>each tree</i>	<i>stands there</i>	<i>in unity,</i>
<i>with their</i>	<i>mouth</i>	<i>pressed</i>	<i>toward the</i>
<i>refreshed by</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>breeze,</i>	<i>warmed by</i>
<i>with their</i>	<i>arms</i>	<i>upraised</i>	<i>in prayer</i>
<i>protecting</i>	<i>one</i>	<i>another.</i>	<i>If we are</i>
<i>world,</i>	<i>we too</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>learn to</i>
			<i>live like</i>
			<i>those trees.</i>

(<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Lane/essay.html>)

An Evolving Identity

Two rivers of consciousness flow simultaneously as I further share about myself and my history for the purpose of beginning this exploration of my experience of spirituality in adult learning. From the perspective of being a distinct self with a particular historical past, I am a white Canadian woman. I have limited knowledge of my cultural ancestry as my mother's side of the family included a wide blend of European descent and my father, who was adopted, knows nothing of his roots. I was raised to seek and explore my own personal sense of spirituality and I now engage in a wide variety of spiritual practices and paths that include meditation, yoga, attending churches, temples, ashrams, and spiritual centres, participating in ritual and ceremony, singing, praying, dancing, chanting, and exploring my spirituality through many other modalities of artistic expression. I have come to embrace many religions and celebrate a connection to a higher power through many names and namelessness, and through many forms and formlessness. To further complicate my difficulty in locating myself within a particular spiritual tradition, I live on the West Coast of British Columbia in the city of Vancouver, a city vibrant with opportunities to engage in new age and spiritual practices and communities, whose origins have become increasingly more challenging to identify within my generation of cross cultural amalgamation and fusion of the contemporary and the ancient. From within my exploration, there are two spiritual traditions that I would like to honor and acknowledge as deeply significant on my journey.

I was raised by a father who, through his own spiritual quest, adopted a First Nations spiritual path, found his spiritual home within the arms of Creator, and dedicated decades towards the sweat lodge ceremony. The sweat lodge ceremony is a purification ceremony that has been in practice for thousands of years by many Native North American tribes as a means to

support physical, emotional, mental and spiritual healing and provide a sacred space in which to connect with Creator (<http://www.dancingtoeaglespiritsociety.org>). I have had the privilege to participate in this powerful ceremony for almost twenty years. I have done so with my family, biological and spiritual, with my friends, and a growing community. I am deeply grateful for everything that this ceremony, this path, this way of life has offered me. It has provided me with a space to grow, heal, release, pray, and find a deep connection to Great Spirit and Mother Earth. It has provided me with the opportunity to personally and collectively heal experiences of suffering, pain, and trauma of both myself and others. It has birthed within me a deep yearning to be part of a collective healing process surrounding the devastation of colonization and residential schooling and a growing desire to embrace the layers of grief, shame, anger, and fear that move through the consciousness of myself and those around me. It has helped me to acknowledge my ignorance and to learn about humility. It has opened my heart towards the courage, dedication, and sacrifices of all of the people, elders, nations, and communities that care took the ceremonies, songs, prayers, traditions, ways, and land from which these gifts were given. Finally, it has provided me with the opportunity to witness my father move from receiving to offering mentorship and to enter into the generative phase of his life with life-long dedication and service towards individuals and communities. I would like to honor the life and spirit of our elder, Frank Settee from the Norway House Band from Northern Manitoba who now watches over us from the spirit world through this next seed prayer that is shaped as a sweat lodge.

*adoption
has brought me into
your kind arms great spirit i
crawled into your earth floored
womb through the quest of my father's
search for your love, i am white and thin and
skinned, my daddy decided to go in search of a parka,
he went east south west and finally north into reserves and
beyond guarded walls, where the men decided to cook him and see
what he was made of, turns out he too was mostly water so they prayed to
the grandmothers and grandfathers to walk in a good way as their sweat rivered
to every door of the lodge, he found a coming home in you great spirit and when he
was reborn through mother earth's womb, a dedication was also born and rights were
slowly earned, now he sifts the medicine on the porch while the people come and builds the
fire while the people prepare and pours the water while the people pray and tells the stories
while the people feast and chops the wood when the people go home and begins all again when
the people return, and so it is in this way that adoption has brought me into your kind arms great
spirit i crawled into your earth floored womb through the quest of my father's search for your love*

As a white Canadian woman, I acknowledge that I am located within the history of colonialism within a position of privilege. I would like to acknowledge the continual journey of embracing all aspects of experience within wholeness including the biases, places of ignorance, and positions of power inherent through the social, cultural, and environmental fabric of my life through the unzipping of this next seed prayer.

<i>sometimes i feel</i>	<i>like a fraud</i>
<i>trying to unzip</i>	<i>a cloak of</i>
<i>privilege with</i>	<i>a mouthful</i>
<i>of prayers...</i>	<i>will i be</i>
<i>discovered</i>	<i>in my white</i>
<i>skinned suit</i>	<i>cuffs ripped</i>
<i>elbows and</i>	<i>knees thick</i>
<i>with dirt as</i>	<i>i bow to my</i>
<i>divine in</i>	<i>the spaces</i>
<i>between</i>	<i>the clicks</i>
<i>of my</i>	<i>keyboard</i>

The other river of consciousness that I would like to swim through surrounds the experience of detachment from a sense of self identification. I am actively dedicated to a spiritual path and organization called Oneness. The word Oneness, as I have come to understand through my experiences participating in this spiritual community, holds multiple definitions. First, Oneness is the name of our spiritual community, one of many communities that are committed to moving towards transformation of consciousness for mankind through individual transformation. Although many of the practices draw on ancient Hindu traditions, the Oneness community is non-denominational and people from all walks of faith gather together to deepen their own personal connections to their higher power. Oneness communities exist across the world and emerged out of a spiritual movement occurring at a spiritual school of life in southern India called the Oneness University. Within our practices, the term awakening to oneness more essentially refers to a movement or phenomenon brought to us at this time on the planet through the Oneness Blessing, a transfer of a loving and intelligent energy that awakens the heart and brings about biological changes in the brain to support experiences including reduced chatter of the mind, heightened sensory awareness, and feelings of peace and comfort (Windrider and Sears, 2006). Ultimately, the Oneness Blessing is, among many other practices, a path to awakening in which there is a dissolving of a sense of being a separate person. This awakened state includes an experience of oneness that is described as an experience of unity, of being one with all beings (Ardagh, 2007).

For thousands of years many great spiritual teachers have shared that our true nature is to live in a state of connectedness and peace. This experience of oneness is described by Krishnamurthi (1991) who offers that “the space between two people disappears and therefore there is immense peace” (p. 108-109). Vivekananda (1896/1989) shares that “this separation

between *wo/man* and *wo/man*, between nation and nation, between earth and moon, between moon and sun...this separation does not exist, it is not real. It is merely apparent, on the surface. In the heart of things there is Unity still” (p. 129).

More and more voices are speaking to the phenomenon of awakening occurring in the world in this present time in history. A transformation in the experience of human life on our planet at this time has been prophesized by a number of cultures including the Hopi, Mayans, Cherokee, and Indian (Shroff, 2011). This shift is believed to act as a catalyst for the emergence of a new and more peaceful world (Ardagh, 2007). Within the Oneness community, this emergence of a new world is considered a transformation of consciousness for mankind through individual transformation. In other words, we are moving towards global awakening through individual awakening. I am drawn to Adyashanti’s (2010) contemporary writings about awakening to help offer clarity towards this current phenomenon.

More and more people are waking up – having real, authentic glimpses of reality. By this I mean that people seem to be having moments where they awaken out of there familiar senses of self, and out of there familiar senses of what the world is, into a much greater reality – into something far beyond anything they knew existed. These experiences of awakening differ from person-to-person. For some, the awakening is sustained over time, while for others the glimpse is momentary – it may last just a split second. But in that instant, the whole sense of “self” disappears. The way people perceive the world suddenly changes, and they find themselves without any sense of separation between themselves and the rest of the world. (p. 1)

I offer my own experience of oneness through the flight of this next seed prayer shaped as an eagle.

*dear
great
spirit*

*as the process of awakening
moments increasingly emerging
my self... the named individual
history...in these moments of
smile of a woman who birthed you
bowl of soup nourishing the body
of the sun on a quiet rose steadfastly*

*continues to unfold there are
where i no longer exist as
with a distinct identity and
disappearance into a
into some steam rising from a
that houses you into the outline
blooming inside the womb of you*

i find only

you

*...this is not
the global oneness
of power and control
of one regime
one system
one doctrine
one dogma...*

*...like the
flake of
stills its
uniqueness*

consciousness

the bliss of

*crystallized
water as it
intricate
this is*

experiencing

its existence

A Journey

In the middle of my Master's degree, my process of spiritual awakening became so intense in both wondrous and challenging ways that I decided to take a year off to integrate the shifts I was encountering before returning to my studies. Many of my experiences were quite beautiful, pleasant, and joyous. I was encountering deeper levels of acceptance of myself and the world around me. There was an ease and a fluidity of experience that became a joy to partake in, particularly while teaching. There were days where I felt immense love pouring from my heart while I taught. I was experiencing students who had previously posed challenges in new light; simply enjoying them for who they were and no longer triggered or upset by behaviour patterns that used to cause me distress. I was seeing myself in those around me and identifying with others with deeper compassion towards our shared humanity. These experiences of ease, joy, and peace, were not without the shadowed experience. In order to come to deeper places of acceptance and love within I needed to face difficult truths and to heal many wounds. I was facing the truth about who I was versus how I wanted to be seen. I was becoming more aware of the fears, hurts, cravings, and conditioning underlying my actions. Finally, my sense of self identity was drastically evolving.

During this time I decided to attend the spiritual school of life in southern India called the Oneness University. Since connecting with the Oneness community five years ago I had heard many people speak about the powerful transformation that occurred for them at this centre. Given the shifts that were already occurring for me, I could only imagine what it would be like to dedicate two months of my life to be immersed in spiritual process with people from all over the world who were also shifting into higher levels of consciousness. I had been drawn to attend the

Oneness University for some time but I had never been able to fathom finding the time or the funds to manifest my dream. Although at the time, I had not much more than a dime to my name, my leave of absence provided me with the time and I decided to go for it. I knew that I was very much on the right path when, upon offering a clear intentional prayer, I miraculously received an unexpected inheritance that would cover nearly half of the cost of my trip less than a week later. One week after that a woman from my Oneness community came up to me with a big smile and put a thousand dollar cheque in my hand. From there, others stepped forward and helped me to raise the remaining funds. In just over a month I was preparing to leave.

While at the Oneness University I was living and engaging in spiritual processes with four hundred people from all over the world. We ate together, slept in dorms together, and spent the majority of each day from early morning until late at night looking within at our patterns of conditioning, bringing awareness to the nature of the mind, deepening our personal connections with our higher powers, and receiving the Oneness blessing. It is very challenging to describe how powerful this experience was for me. I saw all of the ideas I had built up about myself, my beliefs, and my culture. I saw how little trust I truly had deep down in myself, others, life, and in Great Spirit. Layers of fear, pain, and conditioning fell away and I finally experienced a profound feeling of being truly held in unconditional love that I had never before known.

Upon returning to Canada, my process continued to develop and evolve. I continued to feel and release past hurts and pains, but this time with less personal attachment and increasing compassion. Rather than simply feeling my own fear, I experienced the emotion as the collective fear that we experience as part of being human. These emotional experiences intensified but also became much shorter in duration. Growth became fast and furious and every aspect of my life became an opportunity to dive deeper. If I tried to push down or escape an emotion or situation

that was troubling me it would resurface again and again with increasing veracity until I finally paid attention. I was also experiencing new levels of joy and my heart was cracking open to everyone around me. I began to enjoy people more for who they were. Their anger, shame, bitterness, judgements, and insecurities became enjoyable to encounter for I was experiencing them without the filter system of my past conditioning; of what I thought they were and who I thought I was in relation to that perception. Instead I was experiencing the sounds, shapes, and energy of their presence, form, and spirit and the human experience they were having.

In addition to undergoing my own spiritual awakening, my life experiences were bringing me into contact with many other people who, through a variety of spiritual practices and lineages, were also experiencing shifts in perception and an opening of the heart. Friends began sharing more about their own processes of awakening. Strangers began approaching me in public places with the desire to chat about their lives. I would respond and frequently listen. Time and time again they would shift the conversation towards meditation and spirituality. Many times we would end up talking about how much of a shift we were noticing in ourselves and in the world, and how much more interest there seemed to be in spiritual growth and in coming together as a collective humanity. Family members and co-workers began to get more curious about my increased happiness and compassion and began opening up to conversations about spirituality. Everywhere I looked, the transformation I was undergoing was reflected back to me in the collective glow of my day to day world.

In resuming my studies, I grew very curious about how this shift into awakening might be arising within the field of adult education. I wondered what conversations were being had surrounding the role of spirituality within adult learning and what experiences other students and teachers were having. I began to talk about awakening with fellow students and professors and

surprised to find I was not alone in my experiences. I began to review many bodies of literature concerned with the notions of spirituality and holism in adult learning. As I explored these diverse bodies of knowledge, the themes of awareness, acceptance, and interconnectivity surfaced and provide me with a context from which to speak more about how this transformation of spiritual awakening was impacting my experiences as an educator, learner, and researcher. Although I will only be able to offer a small glimpse of the extensive bodies of literature surrounding spirituality and holism in adult learning that span many worldviews and fields of study, I am grateful for the opportunity to share a few perspectives that resonate with my journey.

I offer up my gratitude towards those endeavouring to address the areas of spirituality and holism within adult learning through this next seed prayer that is shaped as a wave and expresses the humility inherent in coming home to a holistic understanding of life.

<i>dear</i>	<i>great</i>
<i>spirit</i>	<i>ebbing</i>
<i>beneath this</i>	<i>keyboard,</i>
<i>guiding me down</i>	<i>the river of</i>
<i>exploration as i ride the</i>	<i>currents of those</i>
<i>who have gone before me into</i>	<i>your vast ocean, upon</i>
<i>diving into your rich reefs i try to prove</i>	<i>my power to your open waters,</i>
<i>after the panic, the pushing, the kicking and screaming, the tireless trying to catch and control</i>	
<i>the waves, i am humbly cut by a small piece of coral, brought home to the frailty of my body to</i>	
<i>finally surrender to your bountiful grace in all i encounter, all i learn, all i experience, dear</i>	
<i>great spirit, how you bring to my shore every undulation of my brief and beautiful existence</i>	

A Perspective

Awareness

Bringing awareness into our conscious moment to moment experience of life has been gaining increasing attention within the field of education and one of the ways that this is being talked about is through the notion of contemplation. Rick Repetti (2010) defines contemplative practice as a “metacognitive exercise in which attention is focused on any element of conscious experience” (p. 7). Whether by bringing awareness to a physiological process such as breathing, a sensory experience such as feeling the texture of a tree’s bark, or a creative process such as making music or writing, this definition of contemplation speaks to the focusing and deepening of attention given to an experience. It is also important to acknowledge that many cultures around the world have various forms of initiations, ceremonies and rituals that involve stepping outside of day to day activities into reflective or contemplative process. Some examples of this include vision quest, walkabout, or silent retreat. The commonality between these experiences is the understanding that something is to be learned and gained about the human experience that comes from deepening our awareness through going within.

There are many possible points of attention when exploring a contemplative approach and a fundamental focus we can attend to is our breath. Right now, within every single moment, as I write, as you read, we breathe. Air gently streams across the space between our lips and nose. It enters each nostril and travels down to fill our lungs. Then it releases from our bodies back into the spaces surrounding our forms. Our chests rise. Our bellies expand. There are moments of expansion, contraction, stillness, and movement. As soon as we draw our attention to our breath, we notice that we are able to change the rate, smoothness, and depth, and therefore

we recognize that we have choices we may not have been aware of before. We can choose to attend to the experience of breathing by simply bringing further awareness to the experience or consciously inviting a change in experience. Just as bringing attention to our breath gives us choices, the act of contemplation or focusing one's awareness also opens up the possibility for new ways of engaging in an experience.

In bringing awareness to breath, we quickly see that another natural point of contemplation is sensation. In this present moment of exchanging ideas, our bodies are engaging in sensory experience. The pads of my fingers are touching a keyboard. Your eyes are taking in light, color, and form. We are resting on objects of varying textures and degrees of softness or firmness. Sounds are coming and going from our consciousness. There is a taste within the mouth and an odor within the room. Just as Carl Leggo (2006) suggests, “we live sensuously all the time – our senses are always at work, even if we do not consciously acknowledge them, but how much more can our senses be alert and aware and rewarded when we focus on our senses, come to our senses, awaken our senses, live within common sense(s)” (p. 148). Alison Pryer (2010) offers that “awareness of the sensuous now is often called mindfulness. Mindfulness is not really a state of mind; it is a dynamic process of becoming” (p. 122). Through the practice of bringing awareness to breath and sensation we deepen our capacity to live within the moments of our lives and to understand that life is in constant flux, flow, and evolution.

We can also bring awareness to the resonances of our emotions, thoughts, intuitions, dreams, and visions. Avraham Cohen (2009) uses the term “inner work” to refer to contemplative practices and highlights the potential of this process to increase self awareness and the ability to witness experience. He suggests that inner work is a process of attending to

“perceptions, sensations, memories, and cognitions, all of which can constitute a person's experience” (p. 31).

We can also bring awareness to our processes of communication, whether they be verbal or non verbal, or through a cognitive, emotional, physical or energetic exchange. We can begin to explore the impact that focused attention has on our ability to listen to and be present with others, ourselves, and our world. Sam Crowell and David Reid-Marr (2006) speak to deep listening within the field of education suggesting that “there is a dynamism in teaching that is very unpredictable. To pay attention to that dynamism, to listen deeply to what is said and not said, to see beneath the surface, we begin to understand what it means to follow the process” (p. 226). As adult educators, our ability to listen deeply to ourselves and cultivate self awareness, inner integrity, and alignment between our values, motivations, and actions is vital terrain to continuously explore. Cohen (2009) reminds us of the importance of personifying the values we hold about supporting growth, change, and transformation and that “it is incongruous if an educator teaches for change of thinking while simultaneously demonstrating little interest in him or herself, others, and personal change” (p. 39). In exploring the potential impact that our own consciousness level has on others we have the opportunity to bring awareness not only to our capacity to inspire but also to perpetuate energies that constrict growth. In this way, self awareness becomes “protection against misuse of power and authority” (Cohen, 2009, p. 37). Through the practice of increased awareness we can begin to identify more clearly the underlying motivations of our actions; the moments we are driven by fears and anxieties or by love and compassion. We can then deepen our capacity to accept and respond to these fundamental aspects of our nature with greater acceptance, clarity and ease.

Acceptance

Moving towards increased awareness is not an easy process. As my journey towards spiritual awakening evolved, I became increasingly aware of areas of pain and suffering, of lies I told myself and others, of the routes through which I sought to escape from my feelings, and of the wounds and fears that drove my actions. Through awareness I began to peel back the layers of who I thought I was. I saw my need to be seen as a successful student and teacher and the layers of doubt, fear, and anxiety that accompanied. I saw how much resistance I had towards myself in continually striving to change, improve, to be perceived a certain way, and to maintain a certain perception of worth and status. I saw how much resistance I had towards others in desiring them to behave in ways that made me feel more secure, comfortable and confident in my perceptions of what was acceptable and successful within a given situation. I saw how much resistance I had towards the educational systems I was working within and how much inner conflict I was suffering from in my efforts to effect change through my individual cognitive efforts without actually fully feeling the layers of grief, fear, and guilt that had surfaced. Finally, I began to drop out of my head and into my heart. I made time and space to feel these experiences of disconnect. By feel I do not mean describe, analyze, solve, articulate, or even emote, but to feel them as sensations in the body and to feel them not with the jurisdiction of my rational adult mind, but to feel them as a child would, fully experienced until the body naturally released the energy. Diana Denton (2006) suggests that our wounds are an entrance to spirit; an invitation to transcend the immediacy of pain into healing, opening and expanding one's heart and offers that "whenever we weave our woundings and vulnerabilities into our teaching, with each gesture we offer a space of opening, an opportunity for deepening humanity and spirit" (p. 139). As I embraced and accepted my own woundings and vulnerabilities, new layers of

acceptance naturally unfolded and through accepting myself, a sense of empathy and compassion for others and for all aspects of life around me blossomed.

Within the literature I was reading I began finding other educators who were also speaking about a process of acceptance within teaching. Maria Schmeekle (2004) shares about how her journey of spiritual growth through meditation helped her to recognize and release her own defensiveness and fears surrounding how she was being perceived as a teacher by her students. Crowell and Reid-Marr (2006) speak to the necessity of acceptance or letting go within the field of teaching offering that focusing attention and deep listening towards what each moment calls for occurs when we stop trying to control outcomes. They further suggest “that letting go of the need to control is one of the biggest challenges that we teachers face. It seems to indicate at some level a basic lack of trust, either in our students or in ourselves. Following our intuition implies an attitude of trust. And with trust, fear begins to dissipate” (p. 223).

As I learned more about the process of awakening I began to understand how much this transformation was a process of acceptance. Jean Vanier (1998) suggests that “freedom that comes through the death of the false self is the acceptance of ourselves just as we are” (p. 121). Adyashanti (2010) reminds us that spiritual awakening “is a remembering of what we are, as if we’d known it long ago and had simply forgotten” (p. 4). Spiritual awakening is not a matter of escaping from the thought processes of the mind but rather recognizing and accepting the nature of the mind for what it is, being present with a moment as it is, and accepting reality as it truly exists (Windrider and Sears, 2006, 154). Finally, I’d like to share that embracing a deepened awareness and acceptance provided me with an opening towards greater humility, surrender, trust, gratitude and faith in the natural flow and order of the cosmos and that which is greater than myself.

I have written three poems to share more about my experiences in going through this process. The first poem speaks to the process of deepening my awareness of my inner experiences throughout my graduate degree and first year of teaching. By bringing attention to and staying with the breath patterns, sensations, and thought processes I was experiencing, I was able to allow these sensations to be fully experienced. In accepting my fears, anxieties, anger, cravings for significance, and grief within my educational experiences, I engaged in a process in which these blockages healed, dissipated, and transformed towards greater inner liberation. The shape of this poem is a fish that was once caught in a net and now swims freely.

The second poem speaks about my process of recognizing the unconscious expectations I held of my students in striving to be perceived as accomplished, important, and successful. It illuminates the freedom I began to experience when, through deeper awareness and acceptance, I started experiencing my students as spiritual beings. The butterfly shape of this poem expresses the transformation of my perception.

The third poem speaks to my process of going through a rite of passage within the academic sphere. Throughout my graduate degree and first year of teaching I recognized that I was experiencing a great deal of inner pain in striving to see change within the educational system through a process of resistance towards the status quo. Instead of moving from a place of resistance, I began to explore acceptance and surrender as a process of empowerment within education. This poem speaks to my process of moving from a paradigm of constriction towards a holistic perspective of education through a process of inner acceptance, surrender, and gratitude. The shape of this poem reminds me of both the formation of a nest and movements towards new flight.

*i have
learned this
fear that hangs
like a fish in a net
river of the throat...
that if i speak from my heart i will be rejected or abandoned...
that i will not receive recognition, validation, love, affection, prestige,
resources or honour...that if i speak from my heart and it is not received
that my truth does not exist, that i do not exist, that i will be worthless, that
i will be nothing...great spirit, i have learned this cradling of my fear, like a
mother swaddling a child, like an eagle hatching an egg...this quiet watching
of the expansion and contraction of tightness and release, of hardness and heat,
the mind persisting like a steady ox with plough or convulsing like a cacophony
of wings when the cat is caught in the coop...great spirit, thank you for my
fears and for your grace as i hold them close and ever closer still...quietly
watching them dissipate
as each meshed strand
unknots from its bind
and reweaves into
the river*

<i>dear</i>		<i>great spirit,</i>
<i>i am not</i>		<i>sure where in</i>
<i>my lesson plan</i>		<i>to list the learning</i>
<i>objective of open</i>		<i>one's heart, i am not</i>
<i>sure where in the</i>	()	<i>evaluation criteria to</i>
<i>express we will feel less</i>	()	<i>afraid of one another,</i>
<i>i have walked a thousand</i>	()	<i>hallways yearning to</i>
<i>be a good teacher,</i>	()	<i>not realizing how</i>
<i>the tread of</i>		<i>my longing to be</i>
<i>significant in</i>		<i>the eyes of another</i>
	<i>would</i>	
	<i>imprint</i>	
	<i>the</i>	
	<i>beautiful</i>	
	<i>simplicity</i>	
	<i>of their</i>	
	<i>existence,</i>	
<i>subtly marking our</i>		<i>moment to moment</i>
<i>connection with a</i>		<i>multitude of expectations.</i>
<i>dear great spirit, as the</i>	()	<i>layers of perceptions, biases,</i>
<i>anxieties are slowly slipping</i>	()	<i>from the classroom shelves, i watch</i>
<i>the idea of myself as a good</i>	()	<i>teacher tumble gently past my desk</i>
<i>and out the door, there</i>		<i>is a moment where i wonder</i>
<i>what is now left but</i>		<i>it is quickly replaced</i>
<i>with a burning</i>		<i>curiosity of through</i>
<i>which form,</i>		<i>shape, color, and</i>
<i>personality</i>		<i>you will express</i>
<i>yourself</i>		<i>next</i>

*dearest empiricism,
 my sweet mother
 who caught her tongue on the claw of the tenacious mind
 time has come for me to leave your nest
 thank you for the cautious cradled-tree-topped-rock-a-bye
 you have provided each and every night
 i am grateful to have learned
 to extract from my spirit that portion-of-appropriate-fit
 and your growing willingness to incubate
 my wild-and-boundless-be-in-wilderness-ness
 yet time has come for me to fly
 dearest empiricism
 my mighty father
 who lost his heart-drummed-rhythms
 in the silencing of calculated time
 we have categorized each twig
 and charted the hierarchical climb
 broken the circle into manageable sections
 captured- jarred-sealed-and-labelled the tide
 it has been a informative ride
 but is now the moment of flight
 for as secure a home as you have provided
 the sweat of these sound sleeps
 has soaked through the layers of dream-spaced-landscapes and past-lived-lives
 it is time to soar beyond these bridges and divide
 dearest empiricism
 mother and father who have grown up in a different time
 i recognize that as the
 love tumbles down the mountain side
 there may be moments where we are
 lost in translation within the shifts between generations
 that fear will necessarily rise
 through undulations of ideals and perceptual collides
 so before you let me go to take full flight
 i want to hold your hand in mine
 to honor the dedication of your time
 you kept me safe
 you helped me to survive
 until our new world arrived
 my dearest empiricism,
 beloved ancestors who have fought for the family line
 beneath your stoic grip
 I hear your warm heart whispering for the unwind
 singing quietly with your eyes
 that every vast sorrow is simply the flight
 of the wing dipping down before it can rise*

Interconnectivity

One of the most profound shifts that occurred for me through my process of spiritual awakening is that my experiential understanding of a holistic approach to education deepened in a very personal way. In addition, as I increasingly began to experience moments in which I felt no separation between myself, others, and the world around me, I grew to more deeply value the notions of holism I was encountering through the literature I was exploring.

The understanding of the cosmos being one spiritual totality within which all things are interconnected can be found across many cultures including Hindu, African, and Buddhist traditions (Shroff, 2011). The understanding of completeness through all aspects of existence is also foundational to Indigenous learning. Battiste (2009) offers that:

Aboriginal knowledge serves to ground our interrelationships with each other – all things, animate and inanimate; to honour the land, the animals, the ecology that gives all of us sustenance; to honour our relationships with one another and respect our diversities, recognizing that we are all one, coming from one Creation, learning to learn, to fulfill our journey, our earth walk, as our Creator and we have agreed upon. (p. 17)

We can also see the impact that a holistic perspective has on our experience with relationship through the Andean experience, in which no part of existence is exempt from being considered part of community. “Given this, human decisions are not only human, but also they are based on a consensus achieved with the world that is beyond human” (Vasquez, 2010, p. 277). From an Indigenous perspective we can deepen our understanding that holism “is the realization of a common essence within us that is constantly being shaped and re-shaped in response to the multitude of connections and relationships that constantly affect us, a realization that we as humans are only a link in a grand chain of existence” (Ritskes, 2011, p. 413).

Another avenue to explore holism is through the bodies of knowledge exploring diverse perspectives on what it means to learn and know. Within the field of adult education there is awareness surrounding the importance of understanding our emotional, spiritual, creative, cultural, and embodied selves within adult development and learning and that our learning occurs within the interconnected contexts and relationships within which we exist (Tisdell, 2011, p. 10).

For myself, it is our beautiful earth that most connects me to an experience of wholeness. Pryer (2011) offers that we can recognize our wholeness through the cyclical patterns of the earth. “We see it in the movement from night to day, in the ebb and flow of tides, in the waxing and waning of the moon, and in the death and rebirth of plants and animals in the ever-changing seasons” (p. 78).

It is difficult to articulate my experiences of moving towards interconnectivity with all of existence. I am supported through the voice of a few educators who share about their own personal experiences of spiritual growth. Abraham Sussman and Mitchell Kossak (2011) speak about a “a felt sense of union with other people, other life forms, objects, surroundings, or the universe itself [and] a unitive felt sense of intimacy with the divine” (p. 57). James Crocker-Lakness (2006) refers to transcendence as “crossing over the boundaries of personal ego into a communion of interconnectedness with others in which alienation and self-consciousness disappear” (p. 244). Karen Meyer (2006) speaks about magical experiences in which there is no separation between the observer and the observed (p. 163). These descriptions help me to share my experiences of disappearing as a separate self and merging with life.

I have written the following two poems to share further about my experiences of moving towards interconnectivity or wholeness. I offer up my gratitude to our beloved mother earth and the unceasing abundance she offers to my journey towards wholeness through the gentle glow of

the first poem shaped as a crescent moon. In the second poem, shaped as fire, I express my gratitude for the opportunity to experience all the diverse ways we learn and express ourselves within relationship with one another and the world.

*my
dearest
mother
how you
must laugh
and cry deep
from your belly
as we try to carve
the ocean of your
breath into thin
separate slices
while you flood
each endlessly
layered crevice
of yourself with
the nurturing
milk of your
love waiting
for us to
remember
that you are
continuously
nursing us
within your
completeness*

great
spirit i see
you dancing
in the centre
of each flame
enticing us
towards the
sacred circle
of life,
reminding
us of our
warm-bloodedness,
our need to keep
bodies close,
keep spirits
sparked, keep
stories lively kindled,
great spirit i hear
your crackling
song calling
forth all the many
ways by which
consciousness
yearns to express
itself, bringing
us deep within
our molten core
so we remember
that we must
sing out through
our many ways
of knowing
to keep the
fire burning

A Process

Poetic Inquiry

My awakening towards a new sense of awareness, acceptance, and interconnectivity and growing appreciation of a holistic approach to learning drew me towards a process of writing that would allow me to make more congruent my contribution within all spheres of my life. Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers and Carl Leggo (2009) suggest that “our narratives, poems, and meditations are echoes whose vibrations are like lines of connection that guide our practice” (p. 4). This metaphor of an echo beautifully encapsulates the transformative potential of narrative and poetic inquiry. Therefore, I entered my experience of engaging holistically through research through the roots of narrative inquiry and quickly took full flight through the wings of poetry.

Life is story. We embody the stories of our lives, and whether consciously or not, we engage in these stories as shared experiences through our relationships and interactions with all aspects of creation. Our natural impulse to embody ourselves and revision our world through story is reflected through the increased use of narrative as a means to engage in research (Nelson, 2000). Leggo (2005) suggests that “we need to compose and tell our stories as creative ways of growing in humanness. We need to question our understanding of who we are in the world” (p. 115). Christina Baldwin (2005) offers that “spirituality is story. Since consciousness and language first claimed us, human beings have made up sacred stories to explain how something larger than ourselves created us and the world” (p. 193). Our stories take us on journeys to transcend time and space and connect us with a personal and global family and ancestry of creatures and beings.

Just as we cast our voice into the world through tales of who we are, where we come

from, and the purpose of our being here, we also allow the movement and musicality within our souls to pour out of us as rivers of poetry. Dancing in the spaciousness between prose and song, poetry seduces through emotional resonance, washing over us with layers of rhythm, cadence and silence to evoke our longing for wholeness.

The use of poetry as a means to more authentically communicate human experiences has been an area of increasing interest within qualitative research. Prose is simply one valid carrier of knowledge (Madill, 2008, p. 41). Poetry, through its woven layers of nuance and subtleties, invites us into a new way of knowing (Hirshfield, 1997, p. vii). Poetry is a unique language that can capture aspects of human experience that other means of communication cannot (Faulkner, 2009, p. 17). There is a quality of directness, depth, and synthesis of experience that poetry offers (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxi).

In exploring poetic inquiry, I discovered that I was coming across the same themes of deepened awareness, acceptance, and interconnectivity that had been emerging in my process of spiritual awakening.

Poetry invites a deepening of awareness of our embodied experience. Like a single drop of water that evokes a ripple of centrifugal rings, poetic inquiry heightens our experience of a singular moment as well as expands our ability to embrace the many layers and dimensions surrounding what it means to be human. Leggo (2009) speaks to the impact poetic rumination has with our experience of time, explaining that “poetry slows the reader down. Poetry invites us to listen. Poetry is a site for dwelling, for holding up, for stopping” (p.164). He continues by illuminating the potential of poetry to heighten sensory awareness offering that “the poet’s way is to attend to the specific moment, the particular texture, the singular sound, the tantalizing taste, the captivating scents that inscribe a local geography of our daily living” (p. 164). As we bring

awareness to our sensory experience of life, we awaken to an embodied experience of life.

Wanda Hurren (2009) suggests that “poetic language facilitates embodied knowing, or at least facilitates calling up our embodied faculties – gut reactions, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, emoting, intuiting” (p. 229). In other words, “even if the prosodic mind resists, the body responds to poetry. It is felt” (Richardson, 2003, p. 189).

Poetic inquiry also facilitates a greater acceptance of oneself, others, and of life as it tends to bypass certain barricades, obstacles, boundaries, and defenses, seeping its way past cognitive defenses to enter the depths of our hearts. Bonnie Raingruber (2009) suggests that poetry supports our ability to tolerate our own suffering as well as the suffering of others and that through this process we come to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our world. Leggo (2006) refers to poetic inquiry as a process that is seeking a sense of connectedness, or what he refers to as “withness, in words, in work, in the world, in heart, in earth, in body, mind, imagination, and spirit” (p. 150). Poetry supports our ability to soften towards a more fluid and permeable experience of who we are in relation to others and the world.

Through its potential to heighten awareness and foster acceptance, poetic inquiry draws us towards the understanding of our interconnectivity. Poetry illuminates moments of human truth (Richardson, 1998). The shared emotional experience of unveiling that occurs between reader and writer through poetry evokes empathic connectedness (Carr, 2003). Leggo (2009) speaks about how poetry illuminates the spectrum of simplicity and depth of life offering that “by paying such attention, the poet also acknowledges how the local is always universal, how particularity is always ecologically connected to the expanse of geography of the earth” (p. 164). Poetic inquiry invites a process of attending to the preciousness of life and accepting the changing flow and impermanence of nature, the cosmos, and our existence.

Concrete and Visual Poetry

It is with gratitude and humility towards mother earth in all of her abundance and power that I share more about how shaping language into what I call “seed prayers” helped to cradle my unfolding exploration of spiritual awakening and a holistic approach to learning. The vast terrain of literature exploring concrete and visual poetry far expands the garden walls of my paper. However, I hope to acknowledge a few aspects of this fertile landscape and how it has fostered my process of planting, nurturing, and harvesting seed prayers along my learning journey.

Like smooth clay from the basin of the earth, concrete visual poetry became the mineral rich media from which I could discover a fluid amalgamation of creation and process as I embarked on a holistic, arts-based, and contemplative approach to engaging in research. Within the realm of concrete and visual poetry, language becomes intricately connected with visual imagery. As the words of the poem are arranged and held within a visual formation, that container or shape then breathes new layers of meaning into the poem. There is some debate regarding differentiation between concrete and visual poetry with some views maintaining that they are synonymous terms and others suggesting that concrete poetry is more text-based whereas visual poetry pushes further beyond the bounds of text into deeper exploration of visual possibilities and explorations of mixed media (www.wikipedia.org). In other words, some visual or concrete poets put more focus on maintaining traditional poetic language within a form that serves as a critical aspect of the texts unification whereas other poets “focus entirely on lettershape, drawing out the beauty of these pieces of language either in isolation (sometimes focused on parts of letters) or in swirling clouds of characters” (Huth, 2007, p. 128). Both directions of exploration employ a “fusion of word and image, an amalgamation of linguistic and pictorial expression” (Tornatore-Loong, 2011, p. 307). What is important to understand is that

these poems are as much visual artistic creations as they are poems and that the meaning of the poem is dependent upon seeing its form and would not carry through upon hearing the poem read aloud (www.poets.org). In honoring both terms within the history and practice of this mode of writing, I have chosen to incorporate both terms and refer to both concrete and visual poetry.

Concrete and visual poetry grew as an international movement that bridged both literature and the visual arts and reached the pinnacle of its popularity during the nineteen sixties and seventies (Tornatore-Loong, 2011, p. 307). However, we can find much earlier examples of concrete and visual poetry such as the poem entitled “Easter Wings” written by British poet, George Herbert (1593-1633) who printed the poem sideways on two pages of a book that faced each other so that it depicted birds descending in flight with full wingspan (www.wikipedia.org). I have included this poem below in a top to bottom versus the original sideways format.

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

(www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173626)

Although my exploration of spirituality within academia is not located within a specific Christian perspective, I have explored multiple elements of commonality that can be seen in George Herbert's "Easter Wings" including visual shaping of language into form, imagery and metaphor that deepens one's connection with nature or the earth, and writing as an act of prayer or contemplation. My exploration also mirrors the simplicity inherent in Hubert's poem. Rather than moving into the area of mixed media or a strong focus on letter formation, I have maintained a traditional language structure within a symbolic form. I have primarily explored the terrain of creating seed prayers with my own words but have at times included others' voices.

The relationship between language and visual imagery has long been explored. Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo (2009) offer that "the very word poetry comes from the Greek *poiein*, to make or construct. By bringing things into being with our hands and our world words we continually participate in the on-going renewal of life in the world" (p. 43). There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. Baldwin (2005) suggests that "we can't get the whole picture unless we have the whole story. And the magic in words is that the story can make the picture" (p. 53).

The first aspect of my writing process that I'd like to speak to is that creating seed prayers became a contemplative process that supported a feeling of ease and connectedness. The process required time and patience and a willingness to not only create, but to undo in order to recreate again. Within this process I slowed down, relaxed my breath, and entered into an experience of detailed attention and isolated focus. I also became aware of the sensations and feelings that I was having in my body. At times I felt impatient or frustrated. In returning my awareness to my breath and the sensations in my body, just as I do within my meditation practice, I found a way to instill a process of centering and grounding into my research. In

revisiting and revising the writing through the shaping process, I had the opportunity to deepen my connection to the layers of meaning within the language.

The process of creating seed prayers also became an artistic experience that provided me with an opportunity to explore and share my creative and intuitive capacities. I became absorbed in the creation process just as I would in painting a picture or sculpting a piece of clay. As a kinaesthetic and visual learner I found seed prayers to be a much easier way to navigate my way through text. They provided me with visual markers through which I could chart the long journey of language. The language within my seed prayers took on new meaning, new energy, and new life and I, as the sculpture of the words, felt an artistic satisfaction that was a new experience for me within academic writing.

Finally, the process of creating seed prayers felt holistic. There was a sense of flow to the experience and the process required that I drew on many ways of knowing and being. Upon completion of a seed prayer I felt a sense of wholeness. In the shaping of others' words I felt a sense of interconnectivity and gratitude towards those who had gone before me and a deepened sense of mentorship, ancestry and global family.

Another way that working with concrete and visual poetry facilitated a holistic learning experience for me was through the opportunity to explore the power of metaphor in my writing. The metaphors we choose to use as educators impact the way we are relating to others and to the world we live in. Many writers and practitioners in the field of education speak about the importance of examining the metaphors we are using as educators and researchers. Our metaphoric choices guide us towards being “educators of ecological understanding and peace with and in the natural world—or educators of violence against nature” (Hill & Johnston, 2003, p. 21). By encouraging students to deepen their reflection surrounding the metaphors they are

using we can nourish an educational system that fosters a sense of reverence and wonder towards the earth (O'Sullivan, 1999). "Metaphors and language are intimately connected with and express our spirituality" (Hill & Johnston, 2003, p. 22). The metaphors we use reflect our internal landscape and impact our external reality.

As I engaged in creating seed prayers, many of the images that emerged spoke to me with regards to the notion of holism and connected me with a feeling of being whole. The images were in some way connected to nature, and as I engaged in the creation process I found myself thinking about the way that language, from syllable, to rhythm, to song, to story emerges from the earth. The metaphoric images that were surfacing also provided me with an opportunity to bring a process of connecting with nature into my research journey. As a nature lover, one of the most challenging aspects of returning to academic study has been for me that it requires such a huge time commitment, and that primarily that time is spent in front of a computer. By consciously choosing to spend time metaphorically with elements of nature while writing, the experience fostered greater awareness and gratitude of mother earth.

Another aspect of my research process that I would like to share was my experience with engaging in research as prayer. As a student with an artistic and sensitive nature, like many others creative beings, I found writing in a traditional academic format to be very challenging, unnatural, and constraining. Throughout my Master's degree I was encouraged by my instructors to explore ways of writing that were more congruent with my nature. In one class in particular, a course on Indigenous perspectives on education, I was encouraged to explore my own process of decolonization through stepping out of the bounds of traditional academic writing. As I explored, I began to engage in writing as an act of prayer. Jean Vanier's (1998) words about prayer help me to articulate the meaning of prayer for me in my life. He shares that "to pray is to be centered in

love; it is to let what is deepest within us come to the surface. Prayer is also a meeting with the One who loves me, who reveals to me my secret value, who empowers me to give life, who loves us all, and who calls us forth to greater love and compassion” (p. 32). Addressing my higher power, Great Spirit, within academic writing was a very healing and liberating experience. The same experiences that occurred when I prayed, including feeling a sense of peace, gratitude, and connectedness, began to permeate my experience of academic writing. Writing as prayer allowed me to deepen my relationship with my higher power through the regular attention towards this connection, and to invite more fully this relationship to be at the core of all of my academic and learning experiences. In addition to strengthening my connection with my higher power, engaging in this way of researching also deepened my connection to my ancestors. From a place of gratitude and humility for all I have been gifted through the lifetimes of my ancestors, I found myself also feeling a deeper sense of gratitude towards the academic voices who struggled to speak out against more controlling academic paradigms and offer hope and effort towards more holistic views of education. This deepened feeling of humility and interconnectivity was greatly strengthened through my process of engaging in research as prayer and brought a sense of softness of the heart and wholeness of spirit that was deeply fulfilling and motivating.

I offer up my gratitude at being gifted the opportunity to engage in a process of spiritual growth through a holistic approach to learning through these next three seed prayers.

The first seed prayer is shaped as an onion and speaks to my journey of peeling back the layers of the mind’s conditioning to surrender into a process of being held by an experience of life that is centered in love.

The second seed prayer, shaped as an hour glass, speaks to my yearning to find a more enlivened, creative, embodied, holistic, and spiritual connection to language and the process of writing. An hour glass holds within it sand, the raw state from which it was transformed and invites us into a new experience and new meaning of that material. In looking at an hour glass our perception of sand not only changes but so does our experience of time and space. In creating seed prayers I also discovered a new perceptual experience of the language I was working with and of my experience of engaging in research.

The third seed prayer shares how this holistic journey of exploring metaphor and form has carved me towards a greater capacity to express and receive the fullness of life.

*dear
divine
spirit,
like the
onion
that
loves
the
onion,
the sister
that
loves
her
sister,
the
mother
that
loves
her
mother,
the little seed
and earthen womb so love
themselves as one, cradling the wholeness,
the completeness of existence in space and time
and spacelessness and timelessness with ever blossoming
expansion and surrender into the cycle of life...as we peel back
the layers cradled in the space between the layers of skin, of cells,
of ideas, of wounds, of worlds, of desires, of differences, of deconstruction,
the mind fights to flee from its home within the wholeness, eager to please,
to prove, to produce, to control, to construct its creation, it grasps to explain
to itself its own clinging, articulating its death until it finally ceases to desire
to articulate, until new life, new realms, new species, new spores blossom
into new existence, like the seed bursting from the earth into the cradle of
the air, to love all of existence like the onion that loves the onion,
the sister who loves her sister's sister, the mother who loves
her mother's mother, the all that loves the all
with love that loves to love.*

*dear great spirit
you through
trees' whispers
through the
or the
worlds through
the disappearing
gently harbored
brought us closer
i'd lose you
within the
flipping from
cut and scroll and
within the flat screen
into a tightly wound spiral
deeper breaths, the chance
as I expressed...and yet you
and forth you came from behind
soft curious hands as i dug into
textures and shapes i could sift up
treasure glowing in*

*it was easy to find
the hum of the
while walking
campus forest,
sharing of
words within
four walls that
the dreams that
together...but then
again and again
formatting, the
page to page to
scroll and paste,
that type-set my body
of wishing for more time,
to move more than my wrists
continued to hear my prayers
the wall of words, sliding into my
the white-washed soil to see what
through my fingers like a salt-sanded
your warm sun kissed smile*

<i>great</i>	<i>spirit,</i>
<i>how i</i>	<i>am held</i>
<i>through</i>	<i>the</i>
<i>changing</i>	<i>shapes</i>
<i>of your</i>	<i>beautiful</i>
<i>formlessness,</i>	<i>as you</i>
<i>sculpt me from</i>	<i>the inside</i>
<i>out, chiseling</i>	<i>away at the</i>
<i>core of my</i>	<i>fears to unearth</i>
<i>the vast spirit</i>	<i>of my existence,</i>
<i>the space to</i>	<i>hear the flute's</i>
<i>perfect caress</i>	<i>through the</i>
<i>hollowness</i>	<i>of our blossomed</i>
<i>empty</i>	<i>heart</i>

A Resting Place

Within education we have the opportunity to mirror for one another our journeys towards wholeness. Pryer (2011) suggests that for many, the motivation to teach “is a longing to manifest love in the world through every day physical and emotional and intellectual labor” (p. 23). Crowell and Reid-Marr (2006) suggest that “teaching is a sacred vocation – a vocation that is constantly presenting new opportunities to deepen our understanding of what it means to be truly human” (p. 217). Cohen (2009) offers that “sleepwalking teachers cannot be models of awakening. If we want our students to be awakened to full reality and become more fully human, then it is essential that educators are engaged in the process of assessing this multidimensional reality” (Foreword). In following my own “longing to manifest love in the world” through the vocation I hold sacred I have endeavoured to share a small glimpse of my journey of coming to understand myself as an awakening being and of approaching teaching, learning and researching as a holistic process. I have planted a few seed prayers. I hope that sharing my experience will offer support to others as they endeavour to cultivate their own journey towards wholeness. I am grateful for the opportunity to have unearthed my own personal process towards tending to our collective landscape. It is my hope that over time, and with the nurturance of our many voices, our seed prayers will root, branch, and flourish, standing as peaceful tree spirits within the nurturing caress of mother earth, announcing their place within all of creation.

*my dear great spirit
i am grateful to love and be loved
by the nourishing elements and landscapes
of my home who have held me on this journey so
dearly, like a bowl cradling warm food, like a seed curled
up in the nestle of the earth, like a tree encircling itself with the
rings of its own life, like a sweat lodge enveloping steam and smoke,
like the half zipper fusing with its mirrored metal twin, like an eagle's
strong wing gently brushing across the face of the wind, like the wave
gently stroking the shore, like the salmon returning home to its mother
river to cycle life, like the butterfly cocooning against its new wings,
like the nest that nurtures both fullness and emptiness with loving
sustenance towards new moments of flight, like the moon kissing
the distant glow of the sun, like fire carrying our prayers up
through a whisper of smoke, like the onion holding itself
tightly from the inside and out, like sand cherishing
its hour-glassed caress, like the air slowly
dancing across the reed of the flute,
like the resonant embrace
of the sound of a
heart beating
inside its
skinned
drum*

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