

The Impact of Meditation Practice on Teachers' Personal and Professional Lives

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

This narrative study of schoolteachers' experiences of yogic meditation employs the theoretical framework of yoga. It poses the research question: How do teachers story their life experiences following their adoption of a regular meditation practice? Narrative research methods are used to reveal the participants' own perceptions of their experiences of meditation. The narratives presented include that of an educator and meditation teacher who has been practising yogic meditation for over 40 years, as well as three schoolteachers who more recently came to the practice of meditation and were experienced classroom teachers before and after taking up this practice. The findings reveal that (1) the teachers perceive their meditation practice to have a beneficial impact on their lives, and by extension their work as teachers; (2) the impact their meditation practice has on their classroom teaching may not be obvious to an outside observer. Instead it is experienced by the participants to be an internal enrichment: a transformation of their thought patterns and perceptions of feelings and events; and (3) the longer the participant has been practising meditation, and the more they have immersed themselves in the philosophical study that traditionally accompanies yogic practice, the more complex may be their understandings of their meditation experience. This research also highlights the problems with imposing Western knowledge frameworks on practices that have traditionally been accompanied by an existent theoretical framework. The researcher argues for further study of classical yogic meditation practices in light of their potential benefits for educators, with the caveat that such research should be undertaken by researchers who have experienced authentic immersion in the study of yoga and its classical philosophies.

Dedication

For my Gurudev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. What else can I do but offer back to you tiny pretend cups of tea? And for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, with immense gratitude.

And with love to Bob and Pierre, two great fathers and teachers, both of whom left this world during the writing of this thesis. You encouraged me with your trust and confidence, and you thought everything I did sparkled. My heart keeps calling out to you.

Acknowledgements

I offer my tremendous thanks to Dr. Ruth Kane, an unusually kind and involved doctoral supervisor and personal advocate, who cared first about supporting me as a person, and secondly about the work. You made it possible for me to get through a full-time doctoral degree as a wife, mother, and caregiver, and ultimately submit my best work with my happiness and well-being intact. Academia has much to learn from you.

I am also very grateful for the presence of a wonderful committee, whose insights have been discerning and profound. You've been encouraging, supportive, engaged, and have challenged me to make the work much better.

Thanks to Janet Shorten for reading this thesis more times than anyone else, and providing extensive editing (for free, and against tight deadlines)—and also for reading to me for an hour every night of my childhood so that I would love to read and write and learn and go to school.

I am very grateful to Kate, whose thoughtfulness and support for this project went above and beyond. Every story deserves to be heard and remembered, though they couldn't all fit in here. If this thesis reads like a love letter to our time in the classroom together it's because it is. And to the other parents and volunteers who worked hard to build that school for us, and sacrificed at a time when you didn't have much, because you wanted the best for us: I think it worked. To all the shimmering souls I went to school with who are and are not featured herein, I send my love and appreciation.

I am also extremely grateful to Nina, Laura, and Etienne, who agreed to participate in this research, gave me hours of their time, reflected deeply, and in some cases arranged their

travel plans and family obligations around our meetings. There would be no research without you; and the research is better because you shared so openly about your private lives and experiences. Thank you so much.

As always, thank you to long-suffering Polar Bear, for making me brave, and listening to drafts for hours. As with all things, this is yours as much as mine. And thanks to my Little Nathan, who got big already, for becoming my son during this degree and helping me know the purpose of my work.

Finally, thank you to all the family and friends who offer your continued support, and for the number of times you asked “so, how is the thesis going?” and then were willing to listen to long and whining answers, for five years. Particularly the Qamaniq-Masons, the Bisonette/Symington/Holbeins, and my Canadian ashram team, especially Asher.

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Introduction

What I remember most fondly from my elementary school years, aside from the pack of neighbourhood children whom I still love deeply, and aside from the idyllic freedom to run loose through the nearby forested ravine all day, is a feeling of harmony, of smoothness, in everyday life. There was no break between school and home—only a flow. So too were there no barriers placed in front of me by my teacher. In those first years of studies—up until I entered grade 7 at the local public school—I don't remember ever being given a task in the classroom that made me doubt myself or rebel internally, feeling that I couldn't do it or that I just didn't want to. Everything I chose to do, learn, create, and everything I was encouraged to pursue, seemed a natural extension of my existence. I simply existed. My teacher seemed always to be in a state of “yes.” “Can I...?” “Yes.” “Do you think...?” “Yes!” Just as my heart latched on to some new passion, as if one step ahead of me she had already prepared today's lesson on just that topic, her body bursting with excitement to share it with us.

One time I thought I pushed her a little too far, ringing her home doorbell with a friend in the evening—just as she was rushing to cook dinner for her own children—to share an idea so small it would seem inconsequential to adult ears. As she rushed from the stove to the front door I prepared myself for the pinch of being pushed to the side by an adult too busy for childish trivialities. But not being able to hold back our enthusiasm we beamed up at her and shared: “Guess what?! Guess what we saw... Guess what we did... It was just like what we talked about in class!” And like a mirror held up against us she beamed back with unbounded enthusiasm. “Yes! Wow! Isn't it so wonderful?!” And then, “See you tomorrow!” And the door was swiftly closed in our faces, and our pride was overflowing.

Just as she facilitated such a space of natural and dynamic action, she nurtured a space of peaceful rest and reflection. She loved to read to us. Great books, often adult non-fiction, which she read with the confident attitude that we would understand, that we would be swept along by a good story. She often moved lessons into the ravine behind the school, and one hot summer afternoon read to us the diaries of zoologists who lived for years amongst the lions and hyenas of the Kalahari Desert. We were so involved in that book that we all cried together the day she read about the death of our favourite lion. She sat in the grass reading and we lay stretched out in our favorite low sprawling tree to listen. We felt like the lionesses themselves. We dissolved—into the story, into each other, into that tree, that breeze, that forest. And that was what my childhood, my early education felt like: existing and dissolving, and existing and dissolving.

~

My personal interest in the effect that meditation has on teachers, and the effect that meditating teachers have on their students, comes from my own experiences in school. I have spent much time contemplating my school experience, both as a child and as an adult. I believe, in fact, that the uniqueness of the first school I attended, from kindergarten through grade 6, is the reason I passionately entered the field of education as a graduate student and researcher.

The guiding principle of this school was ensuring the holistic well-being of students and teachers. This was expressed primarily through the daily practice of yoga and meditation for both teachers and students. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of outdoor learning and play, creativity, introspection, and natural health and mental wellness, all based in a traditional yogic framework and understood through the Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement.

Because it was an unusually small school, teachers were able to foster this school climate more easily than would have been possible in a mainstream public school (enrollment varied from 7 to 25 students per year over the 10 years it was in operation). It was private and co-operatively run by parents. In addition, a remarkable feature of our school was that almost all the families involved lived in the same housing co-op in which the school was located, giving it a truly neighbourhood one-room schoolhouse feel. The driving force for the founding of the housing co-op, and subsequently the school, was the interest of the parents in holistic health and wellness in general, and the TM movement in particular, and their desire to live and raise children in a like-minded neighbourhood.

Though many aspects of the school were ideal, I was left with the impression that the practice of meditation on the part of the teachers was particularly defining. Of course, I may have been influenced here by the emphasis placed on the effectiveness of the practice throughout my early education. But I believe that children, being particularly observant of and sensitive towards the adults in their world, often have great insight about these adults' states of being. Childhood is a time of subtlety, when quick glances, tone of voice, body movements are all noticed and absorbed. At least, I felt that it was for me. And, living as I did in a neighbourhood where many of the adults I knew practised meditation, I discovered very early that I was able to accurately discern among the adults I encountered who maintained a meditation practice and who did not. (In fact, my young friends and I were even able to tell who, among all our parents, had skipped their practice that day—a fact that could always be confirmed with that parent's child.) A little more caution was used and a little more space granted around these adults once identified, as they were always just a bit more impatient, tired, unpredictable, and quick to anger.

At our school, like any other, teachers of course had good days and bad. But overall they displayed a lightness, sincerity, enthusiasm, and ability to be present, to observe and connect with us, that was never equalled by other teachers in my school career. I have found student narratives of alternative vs. mainstream school experiences are often fraught with comparisons of the good vs. the bad, championing one model or the other. But mine is not really a story of negative and positive extremes. The nurturing and supportive foundation of my education prepared me very well for the academic, social, and emotional experiences I would encounter at public middle school and high school, and I excelled in both the private and public school environments. I was also privileged to attend two high-quality public schools. They were both ranked highly among the city's public schools. They were comparatively small, relied on parental involvement, and had relatively well-supported and happy staff who were able to initiate exciting projects with the students. I had an affection and respect for the majority of teachers I encountered during my studies, and shared true friendships with some. However, the classroom climate, the qualities displayed by teachers, and the personal connections that were made between teachers and students were never comparable to those at my first school. My impression was always that the teachers' abilities to let go of personal stresses and be fully present in the classroom were comparatively limited, and as a result, I never found the classroom climates to be quite as light, positive, or dynamic.

The traditional literature that accompanies yogic meditation practices has much to say about the possibilities of personal transformation that can occur as a result of sustained practice. Current Western academic studies have similarly identified a plethora of physical, psychological, and neurological benefits of regular meditation practice. Important missing pieces in the literature are the voices of meditation practitioners themselves, illustrating the

meaning that they assign to their experiences of meditation. My own narrative offers the meaning that I have constructed about the presence of meditation in the classroom, but it does not include the voices of my teachers. I hope that this inquiry into teachers' experiences of meditation will serve to illuminate the understandings that teachers themselves hold about their own meditation practice, particularly in light of their lives as teachers.

Literature Review

Meditation Research

In the 1970's Western research into Eastern styles of meditation started to be published (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999). In the past decade, there has been a surge in research conducted on the efficacy of meditation practices (Chiesa, 2012). This boom partially reflects the increased use of mindfulness practice through Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) used in clinical settings, and partially reflects a trend in the adoption of various Eastern contemplative and somatic practices by the general population (Bishop, 2002; MacDonald & Shirley, 2009; Park, Riley, Bedesin, & Stewart, 2014). Walsh and Shapiro (2006) point out that "... meditation is now one of the world's most widely practiced, enduring, and researched psychological disciplines" (p. 227). Hundreds of articles have demonstrated that meditation practices improve physical well-being including immune response, stress reactivity, heart health, and chronic pain, as well as a variety of mental health measures, including anxiety and depression, memory function, sleep architecture, subjective well-being, altruism, and other social and emotional competencies (Anderson et al., 1999; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chiesa, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Siegel, 2007).

Studies on TM and mindfulness programs (currently the most popular form of meditation used in clinical settings) make up the majority of the research body (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). TM and many other popular forms of mantra-based meditations have roots in yoga, and mindfulness practices have roots in traditional meditation practices of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism (Bishop, 2002). It should be noted that while contemplative practices can be found

across most religious traditions in the world (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006), the most widely researched forms currently spring from either the Yogic or the Buddhist traditions (MBSR, Vipassana, Loving Kindness Meditation, Standardized Meditation, TM, Sudarshan Kriya Yoga, and Zen meditation practices, among others).

Many of the hundreds of studies published on meditation have used broad definitions of the term “mindfulness” that are simplified as they are translated into language suited to clinical settings. As a result of this process, distinct practices, which in their traditional contexts vary depending on technique, school, and teacher, become homogenized (Chiesa, 2012). In the case of MBSR, the result is a large number of publications, both popular and scholarly, that refer to the term “mindfulness” in a very general sense, without referencing a traditional school associated with the practice (which would have its own rich corresponding philosophy to match the specific style of mindfulness practice it utilizes). Though there are many benefits to making practices more accessible to a Western audience (particularly when language becomes an obstacle to the learning process), the generalization of terms can also over-simplify the complexity of the practice.

Malhotra (2007) identifies such simplified translations as having problematic repercussions, particularly when the language in question belongs to a colonized civilization:

The richness of the meaning of a word is often very deeply embedded in the cultural context, in the history of how that word evolved over time, and in the wide contextual bandwidth of nuances and implied meanings that accompany its usage. ... This is why great harm is done when a foreign culture, especially a colonial one, imposes its own simplistic translations of Sanskrit. ... When a word with contextually determined meanings is reduced to merely one of its many meanings, it is like assigning a specific constant value to an algebraic variable, and thereby eliminating its usefulness as a variable. If someone translates “cuisine = McDonalds,” or “ $x = 5$ ” when x is defined to be any real number between 0 and 10, then the reduction is a violence to the thing being represented.

He argues that Indian philosophies have not undergone the reclamation that many Buddhist and Middle Eastern systems have, following the recontextualization of their

knowledge systems into Eurocentric frameworks. He writes that Indian philosophies are currently struggling with representations of their knowledge, making the hegemony of language a critical issue in academic research (Malhotra, 2007).

It has become important to many practitioners of yogic meditation, who are also promoters and/or researchers of the practice in mainstream Western settings (particularly schools and hospitals), to frame the secularity of the practice so as to make it more readily accepted by societies that value secularism within the public domain (Douglass, 2010). These settings provide very accessible environments for research, and many of the studies available on the effects of meditation have taken place in educational or clinical settings. This means that of the meditation research available to date, many studies are drawn from practices that are isolated from traditional spiritual or religious contexts (or are recontextualized into Western contexts), which may result in unintended reductionism.

Practically, one problem with wanting to secularize meditation is that segmenting a holistic practice may simply make it less effective (either by a simplification that lessens the intensity of experience, or by preventing the practitioner from moving beyond a beginner level of the practice). Not surprisingly, studies on long-term meditators frequently reveal more interesting and complex results. A study on the neurological effects of meditation in monks vs. newly meditating college students, for example, shows tremendous differences in neural changes in favour of the monks when both groups sat for meditation for the same length of time (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004).

There are some examples of conventional quantitative studies that researchers have enriched through integrating traditional concepts to some extent. Brown and Ryan (2003) did this well in a limited way, using experienced mindfulness practitioners to revise Likert scale

items, as part of their exclusion criteria, to include only experiences truly relevant to mindfulness practice. Deshpande, Nagendra, and Nagarathna (2009) measured the efficacy of yoga on self-esteem and the *gunas* (a yogic classification system of physical and psychological personality traits considered to be positively impacted by yogic practices). Theoretical articles that draw on traditional meditation philosophies in an effort to re-frame this field of research have been very valuable in presenting “bigger picture” issues and in highlighting aspects of the practice that need further research (Chiesa, 2012; Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace, 2005; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; among others). While there have been some researchers in the field of meditation who have demonstrated special expertise in Eastern knowledge constructs (Chiesa, 2012; Seppälä, 2008; Shapiro, 2006; Wallace, 2006; among others), the majority of researchers have shied away from studies that involve delving into Eastern religious tenets. Research into many traditional schools of Eastern meditation presents a unique challenge because it is not easy to understand writings without immersion in the culture. Similarly, many philosophies that traditionally accompany meditation practices are grounded in experiential practice. Researchers who are interested in the field of meditation cannot simply “know the field” by reading up on Western scholarship *or* Eastern meditation philosophy. Chiesa (2012) points out that according to traditional Buddhist literature long-term meditation practice is “required before an in-depth experience and understanding of mindfulness can actually be achieved” (n.p.). Austin (2006) quotes Zen teacher Kobori-Roshi: “You must understand that a perspective on life that is derived from an inner experience is different from one that is arrived at intellectually” (p. 6).

Meditation and Teachers

Dr. John Miller, an adherent of *Vipassana*, and a professor of education at the University of Toronto, has introduced meditation and other contemplative practices to over two thousand teachers. He notes that he has witnessed “many small miracles” as a result of his students’ practice, such as more restful sleep, less reactivity to student behaviour in their classrooms, more serenity in life in general, and improved personal relationships (Miller, 2014). He writes about the importance of teachers attending to their inner worlds if holistic education models are to be successful in attending to the inner worlds of students:

A crucial element in the whole school is the whole teacher. If we are to teach the whole child, we need whole teachers. Whole teachers are teachers who care for their own bodies, minds, and spirits. They work on themselves so that they can be more whole. This may include reflective work on their teaching practices, various forms of body work, and contemplative practices such as meditation that nurture their own inner life. (Miller, 2010, pp. 12–13)

In *The Contemplative Practitioner* Miller argues that an important role meditation can play in teacher development is improving teachers’ ability to live “in the moment” during their classroom teaching to be more present with their students: “Teacher presence is often ignored in teacher education as the focus tends to be on theory and teaching strategies; yet, teacher presence is critically important, particularly in holistic education” (Miller, 2014, p. 139).

Just as current academic literature shows substantial evidence of physical, psychological, and neurological benefits arising from regular practice (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chiesa, 2012; Siegel, 2007), philosophies that traditionally accompany yogic meditation practice also identify these results, and outline further effects including improved resiliency, creativity, and ability to make authentic connections with others (Iyengar, 2012;

Shankar, 2010). The practice of meditation may be of special value to high-stress lifestyles and occupations, particularly the care-giving and human service professions in which an ethic of care is paramount for professional efficacy. Teaching is a profession in which resiliency, passion, and care on the part of the teacher have the potential to determine his or her job satisfaction, as well as the quality of learning of the students. For example, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) and Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone (2006) identify students' academic performance and social and emotional competencies as improving sharply based on their teachers' own levels of well-being and perceived self-efficacy.

The problems of teacher stress and burnout have been heavily studied, and the research demonstrates damaging effects on teachers themselves, classroom climate, and student outcomes (Kyriacou, 2001; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). Studies that have linked the practice of meditation to teacher well-being have shown promising results. Anderson, Levinson, Barker, and Kiewra (1999) found that teachers perceived a marked reduction in workplace stress after the adoption of a meditation practice at a frequency of 20 minutes a day, two to five times a week. Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tansey, and Hulland (2009) found improvement in anxiety, depression, and stress levels in primary teachers following an eight-week mindfulness intervention. Hartfiel, Havenhand, Khalsa, Clarke, and Krayner (2011) (working with university employees rather than teachers specifically) found that a short-term yoga intervention (a six-week lunch hour program) significantly improved overall well-being, with participants reporting marked improvements in "clear-mindedness, composure, elation, energy and confidence" (Hartfiel et al., 2011).

There are two important gaps in the current literature on the efficacy of meditation practices: (1) More qualitative studies are needed to better examine the results found so far;

narrative studies especially are needed to reveal the ways in which teachers have experienced these results. Kelchtermans (1999) asserts that stress and burnout are highly complex phenomena because one's perception of an event as stressful or not depends upon one's past life experiences. He posits that if we are to understand teachers' experiences of stress we must contextualize those experiences within teachers' life stories. (2) There is a dearth of studies that employ the frameworks that have traditionally accompanied Eastern meditation practices. This study of meditating schoolteachers seeks to address both these gaps by placing participants' experiences within their reflective narratives and by employing the theoretical framework of classical yoga.

Research Questions

In this narrative study I will employ the theoretical framework of yoga to consider teachers' experiences of meditation. I will address the following research question: How do teachers story their life experiences following their adoption of a regular meditation practice?

I address this research question in two ways. First, through the perspectives and experiences of my own primary school teacher, who has been a practitioner of meditation for over 40 years, and who is able to offer expertise in the area of yogic teaching theory. Second, through perspectives and experiences of three schoolteachers who more recently came to the practice of yogic meditation as adults and were/are experienced classroom teachers before and after taking up this practice.

Theoretical Framework

For this research I will draw on traditional theoretical frameworks found within meditation traditions. There are rich existent philosophies, both ancient and evolving, both written and oral, within many traditional schools of meditation. I will be drawing specifically on the philosophy of yoga to frame this study, as the meditation practices of the participants originate in this tradition.

The majority of studies of meditation have been done with psychological frameworks rather than these classical frameworks. The problem of ethnocentrism of Western knowledge paradigms within academia is increasingly recognized, particularly within the social sciences (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010). In the field of meditation research this has led to a breaking apart of holistic philosophies in order to study aspects of the practice that make sense to current psychology, ultimately resulting in reductionism. Walsh and Shapiro (2006) address this problem at length:

. . . research findings have been interpreted almost exclusively within Western psychological frameworks, ignoring meditation's complementary psychological and philosophical perspectives. This has been widely described as a necessary "decontextualization," but it is actually far more. It is also a major recontextualization and revisioning of the practices within an exclusively Western psychological and philosophical framework. (pp. 227–228)

They argue that the result of this recontextualization is that many studies have looked at the wrong things, missing out on a bigger, more complex and meaningful picture. They highlight the problem of many early studies over-simplifying the benefits of meditation by looking only at its effectiveness in activating the relaxation response. It is now clear that meditation does in fact activate the relaxation response, but the consequent labelling of meditation as a practice that *primarily* or *only* results in this response misses a bigger picture, a

wide array of powerful somatic, psychological, and neurological effects (Chiesa, 2012; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

One explanation for the prevalence of this reductionism in early studies is that researchers did not draw on the philosophies that traditionally accompany the practices to frame research questions. Instead they framed studies based on reasonable expectations of effects from Western psychological paradigms. Meditation techniques that come out of the school of *Yoga* are meant to be accompanied by the philosophies of the school of *Yoga*, shaped largely by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Devereux (in Preface of Iyengar, 2012) identifies Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as "the bible of yoga," but worries that its inaccessibility to scholars and academics has left a significant absence in Western understandings of yoga. In this study of teachers' experiences of yogic-based meditation, I utilize the theoretical framework of yoga. To illustrate this framework, I draw on authoritative texts that offer modern interpretations of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* by recognized and honoured scholars within the field of yoga: predominantly Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Swami Vivekananda, and B. K. S. Iyengar.

What Is Yoga?

To situate the philosophy of yoga within the traditional landscape of Indian scholarship, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with the Six Schools of Hindu Philosophy. However, as Dasgupta explains in *A History of Indian Philosophy* (1969), "It is hardly possible to attempt a history of Indian philosophy in the manner in which the histories of European philosophies have been written...[wherein] thinkers came one after another and offered their independent speculations on philosophy" (p. 62). In India, "the principal systems of philosophy had their beginnings in times of which we have but scanty record, and it is hardly possible to say

correctly at what time they began, or to compute the influence that led to the foundation of so many divergent systems at so early a period..." (p. 62). Additionally he explains that as opposed to a founding father outlining a new school of thought in full, Indian philosophies were born as "shapeless as a newborn babe" (at least in terms of written traditions), and after generations of commentaries and debates between disciples of various schools each system became like a "fully developed man strong and harmonious in all its limbs" (p. 64). In every age religious, philosophical, spiritual leaders offered their own commentaries on existing texts. "Even Sankara, probably the greatest man of India after Buddha, spent his life in writing commentaries on the *Brahma-sutras*, the Upanishads, and the *Bhagavadgita*" (p. 64). The importance of these schools of philosophy as living traditions, still today being clarified, added to, debated, cannot be overstated.

Of the Six Schools of Hindu Philosophy, the first two, *Nyaya* and *Visheshika*, deal with cognition, logic, physical science, and observable objective truths; the third, *Mimamsa*, deals with ethics (including self-evident truths, right-action and duty in life); and the last three, *Sankhya*, *Yoga* and *Vedanta*, deal with subjective truths and inner wellness. *Sankhya* is the study of discernment and refined perception to know what is real. *Yoga* is the study of physical and mental exercises to bring clarity of mind, harmony and balance to life, and inner knowledge of one's existence. *Vedanta* is a spiritual philosophy that examines subjective truths of life and experience (Kriyananda, 2013; Vivekananda, 2012). Kriyananda, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, explains the relationship between these last three schools as *Sankhya* dealing with the *why* of the spiritual search ("...*why* is it important to renounce attachment to the world?"), *Yoga* dealing with the *how* ("...how can we direct all our energy toward the heights?"), and

Vedanta dealing with the *what* (“...what to expect, once our energy and consciousness have become one-pointedly directed upward?”) (Kriyananda, 2013, loc 145 of 2469).

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are generally considered to have been composed in the third century CE (Miller, 1995). Patanjali, while not actually the father of yoga (the roots of yoga can be traced back as far as 8000 years to the ancient rishis of India (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005, part I)), was an important preceptor who offered a commentary on yoga (drawing also on *Sankhya* philosophies, the Upanishads, and ideas of early Buddhism and other contemporary discourses). His Yoga Sutras have formed the basis of most understandings of yogic philosophy today. His text was a turning point in the development of the school of Yoga, and is still commented on by revered teachers of today. Iyengar (2012) explains their value:

Patanjali's 196 aphorisms or sutras cover all aspects of life, beginning with a prescribed code of conduct and ending with man's vision of his true Self. Each word of the sutras is concise and precise. As individual drops of rain contribute towards the formation of a lake, so each word contained in the sutras conveys a wealth of thought and experience, and is indispensable to the whole. (loc 163 of 9509)

Patanjali's exposition is built around the eight limbs of yoga (which together constitute the full practice of yoga). They are *yama* (ethics), *niyama* (self-discipline), *asana* (physical postures), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), *pratyahara* (ability to disengage from sense experiences at will), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (temporary or complete dissolution of one's individual identity into a unified consciousness). “Yoga has eight limbs just as a chair has four legs. Each is connected to the whole. So if you just pull one, the whole chair will move. The whole body develops together. Organs develop together... That is why Patanjali called them the limbs of Yoga” (Shankar, 2010, p. 171). Of the limbs of yoga, four make up the experience of sitting for meditation itself (*pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*), and all

are relevant to authentic practice—meditation itself being integral to and reliant upon all other aspects of yogic practice.

Philosophy of Yoga

The yogic view of life offers a rich portrayal of the human experiences of stress and well-being, suffering and joy, mental confinement and freedom. It has been commonly referred to as “a complete science of mind.” The following description of the yogic framework is a necessarily simplified glimpse of an extensive holistic system.

The foundation of the yogic framework is a concept of inner well-being, peace, joy, and connection to something greater than oneself as an ever-present reality that is frequently hidden by the stresses and unhappiness of life, and therefore not constantly experienced by the individual. Wellness and happiness are defined as one's true nature, and stress and unhappiness are understood as part of the illusion of the mind. The eight limbs of yoga are presented as practices for the yogi to undertake in order to return to full union with the joyful peaceful self (it is from this concept of unity that yoga, translated as union, gets its name). It is considered that most students of yoga need philosophical guidance on this journey, and that this guidance is best given in the oral tradition by a living teacher who has experienced this journey his/herself. In this manner, it is possible to introduce relevant aspects of this philosophy to the student at the right time, in a way that is suited to the student's style of learning, and in an experiential manner, grounded in the student's yogic practices and personal observations (Vivekananda, 2012).

The Nature of the Mind

The struggle of the yogi is that the mind, a necessary vehicle for daily living, also pulls one into unhappiness. Yogic philosophy states that it is the mind's nature to look outward—to engage the senses, look for fun, amusement, happiness—but this sequence of desires ironically gives birth to unhappiness, either by not being fulfilled, or by leading to more desires. “Just look back and check all the desires that you have achieved. Have they given you rest? They have not. They have just given you greater hope that you can achieve more; that you can have more” (Shankar, 2010, p. 6). True joy is said to be experienced when one returns to union with one's inner self—the source of all joy. Part of the illusion of the mind is that happiness appears conditional; one perceives experiences of joy as coming from external triggers (eating something delicious, seeing a loved one, hearing a favourite song), but in moments of such delight, one is simply experiencing a glimpse of one's own inner joy (Shankar, 2010). “Self is the nature of joy. In any pleasant experience, you close your eyes; you smell a nice flower, or you taste or touch something. So sukha is that which takes you to the Self” (Shankar, 2015).

According to the Yoga Sutras there are five fundamental causes of suffering. These are referred to as the *kleshas*. They are *avidya* (ignorance, or believing the illusions of the mind rather than clearly perceiving existence as it is), *asmita* (ego-sense, or thinking about one's self), *raga* (craving), *dvesha* (aversion), and *abhinivesha* (fear) (Iyengar, 2012; Vivekananda, 2012). It is explained that, “when these five *kleshas* are eliminated even at the circumference, then whatever is in the centre becomes very eminent” (Shankar, 2010, p. 60). The practice of meditation is considered to help eliminate the *kleshas* (which exist on the surface of the individual) because it allows one to momentarily reunite with the core. The idea of moving towards one's centre, reuniting with one's inner self or core, comes from the yogic idea that the

individual's existence is made of seven layers or sheaths. In order from external to internal, gross to subtle, they are: body, breath, mind, intellect, ego, memory, and self (Iyengar, 2012; Shankar, 2010).

As the yogi practises meditation, he/she is said to acquire greater knowledge about all the layers of his/her existence (occurring both during the practice of meditation, and increasingly throughout engaged daily life). It is explained as resulting in the increased awareness that Western psychology calls meta-awareness or meta-cognition, which is held as paramount to mental health and personal growth (Brown & Ryan, 2003). "The effect of yoga is to reflect the thoughts and actions of the aspirant as in a mirror. The practitioner observes the reflections of his thoughts, mind, consciousness and actions, and corrects himself. This process guides him toward the observation of his inner self" (Vivekananda, 2010, loc 190 of 9509).

Observation of one's own thought processes is crucial to the practice of yoga because awareness of the various modes of the mind allows one to dive beneath these modes into the calm beneath. "The yogi differentiates between the wavering uncertainties of thought processes and the understanding of Self, which is changeless" (Iyengar, 2012, loc 344 of 9509). These modes of the mind are called *vruttis*. *Vruttis* have been translated as "modes" of the mind (Shankar, 2010), conditions (Iyengar, 2012), eddies or whirlpools (Kriyananda, 2013), and waves (Vivekananda, 2012). The classic metaphor used within yoga is the comparison of *vruttis* to mind as waves to the water (Kriyananda, 2013; Vivekananda, 2012):

The bottom of the lake we cannot see, because its surface is covered with ripples. It is only possible for us to catch a glimpse of the bottom, when the ripples have subsided, and the water is calm. If the water is muddy or agitated all the time, the bottom will not be seen. If it is clear, and there are no waves, we shall see the bottom. The bottom of the lake is our own true Self; the lake is the Chitta and the waves the *Vruttis*." (Vivekananda, loc 1218 of 2759)

Shankar (2010) explains that there are only six possible experiences of the mind at any given time—either it is experiencing *samadhi* (yoga, or union, with the self), or it is engaged in one of the five *vrittis*. They are *pramana* (determining correct perception, looking for proof that something is true), *viparyaya* (misperception), *vikalpa* (imagination or fantasy), *nidra* (sleep), and *smriti* (memory) (Iyengar, 2012; Shankar, 2010).

Awareness of one's own mind as engaged in the *vrittis* is said to bring moments of union within one's nature, which causes a moment of *samadhi* (like the realization that one is dreaming brings sudden awareness of reality). In this way it is considered that self-study or *swadhyaya* “can eliminate all mental and emotional impurities, uncertainties, fears and anxieties...” (Shankar, 2010, p. 138). Vivekananda (2012) explains this process as the crux of yoga practice: “What is practice? The attempt to restrain the mind in Chitta form, to prevent its going out into waves” (loc 1304 of 2759).

Abhyasa and Viragya

Abhyasa (practice) and *viragya* (dispassion) are called the twin pillars of yoga (Iyengar, 2012, loc 264 of 9509). The first pillar, *abhyasa*, is the sustained practice of the eight limbs, regardless of personal feelings and impulses (enjoying one's yoga, *pranayama*, and meditation one day, and finding it boring the next), as well as coming back to awareness of self again and again through daily living (Shankar, 2010). “Abhyasa (practice) is the art of learning that which has to be learned through cultivation of disciplined action” (Iyengar, 2012, loc 264 of 9509). The second pillar, *viragya*, or dispassion, is being established in the attitude that joy comes from within, rather than from attaining something outwardly. When engaged in yogic practices, it is the determination to simply rest within oneself for a certain amount of time. It is to avoid

looking at the television no matter how interesting the show; it is to avoid eating no matter how delicious the food. It is to quiet the senses' search for pleasure in order to experience the deeper joy of resting in one's self (Shankar, 2010). This is the attitude necessary for deep meditation.

Without dispassion, practice is not "full," it does not bear fruit, it does not "provide you with the rest you are longing for" (Shankar, 2010, p. 25). And without practice, dispassion is just empty renunciation of the pleasures of life, making everything dry and boring. But together they "[protect] the practitioner from entanglement with sense objects and [redirect] the energies centripetally towards the core of the being" (Iyengar, 2012, loc 280 of 9509). Together they allow the individual to sink into blissful union, and experience the wholeness, completeness, and integrity of one's own self (Shankar, 2010).

There has been a misconception that the sincere adoption of yogic practices leads to the renunciation of normal life and to the desire to live as a monk; but in fact classical practices have always been available for "householders": that majority of individuals who direct most of their energy to their work and family life (Mahesh Yogi, 1967, Rama, 1978). Because yoga makes it practical for the individual to connect with the self on a day-to-day basis, bringing a state of wellness and rejuvenation, it is of great benefit to busy people (Mahesh Yogi, 1967; Shankar, 2010). The sustained practice of yoga over the long term is said to produce many positive effects in the practitioner—not just at the time of practice, but increasingly throughout his/her daily life. Many of these effects are directly related to one's engagement with others.

Effects of Practice

According to yogic philosophy, one of the positive effects of sustained practice is the increased occurrence of *sowmya*: feeling joyful while remaining calm and composed. Whereas many

types of happiness make one excitable often to the point of being insensitive to the feelings of others, *sowmya* is joy that includes sensitivity to others' feelings and awareness of one's surroundings. This has important implications for individuals working in care-giving professions, as it positively affects one's ability to connect with others (an important marker for burnout risk (Maslach and Jackson, 1981)). The yogic explanation for meditation practices impacting one's interaction with others is: joy that is rooted in a connection with one's self allows one the capacity to maintain authentic connections with others (Shankar, 2010).

Additionally, two categories of *samadhi* are outlined: types of *samadhi* experienced during rest (as in meditation), and the *samadhi* experienced during activity (Shankar, 2010). Shankar (2010) explains how the experience of *samadhi* extends beyond the experience of meditation and spreads into one's daily living:

Though you exist with a body, in a state of *samadhi* you are not there at all. In other words, you can live as though you do not exist. This is *samadhi*. When you are with the Self, you are just with the Self—steady, blissful and joyful. And when you are with the senses, you are totally with the senses. When you are with the object of the senses, you become the object of the senses. (p. 102)

Another result of yogic practices is said to be efficiency of activity, which Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1995) refers to as “perfection in action.” Practice of *asana*, *pranayama*, and meditation provide deep rest (explained to increase energy and dynamism once the practitioner engages in activity) as well as focus for the “scattered mind” (allowing for assurance of desired goals, determination of the best courses of action, and clear un-distracted action). “Now with pranayama, there is clarity and you are able to have an intention and a direction. That is why you will notice, after a good pranayama, your mind is clearer, steadier and calmer” (Shankar, 2010, p. 194). Self-study allows the yogi to recognize the motives behind his/her desires and actions, allowing one to determine the root cause of each desire or goal. Intentions (to achieve a

goal) become more powerful, likely to bear fruit, and likely to be supported by others because one is able to understand precisely what is best and most suited for oneself as well as others. Finally, mistakes in one's actions are said to become more rare; they are explained as being caused by a tired, confused, non-unified, or overly busy mind (Mahesh Yogi, 1995; Shankar, 2010).

The *gunas*.

A further way to understand the effect of yoga on personal and professional experiences and abilities is through the concept of the *gunas*. It would not be possible in this brief outline of basic ideas in yogic philosophy to go into detail about the extensive theories of *prana* (translated as life-force energy) that accompany the yogic framework. These are offered as explanation for the yogic accounts of meditation producing physical healing, emotional healing of past traumas, increases in energy levels, changes in patterns of mind, etc. (Vivekananda, 2012). The theories of *prana* present another dimension to the power of meditation and demonstrate that meditation's efficacy is based on more than self-reflection and increased meta-cognition. A fundamental basis of these theories is that all of creation is made up of the *gunas*, the three natures. As the level of *prana* within the individual increases or decreases the state of the *gunas* changes.

“The whole creation is made up of these three *gunas*, three natures” (Shankar, 2010, p. 162). *Tamas* is dullness, sleep, lethargy; *rajas* brings greater activity, and is restless, full of desires; and *sattva* is alert, sharp, joyful, and enthusiastic. “Consciousness is imbued with the three qualities (*gunas*) of luminosity (*sattva*), vibrancy (*rajas*), and inertia (*tamas*). The *gunas* also colour our actions...” (Iyengar, 2012, loc 256 of 9509). According to the environment one

inhabits, the time (of day, the season, etc.), the people one associates with, one's memories, and one's actions (eating, sleeping, talking, exercising, practice of yoga, service to others, etc.), one is affected by the various *gunas* at various times, the predominant *guna* shaping the individual's experience of stress or wellness, exhaustion or dynamism, tendency to shirk responsibility or capacity for effective action (Shankar, 2014).

Your body is made up of the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and they influence your thoughts, behavioural patterns, etc. ... Now, when these three *gunas* influence you, according to their nature, time, place, etc., you tend to identify yourself with the effect of that influence. You may begin to feel that you are a dull and lethargic person; that you have many negative qualities. This is ignorance. You should observe the tendencies that come up in you and think you are not those tendencies; that the *gunas* will influence you according to their nature. (Shankar, 2010, p. 164)

Yoga takes the position that various personal qualities reflect changing influences on an individual rather than being static characteristics. This allows the yogi to recognize the changing nature of the *gunas* within her/himself without labelling her/himself. The yogi is then encouraged to engage in yogic practices that increase *prana*, moving him/her through experiences of *tamas* and *rajas* towards *sattva*, which consequently brings out his/her best qualities. Enthusiasm and resiliency, characteristics identified as having significant value for schoolteachers, are, in the framework of yoga, attributed to higher *prana* and the increased presence of *sattva*. High *prana* and states of *sattva* are also identified as the root of an individual's ability to impart knowledge and convey ideas effectively to others (Shankar, 2010; Vivekananda, 2012).

The *Guru* System

It is traditionally considered important to study yogic philosophy and practice directly from a teacher, or *acharya*, rather than from texts; and, whenever possible, directly from a *guru*—a

recognized yogi so advanced he or she is considered a living embodiment of such knowledge (Fischman, 2010; Rama, 1978). Swami Rama (1978) points out that while the opportunity to study with a *guru* is considered a rare blessing, there are also many misconceptions about *gurus* in modern life (Rama, 1978). It is true that in North America in the past century there has been a conflation of the term “guru” with experts in specialized fields of knowledge at best, and with power-seeking cult leaders at worst. This may be partly due to the misappropriation of yogic philosophical concepts by some cults and new religious movements, though it is likely fundamentally due to cultural inexperience with *Yoga* (Forsthoefel & Humes, 2005). Within India, the traditional framework of yoga provides an inbuilt system of recognition of authentic and authoritative *gurus* (by other *gurus*, *swamis*, and *shankaracharyas*), which serves to protect sincere students from mistakenly associating themselves with self-proclaimed or inauthentic “gurus”.

The word guru is so misused that I feel hurt sometimes . . . that which dispels the darkness of ignorance is called guru. In the West the word guru is often misused. . . . Those who think of the guru as a body or as a man do not understand this pious word. If a guru comes to think that his power is his own, then he is a guide no more. The guru is tradition; he is a stream of knowledge. (Swami Rama, 1978, pp. 363–365)

While such traditional study with a *guru* can seem mysterious to someone who has not been exposed to this process, narrative literature on the lives of yogis can offer a glimpse into such an experience. There are several well-known memoirs of yoga practitioners. The first of these to be published was Paul Brunton’s *A Search in Secret India* (1934), in which Raphael Hurst (writing under the pen name Paul Brunton) travels throughout India, meeting various respected *sadhus* and *gurus* as well as illegitimate self-proclaimed holy men, until finally meeting and studying with Sri Ramana Maharishi, the revered sage of Tamil Nadu who taught *advaita* philosophy and *bhakti yoga*. Christopher Isherwood wrote *My Guru and His Disciple* (not published until his

death in 1981, but comprising diary entries written from 1939 to 1976) about his relationship with his *guru*, Swami Prabhavananda of the Ramakrishna Order, who travelled to the United States in 1923 and taught *Vedanta* philosophy until his death in 1976. Perhaps the best known memoir concerning yoga is *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda (1971).

Autobiography of a Yogi still stands out as remarkable today in that it was the first yogic memoir to be written by an Indian yogi who was raised within the culture of yoga. Yogananda was born in India to a Bengali family who practised yoga in the lineage of Mahavatar Babaji. He left home at seventeen to travel to the Himalayas to find a personal living *guru* with whom he could study (ultimately finding Sri Yukteswar Giri, who belonged to the same yogic lineage Yogananda's family followed). Similarly, Swami Rama, in *Masters of the Himalayas* (1978), wrote about being born into a family of yogis who studied under a *guru*. Swami Rama left home at a young age to pursue full-time study with this *guru* (Bengali Baba) and writes about the ancient tradition of studying from yoga masters who live in the Himalayan caves: "The monastery in which I grew up is one of these. In our cave monastery the tradition goes back four or five thousand years, and it is well-remembered. We have records of who the first masters were and how the tradition began" (Rama, 1978, p. 37).

Sri M, in *Apprenticed to a Himalayan Master: A Yogi's Autobiography* (2011), wrote more recently about traditional yogic study. Sri M was born in South India to a Muslim family. His father had an interest in *hatha yoga* (the physical practice of *asanas*, or yoga postures), but that was the only presence yoga had in his early life. Sri M too left home as a teenager, fleeing to the Himalayas in search of a *guru*, finding Sri Maheshwarnath Babaji (who rarely accepted students, but was waiting for Sri M's arrival on the instructions of his own *guru*, Mahavatar

Babaji). After three years of intense study Sri M was asked by his *guru* to leave the Himalayas, resume householder life, and teach yoga to sincere students in the West.

Reflecting the contemporary reality of respected *gurus* who travel and teach internationally rather than remaining within their own ashrams, Michael Fischman wrote *Stumbling into Infinity: An Ordinary Man in the Sphere of Enlightenment* (2010). It is a memoir about meeting well-known *guru* Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in the United States and then spending his life studying and working with him. Fischman reflects also on the two years he spent studying in a more traditional setting in his *guru*'s ashram in South India. Also of note is the work of Ram Dass, the scholar and psychologist formerly known as Richard Alpert. While never writing a memoir specifically, he has authored numerous lectures, podcasts, and books on yogic philosophy which include personal stories of his life and learning with his *guru*, the esteemed Neem Karoli Baba who taught *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga*. In the 2017 short film *Ram Dass, Going Home*, Ram Dass, nearing the end of his life, offers his narrative of recovery after a debilitating stroke. He considers this challenging last period in his life a stage of his *sadhana* (yogic practice). He shares the story of his life, and his preparation for death, in light of the philosophy of yoga.

These memoirs are all marked by the importance placed on learning the practice of yoga from an authentic *guru*, and are often as much stories about the *guru* as they are about the yoga student and his experiences—demonstrating the deeply important role the *guru* plays in traditional yogic study. In part, the subjects of these memoirs must be considered exceptional: the reason they wrote memoirs is that they had extraordinary experiences during their rigorous, all-encompassing study of yoga. They are the monks of the yoga world—not the average householder yogi raising a family, pursuing a career, and practising yoga on the side. However,

these memoirs do illustrate the importance of learning yoga from a teacher who belongs to a traditional lineage: one who is able to identify their *guru* and *paramguru* (*guru's guru*). Swami Rama further elucidates this point, explaining that in modern life there are many teachers of meditation and yogic techniques, but the reason it is important to follow the traditional framework of yoga, finding a teacher who has studied with an authentic and authoritative *guru*, is that self-discipline of body and mind is meant to accompany the practice of yoga in order for the student to truly benefit from yogic techniques. He points out that a fundamental goal of yoga practice is removing one's mental patterns and conditioning (*samskaras*). He explains that the removal of these *samskaras* can be achieved by the practice of yoga in tandem with the self-discipline that is cultivated through a student's apprenticeship with a *guru*:

. . . This cleansing and replacement of mental content is possible if one follows a path of self-discipline. Too many modern teachers profess to teach spirituality and meditation without discipline. They may introduce sound techniques—but without training the students to be disciplined, it is like sowing seeds in the soil that was never tilled. . . . There needs to be a bridge between life within and without. Discipline is the foundation of that bridge. People should not be tempted by mere techniques, but learn to cultivate that discipline within themselves. (Rama, 1978, p. 194)

All the above-mentioned memoirs declare (in remarkable unison) that although the wisdom of yoga is maintained and protected by the tradition of *gurus* and disciples, the knowledge of yoga is meant for the world at large, to enhance the daily life of the householder living in the world, raising a family, holding a career. Another feature shared, incredibly, by all the memoirs (and perhaps a common motivation to write such memoirs in the first place) is the encouragement by the teller's *guru* that they must travel (or return home), teach, and share the knowledge of yoga and the practice of meditation with the world:

The Yogi must come out of his habitual seclusion and mingle with the noisy assemblages where men command machines. He thinks it is time for the Yogi to descend into the factory, the office and the school and attempt to spiritualize them – not by preaching and

propaganda, but by inspired action. The way of hustling everyday activity can and must be made the way of heaven. (Brunton, 1934, p. 248)

“Madhu” he said, “you have learnt all that you had to, and the lotus of your heart has bloomed. Now, it is time to go back to the plains, to the outside world. Soon, you’ll have to say goodbye to me, and go back to your parents. . . . And then, [you] will begin the teaching phase.” (M, 2011, loc 3646 of 5583)

Yoga and Schoolteachers

There are two final notes about yoga that I feel should not be missed in the discussion of the teaching profession. Though they are finer points of philosophy not generally discussed in overviews of the yogic system, they are of direct concern to schoolteachers, the topic to which this framework will be applied. The first concerns the important “trident” of yogic life, or “three pillars of spiritual life” in yoga (Rishi Nityapragya in Guru Vaani, 2008): *satsang*, *seva*, and *sadhana*. These are translated as knowledge, service, and meditation: *satsang* is knowledge (of one’s self, and of good ways to live, work and be in the world in a way that is positive, uplifting, and enlightening to ourselves and others) as well as keeping the good company of others who are pursuing this knowledge; *seva* is service to others, ideally without concern for one’s own desires; and *sadhana* is yogic practice and meditation. Rishi Nityapragya (in Guru Vaani, 2008) discusses the importance of these activities being practised together to create a full and satisfying life, explaining that they each enhance the others, contributing to a whole that is greater than the sum of the three parts. He explains that *seva* (service) and *sadhana* (meditation) without *satsang* (wisdom) make one very serious, stuck in one’s own opinions, and unenthusiastic; that *sadhana* (meditation) without *seva* (service) gives one energy without direction, leading to boredom; and that *seva* (service) without *satsang* (wisdom) and *sadhana*

(meditation) is exhausting (identified as a leading cause of teacher burnout) (Guru Vaani, 2008). Since teachers' work is by definition *seva* and they are also frequently engaged in *satsang* (professional development, collegial relationships, and reflective practice) then, according to the yogic view, the missing piece that will allow teachers to experience a well-rounded and fulfilled life is *sadhana* (yogic practice and meditation).

The second note is about the traditional consideration of best teaching practices and their use in the *gurukul* system (the traditional Vedic Indian school system). This is classical knowledge that falls outside of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, but was (and to a great extent still is) applied to the teaching of yogic philosophy as well as the other five schools of Indian philosophy, and knowledge beyond that as well. It is the idea that in order to successfully convey curriculum (which included yogic knowledge), as well as to behave in a manner conducive to effective teaching, teachers themselves were required to sincerely practise the essential elements of yoga in their personal lives. They were expected to display highly developed social and emotional competencies, be able to connect with students in meaningful ways, possess the wisdom and discipline to teach ideal behaviour and attitudes through example, and have the skill to impart knowledge according to the individual needs of each child—all of which were considered reasonable expectations of teachers, since the knowledge of how to achieve these abilities are contained within the philosophy of yoga (Kaibarta, 2015; Ramkumar, 2014).

While yogic philosophy is too often written about as an ancient study (no longer relatable in modern times), it deserves to be correctly acknowledged as the thriving living tradition that it is. Widely studied and practised within and outside of India, with scholars and yoga *gurus*

continually critiquing and expanding on its scholarship, Yoga demonstrates breadth and depth as a systematized science, and deserves international recognition of its existence as such.

Methodology

This research adopts a narrative method, which is fitting because the research draws on subjective and experiential knowledge of the participants and myself as researcher. It is also an appropriate method because the participants who were interviewed are all practising meditators, a group that has been considered to have a noticeable capacity for personal awareness and reflection—a key to the success of the narrative method. Walsh and Shapiro (2006) point out that meditators are unique research subjects because of their sensitivity and honed meta-cognitive awareness, and in some types of studies they may be more reliable than average participants in identifying their own internal processes, emotional changes, and changes in thought patterns. Additionally, the study showcases my own narrative: the meanings I have constructed about my experiences attending a school in which meditation had a defining presence. This personal narrative is woven into the thesis text, highlighting the space that I, as researcher, am coming from, and the meaning I have constructed about the topic. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that narrative research is the meeting of many stories in a particular place and time. Like moving rivers, narratives continue on, ever different, changed by momentary meetings along their course. This study strives to portray a moment in the narrative stream from my past, the point of confluence of this stream with other narrative streams, and the emergence of new narratives from these meetings.

Authenticity

Knowledge produced from narrative research is subjective rather than relativist and specific rather than general. It showcases the meaning a particular individual has given to an experience.

This raises questions about the relevance of the knowledge produced within narrative research to research fields in general. Riessman (2008) defends the relevance of narrative research in making sense of bigger issues, and extrapolating to understand human experience. She cites Mishler's argument that throughout time, "theories of great significance were developed through individual cases" (p. 12):

A good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary. Just because narrative approaches interrogate cases (rather than population-based samples) does not mean results cannot be generalized. (p. 13)

It is important to examine carefully the authenticity concerns relevant to narrative research, then, because the more faithful a narrative text is to the authentic and intended meaning of the narrator, the more likely it is to reveal insight, and be valuable to wider applications.

Clandinin explains that "Narrative Inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (2013, p.17). Narrative is the natural form that people have used to share experiences, insights, and personal meaning throughout much of human history. The interview method of data collection, which I will employ in this research, is an excellent method for narrative research in general because it allows for the style of story-telling natural to human conversation. I will follow the "validity" model outlined by Polkinghorne (2007) throughout the data collection and interpretation stages of the research. He points out that in narrative research it is the listener/receiver who establishes validity¹ based on two basic issues: (1) "the differences in people's experienced meaning and the stories they tell about this meaning" and (2) "the connections between storied texts and the interpretations of those texts" (p. 471). Following this

¹ Although Polkinghorne uses the term validity, verisimilitude may be a term more appropriate to the narrative method.

model I, as researcher, must attend to two questions: (1) How can I assist participants in the creation of perceptive and introspective narratives? (2) How can I interpret texts so as to honour the teller's meaning?

Polkinghorne (2007) argues that narrative interviewers are capable of helping participants uncover greater awareness of their own stories. He notes that this can occur through a process of reflexivity (on the part of the participant), if the appropriate measures are taken during the narrative interview process. As an example, he notes Seidman's (1991) three-part interview model as being helpful in promoting reflection and insight between interviews. Granting sufficient time between the three interviews is a crucial element of this process, so as to give the participant the space for reflection and introspection.

The second goal of authenticity in narrative research is for the researcher to let the participant's narrative (and its given meaning) stand on its own, without over-analysis that draws on the researcher's own interpretations (Polkinghorne, 2007). It is important for the researcher to recognize that this may be possible only to a limited extent, and practise reflexivity in an effort to honour the participant's narrative, declaring this process in the research results where relevant. While researchers can never know the full given meanings and interpretations of the participant in narrative research, they can act with the intention of understanding from the participant's perspective in order to be fully present and attentive; and then, knowing that a full understanding may never be possible, they can practise reflexivity, examining their own interpretations of fieldwork, interview text, and the research process as a whole.

In order to interpret texts in a way that honours the teller's intended meaning, narrative scholars have developed a number of practical guidelines, which I have strived to honour in this

study. Polkinghorne (2007) explains that, “because interview texts are co-created, interviewers need to guard against simply producing the texts they had expected” (p. 482). He advocates open and patient receiving scenarios in which the interviewer is able to attend and respond to unexpected information that arises. Riessman (2008) calls this “following a participant down her trails.” During the data collection of this project I grappled with the difficulties of remaining fully present with the participant being interviewed. I observed my own meditation practice before each interview, and I spent time in introspection and reflexive journal writing after each interview in an effort to identify my own expectations and biases, and better hear the narrative presented by the participant. During interviews I tried to maintain flexibility to respond to unexpected pieces of information, as Riessman challenges, for example by abandoning topics I expected to ask about and by forming new themes to explore with the interviewee.

Data Collection

Six participants were interviewed for this study. These include three teachers, one teacher-expert (my own teacher who went on to publish about holistic education and who has taught meditation for over 40 years), as well as two peers with whom I attended school. The recruitment of teacher participants was done using a network of meditation teachers, with whom I had pre-existing relationships, to identify students who might fit the selection criteria. These meditation students were invited to join the study via email flyers. The selection criteria required that each participant must have adopted a personal meditation practice within the last eight years, perceived that practice as valuable, and maintained regular practice (at least 15 minutes per day, 2–3 times per week), and have been a schoolteacher for more than one year

before the adoption of the meditation technique. For the teacher-expert and two peers recruitment was straightforward, as they remain personal friends of mine and were interested in the project from its early stages.

I have drawn on Seidman's (1991) three-part interview model as inspiration, adjusting the interview process to suit this research. The spirit of his model has been honoured in that I began by asking participants about their life stories, and in that space and time was provided to promote reflection on the topic as well as mental and emotional processing of what was shared during the interview experience. There were three interviews (one hour each) conducted per participant to allow for Seidman's predicted pathway to establishing a more complete and reflective narrative. The general themes for these interview were (1) life stories and why the participant took up meditation (first interview), (2) the participant's decision to become a schoolteacher and experiences in the classroom (second interview), and (3) integrating the participant's reflections on meditation with their lives and their classroom experiences (third interview). However, these themes were fluid and I strived to follow the direction of the participants' narratives in the case that one of these themes emerged during any interview session. The amount of time between each interview depended on my own travel logistics as well as the participant's availability. The interviews were audio recorded. Unstructured interviews were employed so as to provide the natural space of two friends sharing, which has been postulated within narrative inquiry to promote deeper, more insightful, authentic revelations (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I approached the first interview by asking the participant to tell me about their life, including when and why they became a schoolteacher and when and why they took up meditation. In the case of the teacher-expert, the second

unstructured interview included the presentation of artifacts (class projects from my time as her student) that triggered memories for both of us.

The participants were asked to optionally complete journals—one following each interview with any additions or revisions to their interview experience, assisting them with the reflection process. Only the teacher-expert chose to write these journals. My own journals include my reflexive impressions of the interview process, completed the day of the interview when possible, or shortly thereafter in some instances. These take the place of fieldnotes, the importance of which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight for assisting the researcher to remember the events of fieldwork as they originally experienced it, rather than through the new narrative understanding created by the research. Taking fieldnotes during the interview process has been avoided in this study, as the tone is meant to be that of natural conversation, inspiring authentic narrative revelations.

In addition to the four teacher participants who completed the three-part interviews, I held one focus group (2 hours in length), also conducted in the style of natural conversation. This group included three of my peers, but one declined to be featured in the study results, so the narratives included in this thesis showcase only parts of the conversation that took place between myself and two of my peers.

I have also included my own narrative throughout this research to illustrate my process of understanding and interpreting the data. My story is presented briefly in the Introduction, as one of the voices in the narrative text boxes of Yoga and Teaching Theory, through my reflections in Stories, and in the conclusion of Tensions and Implications. In order to facilitate the readers' navigation of multiple narrative streams I have additionally added my own voice at the beginning of chapters, and occasionally throughout a chapter, in italicized text. These

introductions of text act as guideposts and give transparency to the way I considered each narrative stream and how I consequently decided to organize them, forming the overarching narrative of this thesis.

Interpretation Strategies

Knowledge production in narrative research is concerned with the meaning that individuals give to life experiences (Clandinin, 2006). My interpretation of the data in this research is based on the idea that individual subjective truths hold meaning, and that meaning reveals the insights by which people live their lives. I have strived to honour the participants' narratives by ensuring that the insights they revealed are presented within the context of their stories and lives. The reflexivity that I practised during the data collection and interpretation is woven throughout this thesis.

Many scholars of narrative research are wary of excess interpretation (Frank, 2000; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Polkinghorne, 2007). Polkinghorne (2007) argues that stories can stand alone as research results, and if there *are* going to be accompanying analyses of text by the researcher, their purpose should be clarification rather than summary. Additionally, if researchers choose to add interpretations, they must justify those interpretations to the readers. Frank (2000), too, is wary of over-analysis. He argues that stories have tremendous meaning for tellers, and if researchers jump right into a textual analysis rather than take part in the story-telling process, they may create false impressions and misconstrue intended meaning. I have attempted to present stories as they were revealed by participants, and have provided commentary, not on the narratives themselves but on the framework of yoga. Thus, the

interpretation that yogic philosophy would offer for a given experience stands, in some cases, beside the participant's own constructed meaning.

I also reflected, in my research journals, on the spaces in which interviews took place—the events and social interactions that occurred and the environment and mood—which form an important context for the narrative that was shared. Gubrium and Holstein (2009) take a social approach to narrative research, which they term “narrative ethnography.” They explain narrative reality as a flexible, ever-changing concept that relies on social interaction and “communicative circumstances” to give it shape (p. 16). They argue that “the environments of storytelling mediate the internal organization and meaning of accounts” (p. 10). I include, in the introduction to each participant narrative, some excerpts from my research journals that identify the space in which narratives were shared, some enjoyments, and some challenges that arose during data collection. Because of the narrative nature of this study I believe it is worthwhile to include my impressions of these spaces and interactions.

Stories Part I

Kate's Story

As a first step in creating this narrative study I reflected upon my own experiences in school. Consequently, I approached my own elementary school teacher and asked for her story: her life story, the reason she learned meditation, the reason she became our teacher, and what her experience of our school was. This is what she told me.

Researcher's Journal, March 25, 2016:

I did my first interview with Kate today. It was fantastic. I have such a strong connection with her, and it felt amazing to see her—like being home. We were at a beautiful little house where she has been house-sitting. We'll be in a different location for the next interviews as this was her last day in that house. We sat at a nice old wooden table in a sunny kitchen, and she gave me honey and lemon tea for my sore throat and occasionally stopped talking to fuss over me when I coughed. My husband and son were with me and had gone out to the park for an hour during the interview. When they got back we were still talking, but it felt as if we were coming to a natural break anyway and it didn't seem disruptive. We mostly addressed meditation in her life: why she started meditating, what she has done in her life (all focused around mediation), and how she came to be a teacher—meditation teacher and schoolteacher. I felt very touched to hear about how important our school was to her life just as it was to mine. She definitely felt that there was something magical there for those few years we were all together. Something that couldn't be repeated at another time, in another place, something that was bigger than meditation practice, curriculum, class size, etc. She described it as a special group of people who were meant to be together to do something special. The world is magical in her eyes; she

spoke about her life with gratitude and reverence, and I felt drawn into her bubble of grace and wisdom.

One thing I noticed, and regretted, was asking a question that felt forced. In that moment I shifted from myself sharing naturally with her, to “researcher” asking a question, looking for a certain kind of answer. The question was at the end of the interview, about the effects of meditation by students—did she think that it was a leading cause of the classroom successes we had discussed? But at that moment she was actually trying to tell me something bigger: that the school was special in a bigger way, that attributing the whole picture only to meditation misses the boat... It was incredible how the conversation became stilted and awkward as soon as I asked the question, and became smooth and natural as soon as I flowed more naturally with the conversation.

I did have a lot of success, I think, with being in the present, staying with what she was saying. When I had a question I waited for a natural break in what she was saying, and if it was still relevant, I asked it. If she had gone on to say something different, or was coming to a different point than what I had assumed, I let it go, and just stayed with her and listened carefully. As I let go of the direction in which I thought the interview would go and just attended to what was happening, the most appropriate and insightful questions just became obvious. I believe that, because of this, we ended up covering one big topic with its own natural progression and conclusion rather than getting scattered.

Researcher's Journal, March 29, 2016:

... It was a beautiful experience of the potential for unstructured interviews, I think. It helped me have faith that the right things will come out of unstructured interviews (i.e., true

conversation) because the interaction, the conversation itself has an intelligence. The conversation itself naturally guides us from one theme to another, better than I could have guided it. I wonder if such a phenomenon can occur between a researcher and participant who don't know each other as intimately as Kate and I do. My feeling is that it requires the two people to be in the same space, in harmony with each other, regardless of previous relationship. This is interesting to me because it is also a principle of yoga: that meditation brings the many fragmented parts of oneself into a calm, centred wholeness—which has the ripple effect of bringing one into a state of harmony with other people.

~

Kate: I definitely came into this life as a spiritual person, seeking. Learning meditation was not a change in the direction I was going already. I grew up attending church and Sunday School and it was ... unsatisfactory. From a really early age I liked thinking about God. Questioning, I mean. It's not an unusual story. So many children have that same bent, beyond just the "Why are we here, what are we doing?" But more, "What is God?" And "How can I love God? How can I know God?" So I had that percolating along even though I was young . . . I remember as a child thinking of such things and being very dissatisfied with answers I would be given. My parents were not helpful in this even though they were staunch churchgoers. They thought it was inappropriate to talk about such things—that we leave that to the church and just go, sit there, and then come back home and don't discuss religion. So, I was on the lookout for other ways to learn about God. By the time I was a teenager I'd dip into books, like the Koran, and the Talmud and the Upanishads, and I'd consider different traditions and ways of approaching God. I was growing up in an area that was very conservative and a little bit backward in some

ways. We didn't get the good music concerts, we didn't get the good—you know, things happening that other cities did at the time. But, at some point we did have, on one of the tours, Maharishi [Mahesh Yogi] came through. And there was some publicity about that. I don't recall—it must have been after the Beatles met Maharishi—I remember having heard of Transcendental Meditation. But it was at a very great distance away from my mind in that it was nothing accessible to me, nothing that I would have known.

When I entered university I had just turned 18 and as I'd walk around from class to class I'd see posters about Transcendental Meditation lectures. And then I had the thought that *this* is what I thought university would be like—it would be a lively discourse of ideas and interesting opportunities and, you know, I had this thought at the back of my mind: “*That's* something I'll look into eventually.”

I'd been to university a couple months, was feeling at loose ends, dissatisfied. University classes were not <laughs> the source of answers I had hoped for. Which, by the way, just to kind of back up, I was thinking afterwards when you had said I was an inspiration for you to go on and become a teacher, I thought, I didn't really have any teachers who inspired me when I was in grade school. I had a few classes where I really liked the information presented, especially when teachers spoke from their experience, especially when they had travelled to another country and would bring information like that into a class. I found that fascinating. And I had one teacher in my early grades who came back on Monday after a weekend, and told us how he had been invited to his friends' place over the weekend and they were from India and they had served curried food. And it was just like every sense inside of me was, like, “What?

I've got to know! What is this 'curried food'?!” And he was saying, “Has anyone had curried food?” And no, in the class of all white, all middle-class kids, no, no. And nobody was even paying attention. But in my mind it was like, “curried food. Okay, that's something to know! That's something to experience one day.” It's kind of ... in retrospect it's amazing how little I knew about other cultures and other ways of doing things. And in university it was the same thing. Okay, I'd see these posters about meditation. It was in my mind that that's the sort of thing I'd like to experience one day. I don't even think I had heard of yoga, *hatha yoga* yet, apart from some reference in a book, although I tended to be reading mostly philosophical texts rather than practical manuals by that point. But, back to being dissatisfied with university towards the end of that first term: I went around to student counselling, starting my meeting by saying, “I'm not sure what to major in,” and I ended that meeting by saying, “I don't know what to do with my life.” And the counsellor said, “We've got this [counselling] group starting up in January. Maybe you'd find that useful.” “Yeah! Sure,” I said. “Sign me up for that.”

So I went to the first meeting of that group and there was a student there, a male student, who I thought was really attractive, and I thought, “Oh, let me get a little closer and see.” He was talking to someone else really enthusiastically and I thought, “I'll find out what that is about and then I can get into the conversation.” And so I overheard him talking and I thought he was saying the word “levitation.” He was saying to his friend, “Oh this levitation! You've got to try it! Levitation's the best.” So, I wait for a pause and I say, “Oh, can you tell me about levitation? I'd like to learn!” <laughs> And he was just sort of “<sigh> It's not levitation. It's *meditation*.” He was like, “You wouldn't be interested. It's Transcendental Meditation.” And I thought, “Oh my God!” And so I went out and walked around to all the bulletin boards, trying to find one of

those posters so I could find out how to learn. But for the next few weeks I couldn't find a poster. So I went to the bookstore, and bought what books they had on meditation. I was, you know, trying to find *something* to explain meditation to me. And eventually there was a poster on a bulletin board advertising a lecture and so I went to hear about TM. I have no recollection of what the points of the lecture were—I just knew I was certain that I would learn this meditation. At the time if you had asked me in a surface way why I wanted to learn, I would have said, “Oh it's totally because of this cute guy.” But there was, at the same time, some part of me that was just completely unquestioning that I was going to learn meditation. This had nothing to do with a cute guy, this was what I was *meant* to do. So I took the TM course and super liked it and I liked the people I met in my course. I thought it was kind of cool to know people who were doing something a little more *alternative* because up until that point I hadn't done anything particularly alternative in my life.

I'm not really sure what they said in my TM course, and I don't know whether they said this, or I just assumed this, but I thought that this meditation was a way to break out of my conditioned ways of thinking. And that's what I really cared about. I felt some of my frustration as a teenager and as a younger person was that I was only aware of a very small and narrow view of things in life, and I didn't want that to somehow infiltrate into my mind and make me start thinking like my parents, or my teachers, or the society in which I'd grown up. And I had this strong impetus to somehow break free of that. And I was unnerved by the idea that my thinking would become more conditioned as I aged. But I didn't know how to prevent that, so I had this hope when I started meditating that it would break me out of that possibility.

I remember that what appealed to me so much was that it provided such a break from everything else, from the whole chatter of daily living, and the problems, and the schoolwork, and the social interactions. When I meditated every day I got to just abandon that chatter level, and feel something deeper inside myself. And that was first of all very reassuring to me as a person that... that I wasn't losing the depths of myself in activity It just felt necessary to have that time to be myself without thinking and analyzing so much, to get away from the little tentacles of outer experience that were always trying to grab at me, and just go <sigh> and be washed clean of that. And then come back and interact with the rest of the world. So, it was a very visceral kind of a feeling. Very peaceful. Very *right* feeling.

Towards the end of that university year—which, I finally just dropped out because I just wasn't liking university much—I had heard there would be a one-month advanced TM course in the summer and Maharishi would come there and give lectures, and I thought I'd like to do that. I'd like to go there. So I got a bunch of jobs because the pay was so little on all of them, so I was working three jobs, and saved up enough money to go to California in August of 1972 for a one-month course with Maharishi. . . . I hadn't anticipated that I would fall so heavily in love with the knowledge . . . I was gaining understanding about the wholeness of life, something I had been searching for my whole life. So the first week they announced that if anyone was having trouble with their meditations [*name removed*], who was a teacher from the very earliest days with Maharishi, was going to offer meditation checkings in the morning, early before class. So I thought I'd go to that. I wasn't thinking I was having trouble meditating, I simply thought, "I'll go to everything!" So I went, and what the checking consisted of was the teacher taking students step by step through their meditation. And then, usually if there was enough

time after, he'd answer questions. He was an engineer with NASA and he had a very scientific approach to answering questions. He also had years of experience travelling with Maharishi so he had all kinds of stories too. And I thought he was a *superb* teacher. I felt completely reassured about my meditation. And I didn't realize it at the time, but by listening to him and watching him, I was culturing myself, so to speak, in the qualities of a good teacher and how to help students learn. So I went to those checkings every single day, just to hear how he handled questions and problems and how easily he explained how to meditate. And I think that's the experience that hooked me onto the idea of becoming a teacher of TM.

That winter I attended an intensive five-month course to become a TM teacher. I loved the knowledge on that course and I was a really attentive and diligent student. Towards the end of the course we had to go through a lot of exams in order to even be considered for being made a teacher. And because there were so many of us to be tested, the course coordinators needed more examiners, to help us examine each other. So first they called for all the master's and PhDs among us there, so that they could become examiners. And then they called for anyone with a bachelor's degree. And I had none of those things—I had dropped out of university. But I was the first person in line to be examined <laughs> and I had every word of every thing memorized. Even the things we were just supposed to have general knowledge of, I had memorized every word. Because I was determined I was going to be an examiner. I knew every single thing. So I flew through that. And they did put me to be an examiner.

So then Maharishi came at the end of the course to make people teachers. I was 19 at the time, and in order to be made a “full teacher” you had to be older... I think it was 20? 25? People

younger than that were allowed to teach children to meditate, but not adults. So, I had it in my mind that I was going to ask Maharishi about this because I thought I was ready to become a full teacher. And as it turned out, the bus bringing us back to the meeting hall was late and I was one of the very final people from our course to meet with Maharishi. And before he had a chance to say a word, I walked in and I said, "Maharishi!" <laughs> "When I go back home I want to teach everyone!" He smiled, "Oh, good, good. Very good." "But I'm only 19!" And I was so *ready*, in my mind, to be asked anything. I was thinking, "Maharishi, ask me anything! I have every single thing memorized. Like, ask me the third line of the second part of the fourth paragraph of the course materials because I *know* I can!" But he just laughed when I said, "But I'm only 19!" He laughed and he said [in a kind voice], "We'll make you a full teacher." So he had me be a full teacher and I came back super excited to teach. And what I was teaching was something, in a way, far beyond teaching information in a school classroom. I was teaching a technique for experiencing the Self. Which was incredible. And I taught people all ages, from little kids to very old people, from very educated people to young students, from sceptical hard people to people wanting it and loving it. It was very, very deeply rewarding. I taught TM full-time for about four years and then part-time off and on ever since.

All of this finally feeds into when I became a schoolteacher. When I was teaching TM, it was something very different than teaching subjects in school. The TM was something that—because it was a very subtle thing to be teaching it meant that, when I went on later to teach the grosser things, such as science and mathematics, that level was already established in my teaching. So I think it turned out to have been a very good practicum in teaching. Later, I never did actually finish the BEd in school, so I was never actually trained as a teacher beyond the

training I got through that. . . . That was 1973 to 1977 I taught [TM] full-time. I had [my first two children] and after a while I taught some more. Had Joaquin. And by then I was teaching in school. So in the end I taught about 350 to 400 people in those first years of teaching [meditation].

So, you loved your teacher training when you were 19, when you weren't sure what you were going to do, but then you continued on and made your whole life about meditating and teaching others to meditate. Why?

I couldn't at that time and nor can I now, years later, think of a *better* thing to do. Like, it just struck me: this was the very *best* possible use of my time.

I have a vision of what the possibilities are from this technique, and I think that is the best possible thing I can do, to be practising it. And yet, so much of its potential is still beyond me, it's still ahead of me, still bigger than what I have yet grasped. But because it had that much vision and possibility I felt that it was a good technique to take me a long way through life. And I haven't ever felt I have come to the end of the path or the completion—it still stretches on ahead of me.

Because I started as young as I did... well, to me it seems young, although to kids who start young it doesn't seem that way! Since I've been meditating—so how long is that? 45 years—there's very little recollection on my part about my previous-to-meditation self and my speculation about what I would be without it. But what I feel is that by the time I started

meditating, I was very worried about life and had been worried for years. I was worried about things beyond my control. About problems between nations, about homeless people, about poor people of the world and how they would have enough to eat. So many things around the world, which to any caring person can be tremendous weights because there is so much that seems to be beyond one's control. And I know by the time I learned to meditate I already had these worry lines on my forehead that were there all the time. And that—coupled with my basic feeling that I was not understood by anyone close to me <laughs>—I had kind of, by that point, given up trying to share what my inner life was with others. None of it seemed to work. Even if I tried to share a beautiful piece of poetry with someone, or bring someone to a scene to “look at this how beautiful it is!”, nobody seemed to *get* it the way I did. So I had kind of come to the conclusion that I was out of step, I was odd, I was different. I had started doing a lot of writing, reflective kind of writing throughout high school, simply as a way to get some of my worries out of my mind and down onto paper. Then I learned to meditate, and several things about the way I'd been progressing began to change. One is that, although I still cared very much about these huge world problems beyond my control, I no longer felt the worry of not knowing whether things would be all right. I began to have a growing sense of things working out, things being what they are for a reason, maybe bigger than what I could see or appreciate. In a way, if we looked at it from a more religious point of view, it was that I had more faith in the workings of the universe. I had never *lost* faith in the existence of God, but I had lost faith in humans and I thought that we would completely mess things up on the global scale. And that's a very worrying thought compared to having an underlying feeling that everything is fine and everything is happening for a reason (even if on the surface the reason isn't clear). So, one of the biggest ways my experience of meditation has changed my understanding and outlook on

life, is it has really . . . kind of tied me to a flow of life. An acceptance of life. An appreciation. That I don't seem to analyze so much and judge everything based on right, wrong, good, bad, the way I used to. That I just—that I don't judge at all. There is kind of a flow that I am part of everything. That non-judgemental view releases me from the grip of having to decide whether something is good or bad, right or wrong. Then what do you do about it? It's kind of like releasing an obligation. But rather than that making me less caring, it frees me up so I can care and put my attention to good use, rather than being clenched and tight because things obviously aren't going well. I think this is how the meditation makes me more effective in activity.

As I describe my time at our school as being marked by a great teacher, she describes it as being marked by ideal students.

One aspect I found in teaching that made the complete difference was: not only did I have my own meditation practice, but also I got the bonus of the students having a meditation practice. And that meditation practice was making *them* more aware, more alert, more understanding of their interaction with others. More in touch with the bigger person inside themselves—not just the little 10-year-old student self, but their big Self, their Self that is a soul evolving and coming from God, going back to God.

Okay, here is a little analogy I thought of last night. It's like you have a great big—I heard this analogy once maybe for something else—a tank or a reservoir that's full of water, but it doesn't flow until you put up a pipeline to it. What my TM practice allowed me to do was to be really full of water. And, like, the very *best* water—not just some water from the local slime pool, but really good water, really full of it. And you students weren't putting up little tiny straws to get

water, you were each putting up great big chunky pipelines to demand more, like you were baby birds with *huge* appetites, so therefore I had to rise to even greater reserves to fulfill that... If, as a group, you had been uncaring about knowledge, uninterested, sleepy, unable to put up anything more than tiny little straws, so to speak, you still would have gotten that same good water, but only tiny little bits of it. But instead you were thirsty for more! So I had to give more, which made you thirstier for more! I loved you students for wanting so much. It was, in a way, a very demanding class, just because you were all the best kind of students—wide awake, questioning, wanting to know: “Now what do we do? Now what?” And so our classroom felt like it was always, always, completely *on*. There was never really much “off” time as your teacher.

In the public school setting, I think it would be more challenging to have such a complete love for your students because there would be such a limited contact. Not just because you’re not there after school, but also because students come into a classroom for one or two classes and then they move on somewhere and move on somewhere. But in our setting, we were together all day long for several years.

I mean, it was a very sincere interaction on both sides . . . the more I reflect on it the more I think it was an extraordinary situation. I don’t think it could be repeated. I have no impetus to teach in a classroom again, and you particular students are all grown. But I don’t know, could a similar situation occur sometime, somewhere else? Could you ever find this in some of the other classrooms even when a meditation practice is in place? Or is it just an extraordinary occurrence that this teacher, these students were put together just to show what could happen? I don’t know

if it was that I was a good teacher naturally, or if I was a good teacher because you were good students. I think the students make the teacher. Like, if I had just tried all sorts of interesting things in the classroom and I had gotten nowhere, would I have just eventually become less of a teacher? Would I have abandoned that kind of teaching? I don't know. But instead, on both sides, we were really into the experience of learning and something greater got created. It was tremendous.

It sounds like an idyllic situation to teach in. You had a very small classroom, you had tons of independence and freedom. You had a lot of time. You didn't have to commute. But I don't really see it that way because, okay, you had all that wonderful stuff in the classroom, but you had the politics of teaching, still, and you had the small community, and the administration, and you were on welfare. You were very poor!

Yes! <laughs> Yes we were.

I mean, you were living almost in poverty and you were a single mother raising three children, and you were running this whole school, and creating your own curriculum! Like, to me that's harder work than teaching in the kind of classroom where most teachers teach, and they get overwhelmed and tired and their enthusiasm dwindles every day.

Definitely far harder. The answer is, I didn't know better. <laughs> I just thought that this is what teaching meant—working this hard. And I couldn't have done less. So, partly that's who I am. I try to do every job the very best I can do it, and I don't seem to be able to do less than

that. But another answer is that I approached teaching the way I approached parenting, which was, I didn't feel that I could fall back on examples from my own upbringing, simply because I had found those experiences lacking. And in teaching, I didn't feel I could fall back on my experiences in school, because I had great dissatisfaction with that. So, both with raising my children and teaching at the school, I just simply wrote my own program . . . about what I thought the experience *should* be like. As a parent, all my activities were based on respect for who my children were. And love, like, complete *love*, for who they were. So when I started teaching at the school I just carried on feeling the same way for you students as for my kids, because you were—I mean, I was spending more hours with you than anybody else, every day and for several years. At one point I subbed in at another school for a while, but I didn't feel the same towards those students even though I respected who they were as souls evolving through life, like I would respect any person on the street. You know, just like you meet little kids on the street and you might play with them for a few minutes and think that they're sweet and adorable and so on, but it's not the same as when your gaze falls back on your own. And you guys—I just totally . . . I don't know that I loved you guys any less than my own kids. I was devoted to you.

So, yes, teaching was a huge demand on my attention and awareness because I was so intent on giving you the very best possible learning environment and experiences. And in a classroom like ours where there were a number of different grades in one classroom, it's not just one subject that needs to be taught for one grade at a time, it needs to be taught for different grades, throughout any lesson. I didn't have formal training in classroom management, or even other teachers I could confer with. I didn't have shortcuts in place for achieving what I wanted to

achieve. So I had to create it all for the first time and that adds a lot of time. And I discovered I had to expand. I didn't have the reflective time I would have liked. It's similar to how a new parent feels, to be suddenly on a round-the-clock duty when really what you want and need most is rest and reflection. But it's not an option, so instead you expand, and then that expansion becomes your life.

The third year that I was your teacher, I only taught until January. There were a number of years that I taught before I had your class, but for this study I think we're really just talking about the years you were in my classroom and I was your teacher. So that was two and a half years. For that time, I was paid a very, very low salary, much less than what welfare was. So I went onto welfare so that I'd have enough for my kids and me to live. I wasn't equating the teaching with the money, because I was so happy to teach. I would have paid to be your teacher. But it was an increasingly difficult experience to continue on welfare because my kids and I were financially falling further behind every month. By the end of the second year I had only a tiny increase in salary. I spoke with the Board of Directors and said, "I can't continue to do this. My credit card's completely maxed out. I'm in debt. I'm falling behind every month. I just simply can't go on with so little money any longer. It's not right that welfare is paying my salary. It's not right that I am working so many hours a week and can't afford to feed my kids." They suggested I get a part-time job. Like, I go be a cashier at the local supermarket. And it was sort of the final stroke in my mind that they just didn't get that teaching wasn't a job where you go in at 9, come out at 5, and then you're still a great person who could go out and work in the night! They really didn't get that it was as demanding a job as it was. And I told them then that I wouldn't continue if I didn't get paid a salary and could get off welfare. And they said they would try to drum up

more students for me. (Although, in my mind I was like: “No! I don't need *more* students!”)

But, by the beginning of October I told them, “No, that's it. I'm quitting.” As of the end of January I would quit because I thought by the end of first term they'd have plenty of time to find someone.

In that final year, I had also found that the grade split (that year was grades 3 to 8) was starting to be more challenging and that for the higher grades it was taking longer and longer to prepare lessons—I was having to relearn math and science each night just so I could know enough to teach and answer basic questions in the next day's class. When students asked me questions about that material I would have to say: “I'll check up on that. I'll find out and we'll talk about it tomorrow.” Which is, all right, I mean that happens no matter what subject you teach: students will ask questions to which you don't know the answer. But because my own background in mathematics and science hadn't been particularly stellar, I felt I didn't have a big enough picture to really teach those subjects well and fulfill curriculum requirements properly. I could say: “Let's see what it says in the book. We'll go through it together.” I could still nourish enthusiasm and confidence in learning in the students, but I began to feel that I was coming to the end of my ability to prepare and teach so many subjects each day, and to be an effective teacher. Maybe it wouldn't have shown up to the students or to anyone on the outside watching for some time, but it did come to my mind that the amount I could learn the night before wasn't preparing me adequately, and my students deserved better.

I remember that in the first two years it felt like a bonus that we had multiple grades and that everything worked better, and in that last year it was a little off. And there were fewer students but they covered a huge age range, and everything was just a little... not flowing.

I think it was because I was in isolation and didn't have other teachers to talk about this with. When you are working alone it's easy to come to the conclusion that it is you (the teacher) who is not doing well enough, that you should try harder or do better in some way. The first year that I taught your class, we had a school principal. She signed report cards and so on, but she didn't really come in and I don't think we ever conferenced over anything. Then she moved away and for the next two years, the head of the Board of Directors was our nominal principal. We had a few parent volunteers who would occasionally come in, but there was no actual peer for me as a teacher to talk with. And, throughout all the years of teaching, I had problems with the board's administration. The biggest cause of any of my stress while teaching was that: dealing with the administration. And that is an interesting comment in that [I had] multiple grades to teach, huge amounts of prep work, huge amounts of attention and demands every single day, and none of that was as stressful as dealing with the administration. Those dealings gradually carved a line into my satisfaction that eventually became a crevice that finally tore open, and then that was it. That was what pushed me from holding-it-together to feeling overwhelmed.

It would have been helpful for me to have peers I could have consulted and friends with whom I could have shared my experiences. Just to get a second opinion or some increased objectivity about the difficulties I was having. But my closest friends were parents of the students in my classroom and members of the small community where our school was based. I didn't feel it

was appropriate in any of those relationships to share challenges and difficulties that I had in my work life. So I didn't share much of what was going on, I just thought: "I've got to do better! I've got to do more." You know in George Orwell's book *Animal Farm*? Boxer the Horse. I mean, if there has ever been an animal in literature that I associate with it's Boxer. "I will work harder!" But in the end, I submitted my resignation, and left the school and the community (and also welfare!).

When I left teaching I moved to another part of the country and began to send out résumés, detailing my teaching experience and the various classroom resources I had created, as well as other skills and activities. One of my thoughts was to approach an education publisher because I'd had this experience teaching. This is not the way they tell you to do it in grad school, but my "cold" résumé arrived on the publisher's desk on a Friday—and usually in that publishing company cold résumés just go straight into a filing cabinet, never to be looked at again. But that day the publisher had just returned from a meeting where she signed a contract to produce a Grade 6 Distance Education Language Arts program and she needed a writer immediately. So she walked into the office and said, "We've got to find a writer!" And one of the assistants who worked there said, "Oh, well, this résumé just came in today," and handed the publisher my résumé. She read it. She called me in on Monday, and hired me on the spot. And for the next 16 years I wrote and edited education resources, starting with that publisher and eventually working for all the major educational publishers in Canada. It was just a wonderful sequence of events.

By the way, in that first project, I devoted one entire section to you students. In the grammar exercises I was writing, I incorporated your names, just as sort of a little tribute to you and to our time together. Little questions, like, “Where do Mary and Theo play/plays soccer?” I wanted to have every one of your names in there because I felt as though I was writing the resource for you to use.

I wrote that English language arts course in 1996–1997. At that time a new pan-Canadian curriculum had just come out. The idea was to tie the curriculum of the provinces together so that if students moved mid-term they would still be roughly in the same place in their studies at the new school. I had to pull so many resources together to meet the curriculum requirements for that course. I thought, what we really need here is one resource that meets all the outcomes to help teachers show students how to choose a topic, how to research it, how to put it together, choose what type of format to put it in, and all those steps that are involved. And so that’s what I did by writing my first book. After I wrote that book about how to research information, I thought that what I would like to do next was write a book about how to think about information. And so I did. Then I continued for many years writing and editing textbooks and teacher resources.

In all my writing and editing work, I’ve always been alert to incorporating unifying principles and holistic knowledge and the inspiration of great men and women whenever possible/appropriate. You mentioned earlier that I seem to really like quotes when I’m teaching and also in my writing. It’s true! I love quotes and aphorisms. I like very succinct encapsulations of knowledge. That really appeals to my mind because you can easily remember

those sayings. Also, I don't think complexity necessarily indicates greater truth. I think simplicity does. Simple truths are often the most profound truths.

If an activity is truly useful and worth doing it's probably going to resonate with a principle that is deeper and that has been there for a long time. Maybe some ancient Greek scholar would say, "Actually this is a very similar thing." And then an ancient Vedic rishi or a Taoist would add, "Yes! It is true here, too." I hope for that sort of resonance when I teach and when I write. I sometimes think about the distinction between information and knowledge. *Information*, being based on the surface level, is something that could be true at the moment, such as "that carpet is made from wool." That could be important to know, but it is not something that necessarily will give you a deeper understanding of a principle in life. Whereas *knowledge*, such as "outer depends on inner," could provide you with insight and understanding in many different aspects of your life. So I've aimed for the deeper level of understanding in the books I write and edit, just as I did in the classes I taught.

I *love* knowledge, and by knowledge I mean unchanging truth about life. I love gaining knowledge, I love sharing it, I love thinking about it. And that's why I went on after teaching to write so many educational resources. You know, you bring through truth wherever you can.

Yoga and Teaching Theory

During the years that Kate taught at our school she took professional development courses based in yogic and Vedic philosophy over three summers. She cites these as having made the biggest difference to her teaching (particularly in conjunction with meditation practice and yogic knowledge). What she learned on these programs is notable here because the courses were designed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi using traditional best practices for teaching children from within the Vedic knowledge tradition. The ideas she explains below are all rooted in the knowledge systems of yoga. I have presented them here under four themes: saying yes, observing the temperament of the student, learning from inside and outside, and connecting and enlivening. To me, this discussion points to the potential of yogic practice for a teacher. It demonstrates the possibilities that could emerge through an experience of coherence between yogic meditation practice, the accompanying knowledge tradition, and the teaching work one is engaged in.

The text for each section of this chapter is divided into three parts: (1) my analysis of each concept based on classical yoga theory, (2) Kate's narrative experience of each concept, and (3) (in text boxes throughout the chapter) narrative reflections on Kate's, my, and my peers' experiences of each concept as it was put into practice in our school.

Researcher's Journal, April 4, 2016:

I completed my last interview with Kate (the pseudonym she has now chosen) a few days ago. Kate actually arrived at the library before I did and arranged for the key to a private room, set it up, and then came outside to meet me at our arranged time. She is remarkably thoughtful and

caring and wants to do all that she can to help with this project. As we were walking down the hall to the room, and I was still under the weather and coughing quite a bit, she said that she only wished she had thought to bring me a thermos of tea before she left home! What a joy to work on the project with her. I understand the potential for participants to become true collaborators in a narrative inquiry study so much better. You are creating a new story together after all, a new way of understanding the past and future that hinges on the insight you find together. I am so happy with these interviews, in part because I did not feel I was leading the interaction, or the direction of the stories, but was simply one participant in a dynamic conversation that took me in directions I hadn't expected. She was a "strong" story-teller, who was not swayed from the truth she understood about her experiences because of any of my questions. One big idea that is emerging is that the lifestyle that accompanies meditation may be understood by these participants as more beneficial than the practice itself. Even though my own meditation experience echoes this deeply, it simply did not occur to me before listening to the participants' experiences.

Researcher's Journal, April 1, 2016

Last night I went to Joaquin's house, and met with him, Theo, and [another peer]. That was amazing – I saw [a few other peers] from my elementary school days 7 years ago, but I haven't seen Joaquin or Theo in about 17 years! They were just the same, though. It was just like seeing my brothers – completely intimate, completely comfortable. I know them so well. They remarked on feeling the same. It was a remarkable setting. Joaquin has set up a gorgeous artist's studio apartment in a partially burned out building. We sat around the living room by candle light, wrapped in blankets, and talked about the old days. I starting recording, with their

enthusiastic permission, and starting thinking of questions about our school experience with Kate to ask them on the spot, just to spark some natural conversation. And after a few questions the spark was lit, and we all just loved reminiscing. I'm sure it will be obvious in our voices on the recordings. I wished we could have talked all night. We told stories about longing for each other, and for our school again, in the year or two after the school closed and some of our families moved away. And in a way, that night was a taste of the togetherness that we had missed. Though brief, it was a deeply satisfying homecoming. I was very struck, just as with interviewing Kate, by the fact that everyone else also (not just I) regarded the years we were together as a very special, perhaps pivotal time of our lives. It brought me joy to hear this from the others – I think it makes the memories that I have, which seem touched with magic, more real, less idealized in nostalgia than I feared they may be.

~

Saying Yes

Because yogic theory understands psychological patterns as coming from the accumulation of mental conditioning over time (*samskaras*), there is, in the study of yoga, a focus on freeing the mind from past conditioning (through yogic knowledge and practice). Similarly, there is an emphasis on cultivating a mind that is ever more open to new ways of seeing oneself and the world and less stuck within self-imposed limitations. This may best be

Theo: So coming into the community it was this really new thing. I felt comfortable because mom did yoga and meditated so there was a familiarity. But it was still... for some reason it was less confrontational in a larger school. You could be unseen to some extent. But here you had to show up with everyone, really *be* with everyone. I think it was Kate who was teaching at the time. And she asked me what kind of animal I was—it was one of the first things she said to me, to get me out of my little crying fit. I remember I was really nervous and my eyes lit up and I got really smiley with her and I said, "I'm a tiger!"

understood as a subtle form of agreement, openness, or harmony with what one experiences. It is an expansion as opposed to the subtle contraction within one's mind, spirit, or heart that accompanies judgement, blame, and pointed criticism (Shankar, 2010). This state could be experienced regardless of whether there is agreement or disagreement, a yes or a no response on the level of speech: "The purpose of asking questions is to get an answer. The purpose of all answers is to create a 'yes'. 'Yes' is an acknowledgement of knowledge. The 'yes' mind is quiet, holistic and joyful. The 'no'-mind is agitated, doubting and miserable" (Shankar, 2014, p. 60). Whether it's the spiritual education of a yoga student by a *guru*, or the formal education of a student by a schoolteacher, an important aim of yogic education is to open the student's mind towards an attitude of "yes," of expansion and agreement towards the consideration of all possibilities. The following excerpt from an article about contemporary schools in India that utilize yogic teaching methods explains the "yes" concept:

The teachers strive to bring about a shift in the minds of the students, a shift from an attitude of "no" to an attitude of "yes." They explain that the kriya the children practice brings a lightness and openness to the child's inner world, which the teachers then encourage. The kriya frees the children from mental patterns that they have picked up from adults, which may include the assumption that a difficult challenge is bad, or that they should avoid discomfort. The kriya frees the mind from such imposed concepts of selfdoubt, from the idea that it *cannot*. When teachers give the children challenges like writing and acting out a skit on the spot in less than ten minutes or when they announce that a surprise test will be held in two days, their students are open to it. Instead of complaining that the assignments are too hard, or that they are unfair, they throw themselves into them with excitement. One teacher explained it this way: "[Kriya] opens up the doors of spirituality for the child In our mind we have many windows and doors. Our habit is always to close them We tell the child, 'Don't do this, don't do this! Don't watch this! Don't go there!' [Kriya allows] the child's mind to open and it helps the child's mind to know what is right and wrong. . . ." (Shorten, M., 2011, p. 50)

Kate: So, one of the things we had in our school was that we taught a type of mathematics known as Vedic mathematics which... some of it now I forget to say adequately—which of the

Vedic literature it comes from and so on²—but basically it's a matter of supplying many small triumphs for the student. For example, if you were to give the student a long list of numbers to add up—235, 519, 1003, 247 in a long column—generally in the traditional way mathematics is taught, you go through the whole long process of calculating one long column, bringing whatever needs to be carried over to the next column, next column, next column. You have an answer. You don't know if it's right, but you've just done all that work. In Vedic mathematics, if we just take as an example the addition, there's a process called *suddha*, in which the student is identifying numbers that will add up to ten. So every time you find a 10 you make a little mark, a little *suddha*. I'm not going to explain it well enough that a person could replicate it from this, but just to say what the process is, that many many times, in coming to the answer, a student has that moment of “got it!” or “aha!” Because each time they get another ten, each time they get numbers adding up to ten, they get to have a little success, and mark down and cross things off, and it's like a reinforcement: “Yes, this is going well. I've done this.” And then as well, for every activity in the mathematics, there's a check as well so the student can immediately check and find out if they were correct or not. And sometimes it's basic. As in other forms of mathematics there are things like casting out nines. It's basically so the student is never in doubt, for example, going through a whole page of questions and getting to the end of it and finding out later that because they didn't understand something every single one was wrong. And so there is never any reinforcement of things being done wrong. And we found that no matter how long the series of numbers to be added up in case or how complicated they were, it was just as thrilling for students to go through and do, because there were so many of these little “got it!”, “got it!”

² For more on the study of Vedic mathematics see *Vedic Mathematics* by Jagadguru Swami Sri Bharati Krsna Tirthaji Maharaja published by Motilal Banarsidass in 1992.

So, that feeds into one of the principles . . . that is, to break a large task into small tasks so there can be many successes there. For example, if you tell a student, or let's say you're talking about a child, if you tell your child you've got to get your whole room cleaned today, well it's maybe an enormous task: the clothes on the floor, the drawers open, the shelves, and everything. I mean it could be overwhelming to the student. But if, you know, you can break it down into tiny things, like clean out this drawer, you know—the student has hope! They have hope of achievement. They can do it. So likewise, in teaching the idea is not to overwhelm the student with an activity during which it will be unknown to the student whether they've got it right or not. But instead to break it down so there are many successes over the course of the day. That's a very encouraging thing to the student.

*Joaquin: . . . I tacked my old uniform [from our school] to a wall, behind my bedroom door. My shirt, pants, tie. . . If I look back on it now it was like, here's a time when you were treated like an exceptionally smart, involved, insightful person with the ability to solve any problem that they throw at you. . . I actually wore my uniform to [public] school one day because I missed our school that much. I was like, "I'm wearing my uniform!" So I go in there wearing a white [button-down] shirt and grey pants and a red tie. And the teachers are like, "Nice clothes!" They think this is cool. Of course I got horribly picked on. And it just so happened that that day was fencing... and *no one* could beat me. And we had this thing where if you tagged someone first they had to go away and the next person in line had to fight you. And I won [against everyone down the line]. And it just happened to be the day I wore my uniform.*

Another of those principles is, basically put, saying "yes." And yes doesn't really mean whatever the student wants to do they get to do. But it does mean saying yes to the student's desire. So, if a student really wants to do something—sometimes it's a straightforward yes, like if a student would rather work on their own than in a group, fine. Or work on a different aspect maybe of a certain activity, and some student will come back and say, "Actually, can I do my part on this instead?" In all those cases, of course, "Yes! Go for it!" But it also means that even

if the question or desire is not going to work into the activity of the moment, it's still to confirm that that was an excellent idea: "When we go on to do a unit on such and such, let's do it then!" You know, that sort of affirmation, so that a student feels open and encouraged to make suggestions at any time, to be an active participant in their learning, that they know they're not going to be shut down or unappreciated. And so that was something I tried to really culture in our classroom between students as well.

Observing the Temperament of the Student

Ayurveda, the traditional holistic medical system of India, is closely tied to the classical system of yoga. Dr. David Frawley explains that

Yoga and Ayurveda are two closely related spiritual or sacred sciences rooted in the Vedic tradition of India. Ayurveda is the Vedic science of healing for both body and mind. Yoga is the Vedic science of self-realization that depends upon a well functioning body and mind. Both disciplines developed together and have always been used together. (Frawley, 1999, Preface)

Both sciences are similar in their holistic approach, considering the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of health and wellness as part of a continuum (Frawley, 1999, Preface). The knowledge of Ayurveda has frequently been applied to Vedic teaching theory because it offers a clear method for determining a student's character and, therefore, corresponding learning style. Dr. Vasant Lad explains:

Western medicine and thinking tend to generalize and to categorize individuality. For instance, according to the Western concept of normality, what is common to the majority of people constitutes the norm. Ayurveda holds that normality must be evaluated individually, because every human constitution manifests its own particular and spontaneous temperament and functioning. (Lad, 1984, p. 19)

The ayurvedic method for determining this individual constitution is to ascertain the unique balance of three bodily humours, or *doshas*, that make up that individual:

The way of working with this individuality is a classification system of doshas, based on elements of nature. The doshas are threefold: *vata* (air and space), *pitta* (fire and water), *kapha* (water and earth), but the combination of each within the individual is varied. There are innumerable subtle variations that depend upon the percentage of *vata-pitta-kapha* elements in the constitution. (Lad, 1984, p. 29)

While an ayurvedic physician requires years of training to learn how to determine this constitutional make-up as well as the health and balance of each dosha within the patient's physiology, a layperson such as a schoolteacher can, through basic ayurvedic study, make a fairly accurate determination of the one or two most predominant *doshas* in a student (based on their observation of physical and personal characteristics the student displays). And, because "these three elements—*vata* – *pitta* – *kapha*—govern all the biological,

Mary: I always come back to this principle—the balance of rest and activity. To me this is a foundational principle in the Vedic knowledge about how to live well. And I remember it was one of our favourites, one of the most popular principles [studied in our school] because it was so easily understandable. But I still feel that this is an advanced concept. That adults struggle with this deeply in their lives. And it's a basic cause of stress in teachers, in parents, in the world. And in schools today, the school feels that its jurisdiction is in dealing with activity only. So you have the students come in and it's all about *doing*. And then there's just this hope that, "Well, the kids will get enough rest. If they don't get enough rest it's tough, but... okay." But it's not taught. We only deal with activity in the classroom. Teachers feel teaching is their professional *activity* and it's all about what they do during the day. And when they go home, if they're tired and stressed out and they want to unwind, you know—there's a whole literature in the problem of burnout in teachers. And about how teachers develop coping mechanisms that are actually very unhealthy and bring them further down because they're so tired, so stressed out, that they don't sleep well and they turn to unhealthy supports like complaining to others, which makes them more exhausted, or to drinking, or smoking, or the whole list of them.

psychological and physiopathological functions of the body, mind and consciousness" (Lad, 1984, p. 26), the teacher can then draw on the knowledge of learning styles most natural to the main *dosha* types to most effectively connect each student with the topic being studied.

Kate: The second year I went to a faculty development course we were discussing learning and teaching styles in terms of *ayurveda*. *Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of health and fullness and happiness and enlightenment, identifies three basic qualities: *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*. And the way of applying it to learning styles is that different qualities in a student (and every student would have a different mix of the same three qualities)—depending on the balance or imbalance of those qualities and which one is predominating, a student will learn in different ways. For example, a primarily *vata* student will be a fast

Theo: In the *Gita* there's something Krishna says that, “this yoga is not for one who sleeps too much or sleeps too little, or eats too much or eats too little, or who is too active or falls to inaction.” Something like that. And I think that's like—in public school we had Coke vendors in every hallway. It's all pizza and chicken caesar pitas and stuff like that in the cafeteria. And there's these, ostensibly there's these problems with students' attention in class. There was this one kid who drank 2-litre Coke bottles out of his backpack. And I think at [our school] we had a really good balance of routine in terms of when we had to be there, independent creative problem-solving, and fairly good food. I think that meditating is nice, but I think that at that age those things—diet, activity, routine—I think that's what really made it a [success]. I think that's what got polluted in the other schools. And I think if there's ever going to be something that comes from yoga philosophy being applied to the school, I think there's an actual practice and then there's—you don't want to be dogmatic and sculpting a person's lifestyle but—there's an environment you can create for the students that's going to eliminate what would otherwise be a hurdle for them to be engaged in their schooling.

thinker, will catch on to things really quickly, also tend to forget things quickly, will like a lot of movement, will probably find it hard to sit still in a chair for long. Let's say we're introducing a topic: fractions. Let's say five minutes into the lesson talking about fractions the *vata* students will be wanting to get started on it, and they won't want to sit and listen anymore, they want to get busy, and so you've got your little handout sheet ready for them: “Go for it! Okay, you've

got it. Go for it! Come back and check with me in five minutes to see how you're doing.” The more *pitta* students, which is sort of a fire aspect. . . *vata* tends to learn very well just through oral transmission. They'll hear it and understand it and get it. And *pitta* tends to be a little more—they often like visual things. Maybe if you're giving directions [use] maps rather than just saying, “Oh go left, then go right, then whatever,” like *vata* will want to do. *Pitta*, when you are teaching something new, will tend to see through to what it is you're teaching and then start to want to apply it to different things. So, you'll be teaching something about fractions and they'll start asking, “Okay, well what about... What if you did *that* with it? Or what if you did *this* with it?”

So sometimes, let's say you're doing a lesson and you send off the little *vata* minds to work on their worksheets right away because they wanted to, and here are the *pittas* and so you then send them off to do something different:

Joaquin: I never remember getting tired of *sitting* in our school. I remember being tired, like, “I just want to get the heck out of here!” in public school, 'cause you'd been sitting all day long. I never remember actually thinking, in that little room—I can't recall an “I want to get out of this chair.”

“Well, go find out. Over there are the research books. Go take a look and see what happens when you do this with that subject.” And also, by the way, even though maybe everyone has something more predominating in the way they learn, it varies. Like everyone's got every quality in there but the more *kapha* student will—*kapha* is sort of strong. Strong, heavy, slow, solid. They might take long to learn something, but they might never forget it. They're very stable. They tend to be very loving, very—they want everyone to be happy and everything to be good around them. When you're teaching a lesson the little *kapha* students might be the ones who want to sit kind of curled up next to you on the floor. You know, as you sit there doing

whatever. They're the ones who really like to see manipulatives. If you're teaching some kind of fraction they'll like to see some block that you have that you break apart so you can hold and say, "This is one quarter." And that will make more sense to them. And they are the type of students who will probably want to just sit there for the whole lesson until they really are sure they've got it. And then, indeed, they've got it. By that time the *vata* [students] have come back and said, "What do you do? What do you do when this happens again?! I forget!" But a *kapha* student will stick around then go, "Yes. I understand it now." So they are sometimes the ones that are maybe slower to do some of the activities the other students have already gone on and done, and yet they have this added advantage of really getting the teaching before that. And those things apply to a teacher as well. Some teachers will want to spend their whole class just talking, and expect the students to listen and make notes. Other teachers will be really into three-dimensional things and hands-on projects and so on. And what you have to learn as a teacher, what I had to learn as a teacher, is to vary my teaching style to accommodate all three, and to anticipate those different learning styles. . . . If a teacher thinks that it's going to be a class of just the teacher speaking and the students taking notes then it might be an annoying thing that some students over here want to be, "Can I, can I, just go do it?! Can I do it by myself?" And some other students are like, "I don't get it." So it helps to anticipate that all of those things will be present there, and how to deal with that is to also structure your lessons so that all of those aspects are covered. And that there is some time for handling things, as well as listening to things, as well as looking at things, and so on...

Learning from Inside and Outside

Yoga considers that there are different ways of knowing: subjective and objective knowledge, as well as different levels of knowing and experiencing. Dr. David Frawley writes in *Ayurveda and the Mind* (1997) that

Intelligence has a dual capacity, according to whether we direct it outwardly or inwardly. The nature of its orientation is the key to evolution in humanity. Intelligence functioning outwardly through the senses becomes “intellect,” the concrete or informational side of intelligence. Functioning inwardly through our deep consciousness, it becomes what could be better called “true intelligence.” . . . Intellect refers to an intelligence that uses reason, based upon the senses, to determine truth. . . . True intelligence is a power of inner or direct perception quite different from the second hand or mediated knowledge of the intellect. (p. 94–95)

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2013) similarly asserts that it is possible to gain objective knowledge through subjective means, as in the case of intuition:

You can develop your intuition through regular meditation. When the mind is free of cravings, aversions and distortions, then it settles and becomes sharper. That is when intuition develops. But if your mind is constantly stuck in desires about something or another, then it does not happen. When your mind settles and become still, then these abilities develop in you. (Shankar, 2013)

Additionally, Sri Sri explains that there are seven layers of existence and one's consciousness is immersed in one of these at any given time: body and breath on the physical plane, then mind, intellect, memory, and ego or emotions: “It is the same consciousness that functions as mann (mind), buddhi (intellect), chitta (memory), ahankaara (ego). In ancient times, people have grouped these four different faculties as Antahkaran Chadushtaya (the four-fold inner equipment)” (Shankar, n.d.). And finally, the most subtle and transcendent level is considered to be the Self. Thus, life is experienced through the level an individual is involved with at any particular time (Shankar, n.d.). As Kate points out below, this yogic theory could assist a

teacher in more effectively connecting with students if these modes of knowing are understood and observed in oneself and one's students.

Kate: So, this brings us around a little bit to the concept of subjective and objective means of getting knowledge. The scientific approach to knowledge, and most of our information and hard facts, come from objective means of getting knowledge, which is, I don't need to really explain this, you know what I mean. But you know, you test things and you set up experiments and you go through the steps of the scientific method and et cetera. And you gain knowledge. Another way of gaining knowledge is the subjective way, which is—and this will just be my take on what subjective means—that you hold it up against yourself. When you're familiar with the eternal unchanging truth within yourself, then you can hold anything up against it and from that ascertain whether it also is true.

Kate: So, for example, it would be something as simple as maybe I'm going to undertake a drive through the mountains in the winter. The mountain passes can be terrible and treacherous and really hard to drive through. And before taking a journey I would just simply hold it up to myself: "Do I see myself completing the journey happily and safely?" "Yes." So then I'd go ahead and do the journey. And I began to do it with whatever knowledge would come to me. Not necessarily as a step-by-step conscious thing but just [always considering] "Is that *true*?" And not just: Does that match with other true things I have read, seen, experienced? But, is it *true* at some level of *myself*?

[S]omething I found extraordinarily useful in teaching . . . a teacher has to [determine], "what is the truth of what's going on here?" Now, sometimes that means that maybe I'm sitting with a student and she's practising reading and I'm helping her out—but at the same time being aware of what really matters in this situation. Is it that she learns that the "th" sound is made by t and h, or is it that she learns that it's a joy to read, or a joy to learn something? So it's helpful to be

aware of what the actual dynamics are in a situation. On a surface level if you have activity, like behaviour, and slightly subtler than that would be the senses, and then slightly subtler than that if you think—we'll skip a few things here, but—the intellect, and below that, feeling. So let's

say that someone's feelings have been hurt for some reason—like maybe somebody said something, or a student feels bad. This is on a subtler level down here. Then, up here on the intellectual level there's not much you can accomplish if

Mary: I remember vividly when I switched to public school. That was grade 7 for me. I was really excited to go because it's like classic stereotypical *school*. Like on TV. Like, with lockers, with our desks in their little rows. . . I thought it was so exciting. And ultimately I did have a positive experience. But I remember my first week of school I was in a portable classroom and we had this teacher, and we were learning history. I was expecting her to tell us a story. And she was sitting at her desk at the front, talking about something, and we were all following in our book, and then we had to do some follow-up work. She took a topic that I *knew* was fascinating, and made it *so* dry. It's like there was nothing in her. She looked like a ghost to me. Like, there was no enthusiasm. She didn't care what she was talking about whatsoever. She wasn't deeply conscious of her own words. She was just spitting out what she was supposed to say by the curriculum because she had to tell us, all so we could check it off: "Okay. Done that this year. Finished that topic." And I was looking around at her and the students and I had this tragic epiphany. I was like, "*This* is why people hate school! *This* is why it's on TV that kids whine and fake sick and say that they don't want to go to school—that school is *boring*." And that was the first time that I realized—my first day of public school—that there was a separation between fun time and schoolwork time. I was disheartened by it.

that level is pinched because none of that flow from deep within the student is going to get past that pinch. It's going to stop there. So there's not much you can do on a behavioural level, like "sit-up and pay attention!" Well, that's not going to help if the little feeling is pinched inside. Or, if the intellectual level is, "There's no reason to feel upset!", you know? It's not going to help because the feeling level underneath is pinched. So, what you have to do first is attend to the feeling level. And then everything else can flow. Or likewise if there is a pinch at the intellectual level, well, behaviour is going to suffer. Like if intellectually the student just doesn't get that, you know, pushing books off the table is not a good idea, then the behaviour won't

change—intellectually you have to grasp that. So, that's where it comes in handy for a teacher to be practised in the ability to reflect and see what the truth of the situation is. And that's especially important on the days when maybe the teacher isn't feeling completely rested, or as on top of things as they would like to be. . . . It's not enough to just meditate and to gain more knowledge but I need to be an active participant in applying these things all the time, every day in every way. And, since I've always been kind of a seeker of truth of things, I wanted *true* knowledge. I've never wanted less than that, so likewise I want truth from myself, from within myself.

I would say that's an important aspect of a teacher's growth. In terms of teachers who just teach the very same subject matter to

Theo on switching to public school: They [the teachers] were mean. They were clearly burnt out. Like, I know Kate, the amount she was doing—I'm sure she was exhausted by the process as well. But it was a different kind of exhaustion. It was like—like a *resentment* exhaustion.

the same grade level year after year, after year, after year, I don't know how that could continue to be fresh to them—unless they continued to employ something like this, where they continually anew saw the value [to themselves] of what it was they were teaching and were constantly aware of and adjusting to what it was their students needed at the moment. Otherwise it would just be rote, you could just have it on a video tape. There'd be no reason for interaction that day.

Connecting and Enlivening

A foundational concept of yoga is the important interplay between knowledge and practice (Mahesh Yogi, 1967). Maharishi Mahesh Yogi explains that *Sankhya* (the study of discernment and refined perception) can refer to one of the six schools of Indian philosophy (which is distinct from and also complementary to the school of Yoga), *or* it can be considered as a general term for philosophical knowledge regarding the nature of individual and universal consciousness (Mahesh Yogi, 1967). He uses *sankhya* in the following passage as a broad term to illustrate the need for both knowledge and yogic practice in order to progress through the study of yoga:

. . . two conditions that have to be fulfilled if a man is to become realized. The first is that he should be a 'knower of Brahman', that is, he should have a clear intellectual understanding of Reality. This condition belongs to the sphere of Sankhya. The second condition is that he should be 'established in Brahman', that is, he should have direct experience of divine nature so that his daily life becomes its expression. This condition belongs to the field of Yoga. (Mahesh Yogi, 1967, p. 115)

And similarly, "Knowledge of the perishable and imperishable aspects of life broadens the vision and makes a man see beyond the mundane and limited sphere of daily life. . . . Yoga, the path of Union, is a direct way to experience the essential nature of Reality." (Mahesh Yogi, 1967, pp. 115–116)

Various *gurus* or yoga masters have presented aspects of this knowledge of Vedic philosophy in different ways, as appropriate to the time and place in which they teach, the lineage or school of yoga to which they belong, the students receiving the knowledge, and the yogic practices being undertaken by those students. For the followers of the Transcendental Meditation practice, Maharishi codified many of the Vedic philosophical principles of the

nature of consciousness into the study of the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI). *Sutras* (simple statements of profound truth often translated as “aphorisms”) are presented and then expounded on through a full curriculum of activities, stories, and examples. True to the balance of knowledge and practice used in the study of yoga, SCI is to be studied in conjunction with the regular practice of meditation to provide for the possibility of direct experience of the philosophical principles being studied. At schools that utilize the practice of meditation as well as the study of SCI, SCI provides an interdisciplinary link that offers students the opportunity to make connections between various subjects and to their own experiences (Maharishi International University, 1974).

Kate: Initially you think meditation is so abstract, so personal, so individual, so non-relative, and yet you can capture something in the relative world that brings you back to the meditation experience. And then yes, [make] the best kind of connections.

I really liked that there was an actual intellectual framework, which was SCI. So Science of Creative Intelligence . . . is a study, in the school system: the study of basic fundamental principles that you can find underlying all of creation. Basically what that means is that you have a way then—because these are basic underlying principles in all of creation—you have a way to connect diverse bits and pieces of knowledge, information that you're dealing with in the classroom, with a bigger whole of knowledge. You have a bigger way to connect that knowledge with the student's own life, and you have a way to connect the student and other students and the teachers through that as well. Now some of these examples are really basic,

such things as “the nature of life is to grow.” Okay, that's a very basic principle. You can be teaching a class and maybe you are teaching in fact how a seed sprouts and becomes a plant and so on, and so you're talking about “the nature of life is to grow.” And then you can easily relate that to a child's own life: “when you were younger you had just learned to walk, and now look you can jump!” and there may be a very simple thing there. There's also the deeper level of “the nature of life is to grow” and that would be what a person finds within themselves: that they grow into a wiser person, or grow into a more understanding person, or whatever. So in the elementary grades we studied 16 basic principles like that. There was like “the outer depends on inner,” always one of my favourites. “Life is found in layers.” All these various principles. So, those could be—we would study those briefly each day, and then they could be interwoven at appropriate moments throughout a lesson so that it made sense. So it sort of helps the student realize, “Huh. Okay. So what she (the teacher) is saying makes sense. And it is out there, and it is in here. Huh. Okay. So, it seems to be reliable knowledge.” And whether a student is cognizant of that process or not, it's going on.

So that's a completely different approach to education right there off the bat. Which is, instead of simply delivering required information to students with the hope it would somehow make them better citizens of the world—instead of that what we're doing is going for the basis first, which is establishing them in their sense of self. And establishing the ability to recognize truth and what is going on in the universe So later when you study more advanced physics or mathematics or science or whatever, those same principles come through. So that aspect of actually identifying those principles, studying them, finding them in the self—that combines with the other approach we had within teaching a subject. And I think many of the best teachers

in the world may tend to do this already on their own, and that is: Let's say today we're going to be studying fractions. So the idea is, start with the wholeness. So you say some holistic statement about whatever fractions are. Then you break it down into the pieces as you study the individual pieces, and then at the end of the lesson bring it back to the wholeness again. So that there's never a time when knowledge seems fragmented—when it's not connected to something bigger. So either you connect it right back to what your big statement was about the lesson plan, or to one of these principles, or to something in a student's daily life. And what that does is it keeps knowledge always being relevant to a student. So there's not as much tendency after sitting through two hours of a class where students say, “Excuse me, why does this matter? Why are we studying this? I don't need to know this.” Which is a problem with much of education. Whether it's voiced or not students tend to feel dissatisfied—either that they know simply memorizing dates for an exam on history isn't a satisfying process, or they know that simply regurgitating back information is not a satisfying process. And yet for a teacher in a classroom to be completely based in critical thinking and creative thinking and the types of activities that really engage students and challenge them—it would be impossible to be doing that for a large number of

students, all day
long, every day.
So, one of the best
workarounds for
that—unless you
have a project tutor
just on you for the

Mary: Some of the stuff you had us do, this was really advanced work you had us do for the grade level, I think. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This was grades 3–6 that year. You decided to have us study two Shakespearean plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. We liked *Midsummer Night's Dream* best so we focused a whole unit on it, the kids decided. So then you decided that we're going to put on a Shakespearean play. I think it was a full act that we performed for parents. And it had to be fully memorized... And we were in charge of set and costumes, understanding the play and understanding the time and setting of Shakespeare.

Kate: But you guys didn't know that was unusual. Well, of course Shakespeare!

Mary: So were you nervous to bring in major projects like this and just say, “Let's do it”?

Kate: Not in the least. . . . If you want a child to love the guitar you don't give him a little plastic thing that sounds jarring to his soul.

rest of your life focused on keeping you enlivened all the time!—is in fact not to teach information in a fragmented way, is to give it in its completeness.

Researcher: But, I mean, I couldn't find any teacher with any kind of training that wouldn't say, “Well of course you try to connect what you're learning to the students.” But it can be done in a very surface token way.

Kate: Right. For example, you're doing mathematics, so you say, “When you go to the store to buy a DVD how much does it cost?” So, well, the student says this much, and okay, “And if you had to make change and you only had a 10 dollar bill how much change would you get?” So that's what you would call, as a teacher, “Well, I'm connecting it to the student's life.” Or, if you're teaching history and you're saying “Okay, in 1733 this happened, and how is that similar to what's going on today?” So that's what we can call an education in general. Making connections. Or you can connect, “Because *this* happens to this chemical under this circumstance, *this* happens to this one.” There's a connection. Good. And we do say the more connections the better. Partly that comes out of the way our brain works too—that is, the more connections the better. But simply that a piece of information has some connection to another piece of information doesn't guarantee a relevance to the student.

I would—my angle of approaching life is: the most important aspect is the spiritual growth—not to the detriment of anything else, but that is really the reason for a person's birth: to take whatever steps they can, that are presented to them, that they can put in front of themselves, that could lead to a greater understanding of who they are, what their purpose is on earth, why they

were born, what is actually going on beyond the surface level. So my own angle of all of this is: the most important possibility that any knowledge presents is to add to that person's personal growth, search, unfoldment. So I would argue that that connection is the most important of all.

In a classroom where you have students, I would argue that the best teaching, the best transmission of knowledge, the best activities, the best of *whatever* happens within that classroom is that which sends the students home happier than when they arrived. And by happier I wouldn't argue for "Let's not work today!" "Let's just play and throw the balls around." That is not structuring a greater happiness in the students. The greater happiness comes from each day a student feels somehow better about how exciting knowledge is, how good they are themselves, how confident they are in their own being. . . . We have within us this vast ability to contact a vast reservoir of creativity and intelligence. And if we're not using very much of it then we live according to that level. But it's there and it's available and sometimes we can sense it. And to be reinforced with the idea that we are great, we can do great things—or

even say for example if a student is trying to make a decision: "I don't know whether to do this or to do this." Even just that reinforcement that, "Well, what does the *best* part of you think you should do?" You know, these are very subtle things, reminders to students that they

Joaquin: In [public] school I remember having to learn that part of having friends was *disliking* the same things. Like being mean or angry about certain things. That was one of the ways of establishing social order. It was also finding the people who were, like, lower than you, and making sure that they knew it. I never bullied people but I remember being mean to a few people and feeling *awful* about it.

are a great soul in a tiny body. You know, they're a great soul in a child's body, which means that we're going through the steps of learning what children learn, which is somehow to help you as a soul on your path of evolution. So that's why I really emphasize the importance of

connecting knowledge to students—because the only value it truly has to students is if it helps them in their personal growth.

And I would go so far as to say if a student ended up completely—let's say grade 6 and yet had not yet studied whatever, mathematics, some subjects, but was supremely confident in their ability to learn, that to them approaching mathematics would be quick, like within weeks they would be immediately caught up to what that level would be—so I would argue that the ability to learn is more important than the subjects taught. And not just the ability to learn, but the ability to actively make connections and see through to the clarity and depth that the subject brings, is more important than what's being taught. Having said all that, when that ability is in place every subject is fascinating. You could be studying fractions one day, and the next day

you're studying architecture, and the next day you're doing the human body, and every subject is fascinating to students. It's just like, “Whoa! This is so cool! Something completely different! Wow! *This* is cool! Now I like *this*!” And that's exactly what you want as a teacher because the actual student, the learning person inside the student, is enlivened. And all knowledge becomes significant, all knowledge becomes relevant, all knowledge becomes fascinating.

Joaquin: Learning was exciting. And when we learned something, even if it was about the voyageurs and it was like a little song or something like that, it didn't occur to me that other students in the world didn't think that was *fantastic*. And I remember when I went to public school and any teacher asked a question, I would raise my hand, and nobody else in 30 students would raise their hands, and I had to learn that oh, not everybody does that. 'Cause I was like, “OH!! I know the answer!!” And in [our school] I think we all wanted to chip in, we all had something to contribute. Or Kate had a way of—whatever a person said got woven into it in some way, became part of the discussion. And I don't ever remember thinking that any student didn't *get it* as well as any other student. But my favourite part, I think, was that we all liked being at school.

Stories Part II

Three Teachers' Narratives

After considering Kate's story beside Joaquin's, Theo's, and my own memories of our school experience, I wanted to look into the question of how much impact meditation itself could have on a teacher in an average school classroom. To isolate this issue from the many other unique components that were at play at our school, I chose to meet with mainstream, conventional teachers who teach at mainstream, conventional schools, and who had taken up a meditation practice recently. In an effort to understand more about the experiences classroom teachers might have after taking up a meditation practice, I asked them about their lives, their work, and their meditation experiences. I wanted to know what they perceive to be the effect of their meditation practice on their work and their lives.

These three teachers work in Canadian schools in different areas of the country. Two work in urban areas and one in a rural community. Two are female and one is male. One is Francophone, one Anglophone, and one is fully bilingual, teaching in both languages. Two work in public schools; one works in a private school. One teaches at the high school level and two teach elementary. One is a veteran teacher preparing for retirement and two are within their first decade of teaching. They all were schoolteachers before they learned meditation, and they have all taken up a regular daily meditation practice within the last 3–8 years (although one learned in the 70's but then dropped the practice and took up a new meditation practice again recently).

First, I asked them to tell me about their life, how they became interested in meditation, how they got into teaching, and what their work is like day-to-day in the classroom.

Nina

Researcher Reflection:

My interviews with Nina were the easiest of the three teachers – she was an open book, willing to share anything about herself without reserve. I have often found this quality among people I know who have undergone yoga teacher training and been approved by my *guru* to become meditation or yoga teachers. I was in our *ashram* for a large program over the summer in 2016, and I had made an announcement in the meditation hall to about a thousand people present that I was looking for participants for this study and hoping someone fit the criteria and was interested. Later that day Nina came down to find me in the daycare room where I was teaching preschool programs for children whose parents were participating in a weeklong silent meditation retreat. I was previously acquainted with her to some extent, and pleased when she said she thought she met the criteria for the study and she would be happy to participate in any way I needed. Our first meeting took place in the *ashram*, later that week, at 10 o'clock at night, on a couch in a back hallway. People filed past, leaving for the night, while volunteers chatted and cleaned the dining hall and the meditation hall around the corner from us. The next two interviews took place over the phone, as she lives too far from me to make travel possible. She was the most open participant of the three teachers. The only struggle I had with her interviews was that she was *so* open and ready to talk about whatever I needed for the study that I had to be extra vigilant about not asking her leading questions as she would have been only too happy to oblige me! I believe that my careful avoidance or rephrasing of possible leading questions may

have occasionally led to a few moments of confusion regarding what I was meaning to ask, and an atmosphere that was a little more formal than it could have been otherwise. (Considering that we have studied with the same *guru* we have many shared concepts about yoga, and use much of the same terminology, which I believe could have created leading questions out of what otherwise might have been considered open-ended questions.) Also of note is that Nina has a tendency to speak very quickly and jump back and forth in her sentences to get across all the big ideas she is trying to convey, which comes across as endearing and enthusiastic in person, but admittedly is challenging for the presentation of transcribed text.

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Nina: As a young child, I was always really religious, or spiritual—from a very young age. I didn't feel like it came so much from my family—maybe my mother a little bit, but there was just always something inside me. I felt that... especially helping people—I used to really want to help children. And I wrote this letter to God when I was really young. That's something I always remember. I used to keep it under my pillow. It was addressed to heaven, or wherever I felt God was... It was a letter saying, “Dear God, I really want to help the children of the world.” Like, you know, those World Vision commercials that would come on? I would look at those and for some reason just had a pulling towards children. Wanting to help children. And: “Please help this dream come true.” Something like that I had said. And I just kept it with me. Even as I aged I kept that letter. And at one point I realized it's not going to disappear from under my pillow!

Nina shares her story of taking her first introductory workshop to traditional yoga and meditation 12 years ago:

I was hesitant to pay [the course fee]. I didn't know what it was about. And [the teacher] said, "Why don't you just come the first day? If you like it you could stay." So I went, and for me—I entered the parking lot and for some reason I had overwhelming emotions. I almost felt like crying. Like, out of the blue. I just entered the parking lot! I just shook off the feeling . . . I went inside the hall and . . . again as I was filling out the form the same feeling was coming to me. I felt like crying. You know, my throat started—you know that feeling in your throat? And your chin starts to wobble? I looked around and I was like, "Okay, I've got to hold it together. If I just start crying people are going to think I'm weird! Like, I'm just filling out a form. Why am I crying?" So I just filled it out and then I just walked out, back to my car. Sat in my car. And I had to talk to myself. I started taking a couple of deep breaths and I was like, "Get it together! You can't just start crying." I was trying to compose myself. Then I went back inside and the volunteer was standing at the door and asked if he could help with anything, and I said, "Well, I'd like to talk to the teacher." . . . And I went in, and I just said my name and just started crying. I couldn't understand what was happening. My experience was like that pretty much throughout the whole course. So much release happened. I didn't understand what was happening. I was actually scared every day to come to the course because so much was going through me! . . . At the end of the course I really felt light. But I only realized that lightness after that course ended—I don't think I realized how much burden I was carrying with me, emotional burden or whatever it was that I was carrying. . . . [It was] like my soul knew I've come home.

Soon after that Nina went through a divorce and used the yogic practices she had learned to help her through that experience:

So I just went and did the course again just to help myself through that. And it did help because otherwise I think I would have just—because prior to that I was just in my bed, not doing anything really. Just in that depressed state, crying and not wanting to eat, not wanting to do anything. So I just made myself go to the [beginner's yoga and meditation] course and at least be in the energy. . . . It just helped me to deal with those emotions and strengthen myself. It just helped me get out of it—faster than I would have without it. I maybe would have continued doing what I was doing: being depressed and lying in bed. But at least I was able to start smiling again, and feeling good even though things were not so good.

Even after one day, one evening, I think, of *sadhana* that we were doing, I could just feel myself feeling better. Just coming out of the really low feelings. Feeling more connected with myself. Over that one weekend, that first weekend, after so many weeks I started to feel more like myself. More connected to myself.

The following year, after doing an advanced meditation program, she felt she should get out of where she was and travel as a way of coping with the divorce:

I went to China. I left right after the advanced course. I left for China. I got a teaching opportunity there. It was either working there or at a school—I mean, I applied to a school in [my city]. And I got both positions. But I thought—and my mom also thought at that time—that being away from everything here would maybe help me. So I decided to take that opportunity and go. But you know, sure. You can escape the place. But my mind was still in that same state I would say.

It was wonderful having done the advanced course and all of that, but then being in China I didn't have that network: the Art of Living programs or anything like that there. And I was not really doing my [yoga] practice. And then I saw the difference in my state of mind. The distractions there—meeting new people and my job and all that—kept me going for a little while, but then I was drinking. That was not helping even though I was using that to help feel better! And I had some very low points there.

Then another year went by, more of the same. I was drinking a lot. We would go out on the weekends. And it was becoming a daily thing with me. And I feel that I wouldn't have been drinking that much in Canada. I would catch myself just having a drink at home alone—a beer. And beer was something I never even liked. And sometimes I would be drinking that and wonder why I am drinking it. You know, all of that. I definitely was not happy, I know that. Because for me, finding love and getting married and all of that was a very big thing. Like, career was just secondary. And having that not work out, and then getting involved with people that were not good for me, made me spiral down.

I remember in August going out with my friends one night, clubbing. And we were drinking and all of that and that night when I came home, I don't know what was different about that night but I just felt like I hit rock bottom. I remember sitting on the bathroom floor. I was just crying. I was just: “I don't want this. What am I doing? Why am I drinking like this? . . . What is my life? What am I doing?” I just felt like I hit rock bottom.

My last drink was that August 2008 when I hit rock bottom.

After that experience she continued with more meditation and yoga courses in greater earnest, and stopped drinking completely. Then she studied to become a meditation teacher.

After the first *kriya* we did [on one of those courses] I asked if I could stand up and share my experience. . . . [I said] something along the lines of, “This has helped me so much that I really want to give this back to other people. We need to help other people. You know, people should not feel like they don't have anything to help them through these things.”

The courses ended and I basically just bought a one-way ticket to [a city on the other side the country] [to volunteer for a yoga organization and learn to organize and teach yoga and meditation courses]. I don't know why I did that. I didn't know how long I wanted to go or how long I wanted to stay. . . . My mom was a little bit like, “Okay, you're not working right now? And you want to go?” I cut my hair super short. I did this whole transformation. . . . I ended up then staying for three months. That was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I felt like that was the *most incredible* experience of my life because I had never experienced being *so* happy. Like, that joy from within! All those things that we talk about in the [meditation] course. I was experiencing all of that. I was doing full-time *seva*³ there. I was throwing myself into everything. At the end of the three months I did [the teacher training course to become a yoga/meditation teacher].

³ Part of *karma yoga*, or the yoga of action, *seva* is a spirit of volunteerism or service to others.

Then she went back home, continued teaching yoga/meditation part-time as a volunteer, and got a full-time position with the school she's at now, a religious private school, teaching kindergarten.

It really taught me a lot about teaching, learning from the young kids. I felt like I could teach any grade then. I just learned so much even though we were doing very basic curriculum.

Nina has been at her current school for four years and has taught yoga to students each year through the yoga club she started. She now teaches grade 3. She has an average of 23 kids in her class. Her day starts at 8 a.m. She has 40 minutes of prep time each day and a half-hour lunch break which she spends with the other teachers in the staff room. The students leave by 2:40 but she and the other teachers usually stay later to work. She does her prep and marking at school and doesn't like to bring it home. She is often the last person to leave at around 4:30. She lives within walking distance of the school so she saves time that she would otherwise spend sitting in traffic and can work at school longer. She reports that one of the reasons she stays at the school is that the relationship between the administration and the teachers is very good. The principal never interferes with the teaching, and trusts and praises the teachers, supports them. He has an open door policy. She's seen some colleagues have issues occasionally with each other or the administration, but she feels that knowing everyone's personality she is good at managing relationships. Teachers are very supportive and share resources, talk together, share frustrations, help each other try to find solutions to problems. She says, "I finally feel like I am where I want to be professionally."

My approach with kids is, I'm stern in some ways—actually I don't know how I really come across. I mean, I know they know I can be quite serious and get upset, but overall I try to just develop an open relationship with them. I want them to feel free to communicate with me, talk with me, and I like to converse with them. And have fun with them. With this last group we had a lot of fun together, and I would just do things out of my plan. If something just came to me, I would want to do it with them. And I mean they would say, “Oh my god! You're the best teacher ever!” or “This is so much fun!” or, you know, this and that. I mean, I was also just doing it for my own amusement. I really like to get into character and make the lessons more fun like that. Like, when we were learning about space, for example, I pretended I was somebody from NASA and I invited them—I told them outside that I had turned the classroom into a NASA conference kind of thing. I invited them in and made them feel like, you know, that they were featured scientists or something, like when we were learning about the planets and stuff like that. So I like to engage the kids like that. Have fun with them and make learning fun for them. Yeah, overall I would say it's a good loving relationship with the kids. I mean, through my teacher training and stuff, I know you shouldn't really hug kids or touch too much or things like that. But I'm a bit of a hugger...

She is teaching full-time and working on her master's in leadership and administration at night. She has completed one year of a two-year program at the time of interview.

My goal is I would like to get into a leadership position eventually, whether a VP or maybe a principal down the road. Or maybe another admin position, depending on what's out there in the education field. I would like the opportunity to step out of the classroom and maybe try something different. Whether I would get that opportunity at my school, I'm not sure. I would

have to look into the districts, or other independent schools, or maybe even the school board, or something like that. So, I'm sort of open to different possibilities. I would obviously like to be in the education field but maybe take on more of a leadership role. I would like to find more effective strategies with the kids. . . . I find I'll come up with a plan but maybe not be consistent. [I'd like] to have more fun with the kids. To be more relaxed. Not take things too seriously. Just have fun with them. . . . I mean, what I would really like to do is also to bring the Art Excel⁴ program to the school. So that's sort of part of my plan that's in the works. I have talked about it with my school, so I'll see if we can give it a go. I think that's part of being an educator, part of my goal, to bring that spiritual knowledge to the kids. Professionally, that's where I would like to go.

. . . Being with the kids, I think, taking care of them, being able to share knowledge with them, to do yoga with them, all of those things... I feel that what I'm doing is helping them. I think I shared in the first interview that I had written that letter to God. So I think I connect it back to that. I'm doing what I had wanted to do, which was help children. So I definitely feel like I am where I'm supposed to be. And whatever ups and downs, at the end of the day, I do feel that teaching and education, this is my calling. And I feel grateful that it's part of all that *seva*. That it's all merged together. It's great I can get paid for something that I love. I don't necessarily see it like it's a job.

When I initially did my first course, that time someone told me about the program because I was going through just some emotional stuff and dealing with a relationship that wasn't working. So

⁴ a yoga workshop for children

I think at that time it was a way for me to help myself through that, basically This would help to maybe clear up for me my confusion in the relationship, or to understand myself better, or why the relationship wasn't working, or it would be a way for us to help the relationship work. At that time it was a lot about that. And then the relationship didn't work in the end, but I think as the years have passed, maybe especially now, for me it's become definitely something beyond that, because . . . I feel like that's not such an overpowering reason anymore. I am reading a book called *The Journey Home*, it's an autobiography of an American swami, Radhanath Swami. There is . . . if I can share this quote he shares in the beginning of the book? He says, "My Sweet Lord, as the river Ganges is forever flowing to the sea without hindrance let my attraction be constantly drawn to you without diverting to anything else." For me I think that's what it is now. I think it was always there since I was really young—the desire to be deeply connected with God and just to not be diverted by anything else, just to be soaked by that love and be in that devotion. I think more than anything that's what I really want through the practice—to be connected to that space. That I think was always there with me since I was really young—that deep connection with God, and wanting to understand that relationship. For me now I think it's evolved into that, whereas before it was maybe just about me, getting through my life situation . . . now I just feel I don't want these other things around me to intrude on my true purpose, which is to have that connection, and to be doing something higher than myself For me it's a way for me to come back to my purpose, my higher purpose.

Laura

Researcher's Journal, July 18, 2016:

The first interview I did with Laura was a little nerve-wracking, as she seemed hesitant to be recorded, and was nervous to commit to the study in general. She wasn't sure she was a good fit. [Researcher's note added later: I met Laura through a yoga teacher friend of mine from whom Laura had taken a few classes. The friend highly recommended Laura to me as a participant, and encouraged Laura to volunteer for the study. She did indeed prove to be a valuable participant, with a lifetime of insight into current issues facing teachers in public schools.] She went over the consent form in great detail, had questions about conservation of data, and said a few times that she didn't know if she had anything to really contribute to the study. Despite this, she had shown commitment to the study already, having biked through the city to meet me at a beautiful and quiet location on a university campus which she had carefully chosen for us. . . . I think I did well with reassuring her, carefully explaining the consent process to her, and clarifying calmly and in detail about the protection of data, protection of her identity, ways to withdraw from the study, and assuring her that she could withdraw at any time. I gently encouraged her to try out the first interview because often once we get going participants feel much more relaxed and enjoy the process. She agreed, and to start out I simply spoke about my own experiences, and focused on experiences we had in common so we would have a friendly back and forth, and establish a more trusting relationship. We talked about working with Indigenous youth, for example, and life in the North, and a bit about being mothers. And then she reflected on a very idyllic year of teaching. By this time she seemed comfortable, and at the end of the interview she remarked that the time had flown by. When I again gave her the option of continuing in the study or not, she said she wanted to go ahead. So that was a big relief. I

have to return to Ottawa now though, so the next two interviews with her will be over the phone. [Researcher's note: the two phone interviews were easy and pleasant, and she was noticeably open and relaxed during the last interview. I sensed that there were some events of her personal life that she avoided discussing, as was her right as a participant, and which I strived to respect. However, I believe that she has even more insight about meditation, emotions, and healing than has come across in her narrative so far, and hope she will be ready to share them with the world eventually, as she is a very gentle, thoughtful, and insightful person.]

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Laura is a veteran teacher who has taught in both French and English. She shares her feelings about beginning her teaching career in the 80's:

Laura: I decided to do teaching because I loved to travel. And I did get to live in a lot of places because of teaching. It gave me more freedom that way. I worked up North. . . . Then [on the coast] that was very different Great kids. All they did was draw about water and the ocean! Cute little kids. Usually about the same age. About grade 2. And it was all learning about how to teach French in an English environment. That was all a learning experience too. And it hadn't been set up in this school so we had to set up a program. It was the first year of grade 2's there. They had a small group of 12 kids. It was really good. It was probably one of my best years. I mean, who couldn't have a good year? You've got the best kids. You've got 12 kids and they're amazing, and it's a beautiful place to live. It wasn't stressful at all. But it would have been stressful the year after. I didn't end up staying there. I had fallen in love with some guy in Montreal and I went back to Montreal. But I think it would have been [stressful] because they were doubling the classes the next year. . . . And then I moved up here because my husband got

a job here. We moved here. And when I had a child I got back into teaching. (I wasn't teaching for a while—I got into social work actually. I did social work for a while.)

Laura was introduced to meditation in the 70's, but didn't continue the practice and then was reintroduced to it, recently taking up a regular practice.

I had tried TM in the 70's. But I was the only one I knew who was doing it, and there wasn't a place—there was, but I didn't know anyone. There was a centre but I just never went. I just did it all on my own. Eventually I just stopped doing it and didn't do follow-up. . . . I had done mindfulness at some point, but with mindfulness again they always recommended that you follow up at a centre somewhere. . . . I think TM, way back, was a profound influence in my life. Mindfulness meditation with yoga was really good, but I really had trouble following through, to do it. But with *sahaj samadhi* meditation,⁵ I found this way of meditation has been a lot easier for me to maintain. It's been a lot like the TM that I did way back. And I think it's because of the process, the way I was taught. . . . I find this one I can do on my own, and I'm consistent.

She loves to talk about her students and her school. Her face is radiant as she shares wonderful moments of learning with the students. She happily describes her colleagues as having a high level of devotion to students' well-being and the school environment.

I think one of the biggest moments of teaching that I really really *really* like is when I can read. Like the parts when I can bring in literature, stories, to kids. Because story-telling is such a huge huge *huge* thing to me. I love stories so much! Where I can bring a story to students, and where

⁵ a yogic mantra-based meditation similar to TM

I think I understand the story, and I'll read it to this class 'cause I think it's the greatest story—and sometimes they see even more. Like, they pick up things and I think, “Oh my god, I didn't even see this, and this is the greatest story, but now it's made it even one hundred percent more because they've even found more details of the story!” And this happens every once in a while where you get these kids—and this is the part that really blows my mind, that you think they're so little, they're so young—that they can see so much. And that has been those profound moments where you think, “Oh my goodness! Can this be possible? That they are understanding this?” And where you really have these conversations after—and they'll ask these profound questions that are so deep and you think, “Oh my god. Look what this story did.” And there are some stories that do that. And then the lesson they get behind it: “So that means...” “And this is...” And you say, “Yeah, that's right!”

. . . You're supposed to be so careful about how you read books to kids that it doesn't imply any kind of religion. But spirituality is different in that, you know, you can still have a perspective of how you see the world, and that's how you teach, right? If you see how important things are, and the environment . . . nature, and how that spirituality is . . . it's huge! Taking care of the earth, and taking care of living things, and ourselves.

I think I work with an exceptionally incredible bunch of teachers, and they are all very very devoted and very very capable and they seem to do very well. But I don't think it's that situation in a lot of schools. I think our school is particular because I think everyone is, well, it's a small school and people support each other really well.

Every day people get together at lunch and they talk about stuff. And I've been to other schools where nobody has time for lunch. You don't see anybody in the lunchroom. You don't see anybody anywhere. It's like, you know, "Where *is* everyone?" Either they're in their classroom eating, frantically, to get more work done and they're gone right away—and that makes for a school where there's a lot of different things going on and you don't know what's going on. But I think in our school everyone gets together and they talk out a lot of stuff. If they're having certain problems then people might say, "Well you know, why don't you try this." Or, "maybe I could help you with this." "Let's try to do this." That's one thing that they do and I think that's important because, you know, if you are having a problem—and I think some of the teachers know how to support certain kids too—like if they're having certain difficulties saying, "Well I think this child maybe has this. Let's take a look and see if we can get him tested." You know, and learning problems for reading—because we have a reading resource teacher who is really, really good. And so any of the kids who show any weaknesses in reading, we put them into her program and she gets them set up with all the other kids so that they're not behind. But not all schools have that.

I think maybe that people have been there for a long time so we don't have a lot of different people coming in. And everybody's on the same commitment level, I would say. Everyone's committed, everyone's serious, everyone wants to do the best they can for the students. There's no one in there who's going, "Oh I hate my job. I don't want to be here." I think everyone is pretty devoted. I think that's number one. . . . It's like a little home I would say. That people, even though there are fights between everyone it's like a family. I would say like a family—you know it's not to say that everything is super perfect all the time, and there are some people who

have their little idiosyncrasies, but overall I think it's just the devotion that teachers have, and that's pretty incredible actually.

Laura places great importance on community involvement and service in addition to her lifetime of service as a teacher.

In my own time, when I do have time, my whole thing is trying to do community stuff, like, in my own community. I like to be more involved—and I want to be. I mean there are so many things. There's a save the rail committee in our neighbourhood that I try to go to meetings for it, but I don't have lots of time to commit to it. . . . For me a sense of community is so important. And trying to make things better is so important. I grew up in a small town, and we knew everyone in that town. And my dad was part of so many things in the community, like, he did so much . . . and then you come to a big huge city like this, and you think, “Oh my goodness, it's so community oriented!” There are so many people that know each other, and I think that you want to do the best you can, making sure that your community is the best community you can live in. And that's important to me. So if I'm not in school then I want to be part of helping, and knowing what's happening in the community too is important for me. Like going to local meetings and going to town halls and just finding out what's going on. And helping people whenever you can too, if anybody needs help with anything. I know I've got a friend who broke her back, so to go visit her and make sure she's okay. And there's this little lady who lives next door—she's by herself. It's just making sure that people are okay. To me that's important.

I can't see myself being one of those people that, you know, goes out to Florida and, you know, sits on the beach. I think whatever I do it will be something to—and it's not clear at the

moment—but it will be some way of doing something for my community. Or climate change, or something that I will be involved in. Because I think that's something that I sort of *have* to do. . . something that gives me a goal and gives me purpose.

Etienne

Researcher's Journal, June 19, 2016:

I just finished my first interview with Etienne. I am sitting to do my journal straight away because I realized the importance of getting all my thoughts down immediately in my last set of interviews. It was quite a messy interview. It was done over the computer instead of in person, and quite impersonal and filled with tech glitches. He had a hard time finding me as a contact on Skype though I sent a contact request to him, and we ended up using Facebook Messenger and the video kept freezing and dropping the call. I suggested we turn off videos and just use audio, but he said that seeing my reactions and my mouth move as I talked helped him with the language barrier. . . . The other issue was the translator. I have carefully selected a translator for when Etienne and I meet in person. She is a professional translator and practises meditation, following the same yogic tradition as I and, most importantly, Etienne. To facilitate today's conversation Etienne and I had identified a similar person in Etienne's city to sit with him for this first Skype interview, but at the last minute he wasn't available. So Etienne arranged for his friend to be here to help, but the friend's English was not much stronger than Etienne's. And the impersonal nature of video conferencing as well as having a translator who didn't have personal understanding about the experience of meditation kept the discussion pretty superficial. So I stuck with very general questions. . . It was a start, and it will help me decided on the right

follow-ups for the next interview. But I am very hopeful that the next interview will feel more personal and open...

Researcher's Journal, August 4, 2016:

My last two interviews with Etienne went much better than the first, although language barriers and quality of translation were still an issue. We both travelled and met each other in Quebec City (for him that was because he was going to fly out of that city a couple days later for his vacation to India), and we met in my hotel. For interview #2 we were in my room, and for interview #3 we were at a table in a corner of the hotel lobby [Researcher's note: For both of these two interactions we were in fact with the new translator, but I still found the process of translation created too much of a break in the flow of natural conversation. He seemed to share this feeling and was torn between using the translator and simply attempting to answer me in English instead. As a result, some of his narrative is shared in non-fluent English. I experienced his presence and non-verbal communication to be more powerful than his words alone, and found that the richness of his experience does not always come through in the transcribed text.]

Researcher Reflection:

The reason I included Etienne in the study even though a language barrier existed is that I met him by chance on a meditation retreat and we got to talking. Without knowing what I do, he shared with me that he is a high school teacher, he loves his work, and he feels that there has been a change in his teaching since he started practising meditation. I then offered that I was studying that very phenomenon and maybe he'd like to tell me more sometime. He replied with

an excited smile: “I think I have much to say about that! You know, my relationships with my students have been transformed since I started yoga.”

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Etienne: I started [*tae kwon do*] when I was seven or eight years old. It was just a hobby. I liked it. And I really liked it very quickly. I started competition very soon. I think I was very good. And I liked the attention when I won, and I liked to compete with the other children. I mean *tae kwon do* is very—you have to constantly get new grades and new belts, so it's very motivating to grow up in this sport. For me competition was very important, so I went to a lot of them—until I was 25 years old. I practised it in an intense way for about 18 years. And I was a teacher for a few years also. I travelled a lot for competition. I made very very *very* good friends. But, in the first part of my *tae kwon do* career, it was very much for the competition. I wanted to be a good athlete, and be great at competition. I was on the national tier. The national team for a few years. I made the podium.

But when I was a teenager I started getting some injuries—legs and back. So I had to stop a few times, and then try again. For 10 years now I haven't practised because my body can't [take it] anymore. But it's still part of my life. I have some *tae kwon do* tattoos and I still have friends, and my brother also practised and was a good competitor, and I follow him when I can and go to watch competitions. So it's still in my life, but since I have moved to [this village]—because I was practising *tae kwon do* more in [other cities where I lived]—since coming here I've totally stopped it because they don't have the style of *tae kwon do* I'm used to.

I wanted to be a physical education teacher because I taught *tae kwon do* for children and older people for a long time. I was pretty good at it. But I really like history and geography because I travelled a lot. And I met some very good history teachers who gave me a love for that subject, so I decided to do that. Also, I wasn't very good in sciences and math. I almost wanted to become a physiotherapist, but no, the math was too much for me! I loved history and being with teenagers. So, that's why.

I went to [teacher's college] and it was for a four-year program. It was good. There was a lot of [practicum]. Each year of our program we had to work with another teacher to see how we will do this in the real world! It was very nice.

It was difficult [when I started teaching]. I was at the university—I was finishing a few classes at the same time—so I was part-time at the university and part-time teaching at a school. I found that difficult. I realized that to be a teacher it's really different from what we learned at the university. That's often more theoretical, about child psychology, or how to prepare your class, and it's always easy to just follow the steps, but in the real word it's much more complicated. In class it's different because it's more about classroom management than teaching the subject.

You have to deal with the students' behaviour, when they forget their material and things like that. You also have to deal with all the behaviours and [personalities]. At the beginning I wasn't very good with this. In *tae kwon do*, when you teach, it's a martial art. It's the way—you have to respect your seniors and you have to say “Yes sir!” And you have to do push-ups if you don't do something well. It's more like the military! The respect is very very *very* important. In class it's different! With 30 teenagers who look at you and sometimes don't want to do what you ask

them. And they can be influenced by their friends. That part of their development, the influence of the others around them, is very important, so sometimes they are “bad” just to be accepted by others. You have to work with that and during that time you are not really a teacher. You are an educator. So very soon in my career I realized that I'm not really a teacher. I'm an educator and that it is very different. I think when you are at college with older students then you can concentrate on teaching something, learning more, becoming a better learner, but especially in class, at 13, 14, 15 years old it's more a way of life that they need to learn. So, it's totally different than what I expected at the beginning!

Etienne also shares the story of how he took up a regular meditation practice:

My father had been to India twice, and I'd been once when I was 16. It was very exciting for me. It was the fulfillment of a lifetime. For meditation my father was a big influence for me. I saw him doing meditation daily. However, it's not because of that that I ended up doing meditation. It's really because of the Art of Living. But it gives us an additional connection, that I share this with him.

I tried [meditation] near my home. My dad tried it a long time ago, and he talked to me about this, and I started... I wanted to try. I was sure it was very good and all I read about it was so nice. But I tried for a few weeks and it was very difficult for me to stay sitting and to not move and be relaxed and concentrate on something, and I gave up after a few tries. Last year a friend of mine who just arrived in my region—he's a yoga and meditation teacher—he talked about the class . . . it was about yoga and meditation. And he was leading an intensive class of three or four days. So another friend of mine tried it and told me it was very nice, very intense, a special

thing. So I tried it, without any expectation, and finally I really fell in love with it. At the beginning it was more for the yoga, and meditation was just a little part of it. For me yoga was more important. . . . Finally I just [kept to] the meditation and not the yoga. And it was very good for me because, as I told you, I broke up—now it was almost two years ago—with my ex-girlfriend, and it was really difficult for me to pass through that, and the meditation helped me a lot. And now it's not for fun—I think it's my way of life now. I wake up and meditate almost every day, and try to learn more.

He shares some of the challenges he faced when first learning yoga and meditation, and the transformation he experienced:

The *kriya*, the Art of Living class—in the beginning I didn't like [*sudarshan kriya*] because I found it was long, and I didn't know why we had to do this. I couldn't understand the reason. But I liked, after the *kriya*, my state of mind. It was easier to relax. . . . I thought it was long and a bit difficult, and they asked me to try [practising it] for 40 days [to make it a habit], and...
<laughter>.

I was really emotionally overwhelmed by [a process that took place on the course], and it was really, this thing on the last day, it encouraged me to do the practice for 40 days. When [the teacher] asked us after [this process], “Could you recognize the divine in [another] person?” I burst into tears for half an hour because—I didn't used to be a very spiritual person—and after that I realized I wasn't having relationships with just a person—a man or a woman—there was something beyond that connecting us to each other. So that's when I decided to meditate and do *kriya* every day for 40 days.

He talks about his mornings being different since meditating. He doesn't wake up late and rush and watch TV anymore. He wakes up early, does meditation, and listens to calm music.

I want to keep the habit, because I know when two, three, four days [go by without the practice] it's difficult. It's more difficult in the mind. You hesitate more.

Interestingly, Etienne shares that he does not find his work stressful. He has experienced the stress of starting at a new school recently and getting to know the students, gaining their respect. But he says his hours are good, and class sizes are small where he is, in a rural area. He usually finishes all his prep and marking in his spare period. He has good relationships with other teachers and his principal. Sometimes he does sadhana right after school to clear his mind and switch his focus to his personal life.

Teachers' Experiences

After understanding their stories, how they became teachers, and their reasons for learning meditation, I held two more interviews with each of the three teachers and asked them more about their work experiences and then about their meditation experiences. These interviews were lengthy and because of length I do not attempt to present full narratives here, but I offer narrative fragments that I perceive as meaningful to the research question (what impact has meditation practice had on the teachers' personal and professional lives). This includes comments that were spoken with passion or strong emotion by the participant (as was perceived from my position as listener), that echoed the comments of one of the other teachers, that echoed my own experience, or that echoed the traditional knowledge that accompanies the practice of yoga. I have organized these fragments thematically.

It is important to note, regarding the presentation of the text, that comments are preceded by the name of the speaker, and all text that follows is hers until a new speaker is identified. Paragraph breaks within a single speaker's text denote a gap in speech where the subsequent comment may have been offered later in the conversation or in a different interview session than the preceding comment.

Challenges

Nina and Laura had much to say about the challenges of teaching. The main themes of their comments are presented here: managing students, relationships with colleagues and administration, high workload, and lack of school resources.

Students.

Nina: Because I think that as teachers we're dealing with a lot. I mean, we have 25 to 30 kids that usually you're dealing with by yourself. That's a lot of little bodies to handle. And each kid is unique and I think there's just so much that's happening in the classroom.

Laura: Thirty-five students in the upper grades?! Yeah I guess a teacher should be able to teach 35 kids but it is so much double the work and I think kids don't learn as well. I really don't think...

Well big class sizes are, you have double the amount of students. So if you have any special needs kids, and say you get the kids for 40 minutes a day and you have 35 kids, well think about it. If you're teaching a class with special needs those kids won't get any help. . . . There's also distractability. You know you have to make sure you have the attention of 35 kids all at once. And you know, I think that if you have them as a regular class and you have them every day it's a little bit easier than if you have them for 40 minutes a day. Because 35 kids take longer to get up the stairs, they take longer to sit down and settle down, and then if you've got to pass out their notebooks and all of the pencils and pencil crayons, basically you're spending all your time getting them in, settling them down, getting a quick lesson, getting them to do some work, and that's it. Then it's time to clean up which takes another five minutes and they're out the door.

And to teach kids—35 kids—a second language is *nuts*. You can't do it. There's no way—you get these kids for 35 minutes. By the time you sit down and you're working with them... it's hard. I mean, think about it—you have one minute for each kid.

Colleagues and administration.

Nina: Sometimes I find there's a lot of complaining that happens at our school. *Nina shares with me that she sees some other teachers complaining to each other a lot but she tries not to engage in it. She is sometimes disheartened and perplexed by it since she feels she is able to remain positive and collegial. She tells me she sometimes hears them counting down days to the end of the year and it makes her think:* “Well, if you’re so unhappy that you’re waiting for it to end, why are you here doing this?!”

Laura was concerned about a recent change in administration that had made her work more difficult: Say you have a problem: like, you have to talk to [our principal] about something. She usually puts it off. Like, “We'll talk about this later.” Or you know, “Email me.” Or, “I can't. I'm busy right now.” There's usually some reason that she can't deal with it right away. I mean, there's been a couple times where there's been an emergency where it took me 10 minutes to get to her and she got upset that I didn't, you know—she said: “You should have told me this right away!” Well, I was going to but I didn't know where you were. I would have told you right away but I did not know where you were and I had to deal with this! . . . So, that's how she deals with it and . . . I've learned I can't email her because she won't respond to emails.

Sometimes I have to try to get her at a moment where I can talk to her about stuff . . . or I remind her. I say, “Look, can we have five minutes together at some point today where we can sit down and talk about this certain situation?” And then if I can get her to sit down and talk to her—but it's hard because the emails just don't get responded to. And I think because she's bombarded with so much stuff that, for her, that's how she copes. She just, you know, cuts everything down. Whereas we had a principal a few years ago and everything was responded to right away, you know, boom! Like, she just got to it right away! And it was a lot easier to deal with situations because, you know, you had a problem, it got solved, and you kept going. But here it's almost like... it doesn't get solved right away, it just seems to stay...

Workload and school resources.

Nina: And I feel like I'm always talking about this—as teachers the different roles that we have to play. I mean, you're their teacher, you're there to give them the knowledge of the subject areas and sometimes you're having to attend to them as a nurse, or as a counsellor if they are dealing with issues with their friends. You're an entertainer! You're this, you're that. I feel that there are so many hats that it can definitely get to be overwhelming. It can get stressful. You can feel like, “Okay, I don't know what to do.” And then you're also dealing with parents. I mean, it could be good things or bad things with parents. Me being at a private school too, you tend to have a bit more demands from parents. . . . So obviously students, parents, and then there's the schoolwork itself. Like things you get, paperwork you have to do, or things that they request: your lesson plans, or whatever information that they need and the office needs. So, there's constantly things happening and each day is sort of a new day. You don't know what to expect. Certain challenges come up.

Laura: The first few years [as a mom] I had to go half-time, because I couldn't manage. When I first started working full-time I got sick. A lot. I was sick. I kept getting pneumonia those first few years my daughter was little. And the only way that I could manage was to go half-time. And I did that until my daughter was about in grade 5. And then I started working full-time once she could manage getting to school...you know, getting to school on her own. I couldn't do it before; it was just too hard. There was coming home, making dinner, it was, you know, having a house to clean, doing homework, and I only had one child! People have, like three, you know? We had pets. And that way my life was more balanced. I was happier. I could do my work efficiently. I could have a family. I could cope with it. And once my daughter was older it was easier to manage getting her out in the morning, getting her to school. It was a lot easier. But I had to be home earlier and I just had to make sure—and I probably did more work on weekends. You just have to cut a lot of things. It's never perfect.

I've been in the teaching profession for about 20, 25 years. So I've seen the changes. And I think as the years [go on], I see that teachers have way more responsibility than they had in the past. And the office administrators and principals are getting more work to do. So you know, the administrative assistants can't do it all so it has to be, "okay, teachers are going to do it." Right. So it becomes the added paperwork that they have to do. So it is very difficult and I think in the future it's going to be even more difficult because there are always these constraints. I mean, is it ever going to get easier? I don't know. I mean, my daughter doesn't want to go into teaching because she sees how difficult it is.

Laura often shared her concern about growing class sizes. This was a more pressing issue for her than the other teachers as she works in a public school in a major city where class sizes are the highest in the country: That's one thing that we can't say though; as a teacher, you can't say that. It has to be that it doesn't matter. You should be able to teach every student whether they can do well in a large class or small class. But some kids just get lost in a big class. They're just gone. They're just in another world. They're just zapped right out. And those are the kids that have more difficulty. They're usually quiet kids. They usually have some kind of learning disability where they can't focus—it's too noisy. That's the other thing, that it's so noisy with 35 kids! It's incredibly noisy. So you've got this noise and even when they're being quiet they're still noisy. You can't get 35 kids—I mean maybe you can if you're—I know I never could. So all day they're in this noise level and then the bright kids—I think both bright kids that finish their work like within five minutes and then the kids that are having the problems [struggle]. But bright kids will survive whatever. But they will need more, you have to have more challenging stuff for the bright kids, and then you have to be there to help the kids who are having difficulty. So if you have smaller classes you can deal. I would say it's the kids who are having more problems with the learning that will lose out rather than the gifted kids. Gifted kids will survive whatever. They might not be too happy. And parents might not be too happy. But they'll survive and I guess that's the way you have to look at it. And you've got more one-on-one too if you have a smaller class. Like, your teacher isn't frantically trying to deal with so many things. If you have an issue you go talk to him or her and they say, "Oh yeah sure, we can deal with that." Rather than having a teacher that says, "No! Go sit down! I can't talk to you right now. I'm dealing with these 10 kids." You know?

Handling Stress

Laura: Well, at the end of the day the kids are tired, but I'm more tired too. . . . If you feel stress you're going to be more on edge with the kids. You might get upset more easily or you may not see things clearly. Like you may see an interaction with two kids and say <angrily>, "You did that!" The kid will say, "Well no, I didn't. I was actually..." but if you're a little more relaxed and you might see those little things a bit more, or you might listen to the child a little bit more. Like, you'll go, "Oh, you're right. I'm sorry." Rather than if you're just really upset and you don't want to listen. And that makes a big difference too—when you understand the kids. And I find if I stay really relaxed and I try—well as relaxed as I can with 30 kids!—I try to look at the positive aspect of the kids doing something rather than the negative, and I think I'm a little more understanding about what's going on There are some kids that might lie about it, but you get to know who's doing what or who pushes the buttons and who doesn't.

Yeah. I think you have to realize the limit of what you can do. I mean, you do your best and you do everything you can, but at some point you have to take time for yourself. You have to take time to—you have to stop . . . you could go on working all night. There's always going to be something you can do better, always something you can do more, so at some point you have to say, "Okay, I've done my best and now I have to go with that." And learn from it. So if something wasn't a success you have to make sure you're always learning from that situation. Say, "Okay, that didn't work. I'm going to try something else next time. But I'm not going to spend 10 more hours doing it all over again. I'll try to find a way that I can do it successfully." Sometimes you just have to take a night off. Say, "No. I'm not going to work tonight. I'm going to take some time for me." And I think taking some time for yourself—because you will burn

out if not. And I do know a lot of people burn out. I do know because, I mean, sometimes I feel like I'm burning out, you know? I have to really be careful. Will they put less work on teachers? No. That's not going to change. Are children going to be easier to deal with? No. That's not going to change. So all these things aren't going to change, so it's the teacher herself or himself that says, "Look, I'm going to do these things, but I'm going to set what I can do." And maybe decide that if it's *that* hard that it's not your work. That maybe you have to do something else. 'Cause it's really not for everyone. That's for sure. And I know from my own experience, new teachers are coming into the school and they're going, "What? I have to do all of that?! You mean you do this all day and then you have to do all *this*?" They're like, "Ooh... okay..." No, you just don't go in and teach and leave! There's a lot more to it.

I think that because teaching is hard—and there are a lot of demands on teachers today, and a lot of burnout with teachers, a lot of work hours and so many expectations—that it's really important that teachers stay connected with themselves. Because it's so easy as a teacher to just be doing and doing and doing for everyone else, and then you forget for yourself.

I've seen lots of different things. You know, I've seen breakdowns. Especially working in special education. There's, um, one of the teachers had a breakdown. She just had to leave it. She couldn't handle it anymore. And that's a whole other question—that's a whole other issue with special ed because they have students that are beyond... there's nowhere else to put these students, right? And the situation is that the teacher gets hit and she gets all sorts of injuries and she has to be in that classroom. And it's a child that shouldn't be there, but it takes so long in the

paperwork to get them to where they have to go, and there aren't a lot of places for some kids to go.

I think overall teachers have to find a way to cope. I don't know really what they do. I think the younger teachers have way more energy, but there's a point where having the experience gives you lots of ways to deal with different situations.

I've always exercised a lot. I make sure that I get a lot of physical activity, which relaxes me. So if I come home I might do—depending, I might not necessarily have time to go out, but doing some yoga at home or some activities where I can go for a long walk. And I make sure that I have to walk where it's, you know, through a park or something, where I can just get my head [clear] and try to just think of other things to do, which would help a lot. And also I try not to bring my work home. I try to get all my work done at school. So then when I do get home I just have to—I try just to not think of work, and give myself some time to get connected back into another, you know, my home life, and that helps. Because if I bring it all home, even the work, I find it just doesn't end, and I get more tired.

Nina: Prior to grade 3, when I was teaching kindergarten, I slammed doors! That sometimes happened. Last year was definitely better than a couple years ago when I was with kindergarten. I think I lost it a little bit more, especially towards the end of the year. 'Cause I had this class where there were 25 kindergarteners and the majority of them were boys and towards the end it got quite, uh, yeah, I think I had reached a limit. Because when I had an evaluation done I remember that year towards the end of kindergarten, one of the things my VP had said was she

felt that I was not happy. With the kids, or I don't know what word she used exactly, something along those lines meaning that I wasn't happy. And she shared that with me. That really hurt me actually. . . . Just the note that she picked up that's how I was in the class. Like what happened to me. I really felt uncomfortable to hear that. But then, you know, it gave me the opportunity to reflect on what was happening. And I mean in some ways I felt like this was the worst time for her to be here at the end of the year [for the evaluation]. But at the same time it brings something to my awareness. Like, how am I being with the kids? And I think, I mean evaluations are a little tricky like that. I guess I remember feeling during that evaluation that maybe I *had* to be hard on the kids—make sure they were really behaving well. And maybe I took it too far and it came across, obviously to her, as if I was not doing so well in the class. And then the next year when I had an evaluation I had a much smaller classroom. Only 13 kids actually! And she was evaluating me again and she brought up the last year's situation and said, “Wow. That's a huge improvement. You seem so happy now with the kids,” and stuff like that.

I think teaching can be tough, it can be one of those jobs where you can be hard on yourself and feel like, “Well you know, I'm not getting anywhere with the kids, so they're not learning anything.” I mean that's been my experience, that it can be a job where you're constantly judging yourself and how you did and whether you had a good teaching day or not, and maybe not being happy with your choice of words, or how you dealt with the situation. And obviously, as teachers you have your own personal life outside of the job. So, you know these [meditation] practices—obviously they can help create that. You want to be fully focused when you come to work. You don't want to bring everything with you to your job. I think teachers are very important—it's a complex role and it's required that [you have something] that helps you to just

be with your emotions, and helps to bring focus and clarity. Something that's there to help deal with your day-to-day stress is so important. Then I think you could be that much more present with the kids to deal with things in a more positive way, and be able to handle all the responsibilities that come with this job.

For me, what I do is, sometimes once the kids have all left, I'll meditate or I'll do my *kriya* at that time. Because sometimes I don't get up early in the morning and do it, so I find once the kids leave I just close my door, shut the lights, and I have this armchair where I sit and I do my *kriya* or meditation. And it gives me that second wind of the day, and then I feel more refreshed to get the rest of the work done. So that helps.

Meditation Experiences

Etienne: When I'm observing my breathing and it's slow and steady without my trying—it just happens. I accept the physical discomfort. It's like my spirit and my body are disconnected. I could just accept it—it doesn't disturb me at all. It's hard to describe something so profound. It's like at that moment all is well. Everything is just, good.

When it's over and you open your eyes: peace. There's no rush. There's deep peace and an opened mind.

Nina: There's something that feels like, I can't wait to just close my eyes and be away from everything and just be in that space. It's actually been a couple days I haven't done it... I need to just be within myself. Just wanting to close my eyes and shove anything else out.

That space—I mean it feels safe. Or it's like... it's something I do where I just know it's going to help me. It's a space of reconnecting... a place where I can go to, where I can feel calm and just relax and reconnect. Be cozy again.

Laura: Why I'm consistent with it is that I see clearly why it's helpful for me. And because I see how it helps me so much, I really want to continue it and I don't want to stop it because I feel it helps me a lot in dealing with so many things. And also it just helps me, just cut off from the world and just relax. And I feel so much better afterwards. So it's been a really, really helpful way to cope with day-by-day situations. And definitely with teaching because I find teaching—it's overwhelming! . . . So that meditation, it has been really good for me. I find [mantra meditation] has more impact on me. Like TM did. It's the purpose of: you sit, you focus a certain way, and your mind starts doing it by itself. Whereas with mindfulness you're always thinking the thoughts and trying to get rid of the thoughts, and anyway, yeah, don't know if I'm being clear, but I saw a very big difference between the two ways. They're both very good, but you need to be... you need to follow up with other people [in mindfulness]. But you need time to do that. If you're working every day, and as a teacher... there's a centre really close to where I live, I go by there all the time, but the hours are lunchtime. Or after work at seven. Well, I'm home at seven, you know, I get home at seven—I'm not going to go back to the centre. So you have to do things just on your own, so that [mantra meditation] worked out better for me.

Etienne: I think people saw something different [after I started yoga, *kriya*, meditation]. It's difficult to say. . . . But my back and my shoulders got more relaxed after starting. Before that I

always had stress [and tension] there, but now it's more relaxed. It's easier for me to let it go now, when I have stress with my students. They don't get on my nerves easily anymore. I have more rope, before I snap. With my friends and my family, I can just hear them, and accept, and try to help them. Yeah, I'm a better listener. I can listen to them and not try to find an answer, but just listen. Then after, react. And I think I'm more empathetic with people. I'm less turned in on myself and more open to other people: their joy or their sadness.

I changed schools this year, so often in a new environment it's more difficult. The students don't know you. You don't know them. When you get a new group of students you have to make your place. It's a new start, and the students do the same thing. They don't know you so they try your limits to see where they are. So this year was more difficult. But when I started meditation, it was easier for me to accept the situation, and keep calm, and to understand that they are not against me. And I was not against them. It's just that I'm the adult, I'm the teacher, and they are doing their job [testing boundaries], and I have to do mine. And I know this year is difficult and next year will be better and better. So it's easier for me to accept the situation. I don't know if I am a better teacher since I learned meditation, but maybe a better educator.

Knowledge.

Etienne and Nina both spoke about the importance of yogic knowledge to their lives—referring to the knowledge frameworks that the student of yoga traditionally learns in conjunction with meditation and other yogic techniques. Etienne shares that while he does not contemplate knowledge right before, after, or during his meditation, he does read yogic knowledge regularly now and he does feel these two practices are connected: “maybe meditation makes it much

easier to understand the knowledge.” *The knowledge influences the way he interacts with his students and others. He shares that he learned to “accept situations as they are.”*

Etienne: I know it's just an event, with a beginning and an end. It's not against me—it's the situation. This makes it easier for me to go on after. With meditation it's easier for my mind to let go of a situation without it turning bad. Like after the event is over, I can stop thinking about it. Before meditation I would run the event over and over in my head. It was not stopping—it kept going. There was no end. It's not perfect, but it's better now. It's much better. And I think that if I didn't have that attitude all these years from practising meditation, I'm not sure that I would have made it through this long without a break, a vacation, to relax, catch my breath. But I'm pretty sure that with meditation I can continue through my career without stumbling. It was difficult for me this year, but I think with meditation I made it all the way through.

Nina: I feel that it's gotten better in terms of how I'm dealing with it when things aren't going my way. I think it's a lot to do with my personality. Like, I want a structure and organization and things like that. When that perfectionism is there, I think that's when I get upset. So coming back to . . . knowledge about perfection and imperfection, that helps. For me, reading knowledge, reading something like that, just brings me back to feeling more, you know, okay with that imperfection. To feel more relaxed about it. And then reading that helps me to approach a similar situation in a different way. Which has happened. Once I sort of stood back [in the classroom]. Things were kind of getting chaotic and I allowed myself to stand back and watch what was happening, rather than just right away reacting to it. And then I felt okay. I felt, “Okay, it's not so bad. It's okay.” Like, still things are getting done in this chaos, and just give it

some time, see what happens, look at what the kids are doing. And that made me happier, to not be so *on* the kids, and mad. It definitely made me feel happier. Like, not so physically strained inside.

Handling emotions.

Nina: That was one thing in my life I never knew how to deal with: my emotions. . . . I think if I'm dealing with something I get really bogged down in emotions and want to just stay in my bed, and I really get stuck in my emotions. That's one big change, that I'm able to get out of it. I think the intensity of them has decreased. And the way I'm dealing with them is quite different. Like I'm coming out of them much quicker. I'm not sitting there brooding over it as much as I feel I used to. So that's a huge change for me. It's allowed me to keep moving forward rather than just getting stuck in all of that. And definitely with the changes in lifestyle, like I stopped drinking and all of that. I mean, I think at one point obviously it was something I did socially for fun and stuff, but somewhere I think it helped me to get through things too—but at the same time I wouldn't feel so great about drinking every time I did. This guilt would come and all of that, and make me spiral down even more in my negative emotions. That's one of the biggest things—it really helped me to come out of there. I think even just with anger. I was more angry before. I would get mad a lot quicker. Lose my temper. That's been a huge shift in the way I deal with things. I remember this one moment where I think I had an argument with my mom and I was driving and I realized, “Oh wow, I'm *mad*! Wow, I haven't been mad in a really long time!”

These last couple years, I've been finding I'm definitely dealing with my stress much better. If I think back years in my teaching experience I would get frustrated a lot more easily. Because my personality is, like, I like things structured. Organized. Even if there are a couple students talking, I don't like it. If everyone's going to listen, everyone's going to listen! <laughs>. So sometimes I felt like I'm too tense like that. I mean that's still there, but I think I've learned to become more flexible and adapt to the situation. Like, letting things go... not having to strive for that perfection constantly, or having control constantly. And lately I've been finding, like, being able to be spontaneous. Like thinking of ideas and just doing things on the spot with the kids. Or being able to come up with something on the spot with the kids if something didn't work. Or having more creative thoughts. I've been feeling that a lot more. I feel it's because of the meditation. Having that clarity and that sense of focus. I feel like it's helping. And I definitely feel—even if I didn't have such a great day and it was frustrating with the kids or whatever it was—I feel like I'm able to do my *sadhana* at the end of the day and come to the next day with a smile. Even if I ended the day on a really bad note! I get the sense that, whatever, tomorrow's a new day. And I feel refreshed and excited to see the kids again the next day. Even if the day before I felt like: “oh my god, just go home!” Even the next day I feel excited to be with them and to teach them, and, “Oh I want to share this with them today, or do that with them today!” Just being able to get out of that rut quickly.

Laura: It helps. It's almost like when I do it every day, I can feel a part of me all day. I do feel that it gives me a focus, and it gives me a calm. And it really helps anxiety. I don't know—I get anxiety and it's really really helped a lot. I can focus on the moment and relax. And I get

through things a lot more easily than I did. It's like I don't think so much beyond. It helps you focus *now*. . . . Oh, it's, it's amazing.

I want to retire fairly soon and there's all this thought about where I'm going to go, what I'm going to do, but I think the meditation is helping me to be not so worried about it. Like, not to think that “oh, I have to be here, I have to be there,” but that somehow, I'm going to have a solution to the problem. I maybe don't have it now, but it's going to come. I'm going to get the decision—it's going to come to me. Rather than being worried about it all the time, I'm not so worried about it.

Etienne: I really like the time that I am sitting for meditation and the peace right after, but it has also made a difference in my lifestyle. It's difficult for me to describe it, but it's like a shelter for me. To stop thinking and to feel calmer and energize myself. I developed the ability to adjust my breathing in different situations—when I'm nervous, for example. This had a truly great impact on my life. It helps me to connect with the present moment. When I am anxious about things I can calm my mind instead of having the worry run through my head over and over.

I just finished my job and I don't know if it will be renewed at the end of August, but it helps me to realize that things will be all right either way.

Sleep.

When Nina shared her reasons for deciding to become a volunteer meditation teacher she mentioned sleep as being one of the fundamental ways meditation could help people dealing

with stress, anxiety, and depression: Simple things like sleeping, like people not sleeping well. This is why we need this. I feel like our small day-to-day lives are being affected by our lifestyles and I think people don't even realize that. You know, until you take that time to really breathe or be with yourself and do something which is helping you to come back to your space . . . I mean, I think if you can get a good night's rest, that in itself could help you deal with fifty percent of your stress because if you don't get enough proper sleep that itself adds to your level of stress.

Similarly Laura shared her struggles with insomnia a few times over the course of the interviews and here mentions the relief she has found recently, following a regular meditation practice: And it makes me sleep better at night. This year I've been able to sleep with the windows open. I haven't been able to [do that] in years because all the noises bother me. But the noises, they might wake me up a little bit, but then overall I can just—I mean I can go through the noises of the night now. Because I live in front of a park and there are people who bring their dogs in the mornings, and the birds at six in the morning, but they don't bother me anymore.

Transformations

As the three teachers continued to talk about their experiences with me, more insights about their understanding of their practice emerged. I have identified four themes that were discussed most: increased awareness, accomplishing more, happiness, and connecting with others. I present them here and precede each section with analysis based in yogic literature, which predicts and explains each effect.

Increased Awareness

An often cited benefit of yogic practices is “increased awareness,” referring to an awareness of mental faculties, thought processes, one’s own words, actions and emotions, one’s true intentions, the feelings and intentions of others, a sensitivity towards the space one inhabits, etc. Though a natural benefit of yogic practice, it is also viewed as a goal of practice: as awareness dawns in the practitioner’s experience she is able to delve into further yogic practice. This awareness increases naturally as a result of yogic practice (meditation and other *sadhana*) rather than a result of mental effort: “By ‘doing’ something you cannot experience, you cannot achieve, this awareness. You cannot bring up the intelligence and alertness in you by effort. It can be done only without effort; with relaxation—by relaxing and reposing in the Self. *Viraama pratyaya*—resting. *Abhyaasa poorva* means the practice of resting—conscious relaxation and rest” (Shankar, 2010, pp. 44–45). Though direct mental effort is not helpful in this regard, another practice, *swadhyaya*, or meditative self-study (a practice that should naturally increase

in the practitioner based on yogic practice and study of yogic knowledge) is cited as also producing greater awareness:

Patanjali has said, “*Swaadhyaaya*”—self-study. Look into the motives behind your actions. Often, you do not go for things that you really want. You go for them because others want them. You may even go for something depending on what others would say, think or do about it. And many times you are not clear about what you want because you have never really looked into yourself. You are swayed by fleeting thoughts, fleeting emotions and fleeting desires. Your desire may not even be your own. Maybe, some outside factors—food, events, situations or company have raised a storm in you and you start believing that storm as your very Self. That is why often you are not happy even when your desires are fulfilled. You should observe the Self. You should wonder who you are and what you are. You have purified the body, but are you the body? You have made your mind light, but are you the mind? Are you your thoughts? Are you your emotions? Who are you? This self-study leads you upwards to the universe that is unknown to us. Self-study takes you a step further and eliminates misery and suffering of the mind. (Shankar, 2010, pp. 136–137)

At one point in a conversation with me Laura shared multiple benefits she experienced that she attributed to her meditation practice (feeling more connected with students, able to better “hear” what they were saying to her, able to break free of conditioned patterns of thought, seeing the words and actions of others from a broader perspective). I asked her why she attributed these effects to meditation and she identified increased awareness as an expanding skill that transferred from her meditation practice into her daily life.

Laura: I think it's because meditation makes me aware of a lot of stuff. I noticed, there's this person I know, who I was thinking of the other day. I thought, “Oh my god!” I could feel these negative thoughts about her and I thought, “What's going on?” I thought, “Why am I feeling this?” And I realized I had to think about that a little bit. So what it made me realize is that normally I would have thought, “Oh, I don't really want to deal with her.” But it made me realize I *do* want to deal with her because I want to understand why I'm feeling this way... You

know, it's a complicated thing, but I think the meditation made me aware of it. And as a result, I could just be aware of why I'm feeling that way. You know, instead of going with the feeling but [instead] going with the awareness of it, and trying to deal with it.

One thing on the spiritual path that strikes me is that I'm more—I have more awareness of things that I say and that I do, and how I feel. Which helps me understand a little bit of what's going on. Which helps me with people I'm close to. Like, if it's time to listen, like with my teenager. That I can . . . know that this is the time that I have to stop and listen.

And you can train your brain to stop in other cases too, not just in meditation but in the day, be aware that... For example, my mother. I spent some time with her this summer and I realized that my mom can get into detail about things that like, you know... She was talking about some situation. We used to have a dog, and [she shared] great details about our dog, but she said the dog didn't like one guy. He was our German Shepherd. He would always go to attack this one guy, and she didn't understand particularly why this one guy, but it turned out this guy ended up killing his wife. And she said, "The dog knew it! He knew." And it's possible that this dog could sense that this guy was not a nice person. Then she proceeded to tell all the details about how his wife died. I said, "Mom, I don't want to hear about this stuff! Let's focus on the dog, the dog was amazing, and the dog was just, you know, she just knew who was good and who was bad. But let's just leave it there." And for me I felt, okay I felt good about the dog, but the minute she started giving me the details about the wife I could just feel my whole body getting anxious. I didn't want to hear details about anyone, how they got hurt. You know like the murder stories on TV, like you can just turn the TV off and not hear it, but I could feel my body just going

[tense]. But she can't. She says, "Oh okay, I won't say that." But normally I would just listen to it and not realize that my body is tense—but I could notice it right away and I knew it. And I think all that stuff has helped me because I could say, "No, stop." But also focus on positive so she didn't get upset with me. I didn't say she couldn't tell her story, and she could continue to talk about her dog, and it was good. So we didn't get into an argument.

Researcher: All from the increased awareness?

Laura: Yeah, awareness of things that are bothering me, but I could turn it positively instead of negatively.

Accomplishing More

The *samadhi* (or harmony and unity of all the layers of the self) that is experienced by the individual while engaged in daily activities is termed *sabeeja samadhi* (Shankar, 2010, p. 102).

When you are in Samadhi, every experience of your senses becomes very bright, colourful and complete. When you are happy, you feel expanded. . . . *sabeeja samadhi*—when you are totally relaxed, happy and expanded and when, at the same time, you have that sharpness of awareness and sharpness of intelligence. Your senses become so clear that you can perceive better, see better, think better, hear better. (Shankar, 2010, pp.104–105)

Such a state of pure action depends upon the right balance of rest and activity—meditation and the activities of life:

Integration of life depends upon the mind passing in a cycle between the field of the Absolute and the field of activity. The mind goes to the unmanifest and comes back to the manifest, thus experiencing both fields of life, absolute and relative. . . . When King Janaka and others like him were found to be established in Reality while fully active in the world, the secret did not lie in their continuous outward activity. It lay in the fact that such activity was supplemented by their experience of the Transcendent through the inward activity of meditation. . . . It should be remembered that it does not need a long time of silent meditation to reach Transcendental being: just a dive within the Self for a few

minutes and the mind is infused with the nature of pure consciousness, which keeps it enriched through all the activities of the day. (Mahesh Yogi, 1967, pp. 213–214)

Laura: And sometimes, you know what? I've been panicked because I didn't spend 10 hours on something, but I end up stopping, and if I'm more rested I can maybe do a better job. And if you stop and relax, you get this intuition of all the stuff that you can do. It comes to you. It amazingly comes to you. But if you're so exhausted and you've prepped yourself for hours and hours, you just can't do it.

Nina: Then I get up and go about my day. Once I've done my *sadhana* it just puts me in a good space. I feel... on days when I do it I feel more ready for the day. I just feel good. It's a subtle shift I feel. I like the feeling of not rushing in the morning. Having had that time to just be with myself before the to-dos of the day begin and all of that. And I do find a difference in how the rest of my day goes. I'm more effective and productive and feel more centred overall, I think.

Nina: I think I would have to say the practices, the breath [are what helps]. And the breath is increasing the flow of *prana* within me and giving me more clarity, more focus, more energy. I feel like there's less time where I'm just chewing on things in my mind—or, it gives the clarity to just get things done, rather than thinking about things. It just puts you in the space of action.

I'm doing things, and things are also just getting done. It's almost like, on the one hand I'm doing things, but on the other hand it's like, something around me—I don't know how to describe that I guess. It's like that to-do list that was in my head is just getting done right before

my eyes. Like things are just falling into place and time is just getting created, made for things to happen. Even things like, you know, just picking up dry cleaning, which hasn't happened for days or weeks There is this flow of things that just start to happen, I feel. Time just gets created for everything. I have found that often.

Happiness

Yoga places the responsibility for individual happiness on the practitioner because it offers concrete methods for increasing *prana*, the life force that is understood to be responsible for one's state of being. Thus, the practitioner has the ability to uplift himself during a time of emotional turmoil, and yoga can be useful in facilitating a switch from a victimic to an agentic mindset. When *prana* is high (often predicted as a direct effect of meditation, *pranayama* and other *sadhana*, as well as yogic diet and the proper balance of rest and activity, among other factors), happiness should consequently increase.

. . . when you feel blissful and happy you do not feel any boundary. You feel expanded and do not feel any limit to yourself. And when you feel sad or unhappy, you feel crushed, because then your prana is getting smaller than your real body. This is the mechanism of unhappiness. It is like trying to put your body through a small hole where it cannot fit. This is the reason why you feel so unhappy. When you try to crush your prana, which is so big into a small space, you feel unhappy. (Shankar, 2010, p. 131)

Prana is connected to the *gunas*, the three universal qualities of consciousness and matter:

sattva, *rajas*, and *tamas*. As *prana* increases the individual experiences a shift from *tamas* to *rajas*, or from *rajas* to the light and joyful qualities of *sattva*:

Sattva is the quality of light, love and life, the higher or spiritual force that allows us to evolve in consciousness. It imparts dharmic virtues of faith, honesty, self-control, modesty and truthfulness. Rajas is the quality of twilight, passion, and agitation, the intermediate or vital force, which lacks stability or consistency. It gives rise to emotional fluctuation of attraction and repulsion, fear and desire, love and hate. Tamas is the quality of darkness, non-feeling and death, the lower or material force, which drags us down into the ignorance

and attachment. It causes dullness, inertia, heaviness, emotional clinging and stagnation. . . . Yoga and Ayurveda emphasize the development of sattva. In yoga, sattva is the higher quality that allows spiritual growth to occur. In Ayurveda, sattva is the state of balance that makes healing happen. (Frawley, 1999, pp. 2730)

Understanding the principles of *prana* and the *gunas*, and adhering to yogic practices in order to facilitate increased *prana* and a *sattvic* state, also enable the practitioner to develop “*santosha*,” the habit of being happy, which Patanjali outlines as a disciplined practice the yogi must adhere to: “You have to develop it in yourself. Nobody else can do it for you. Nothing else can give it to you. If anybody else or anything else gives it, it will only be temporary. You should adopt *santosha* as your rule in life” (Shankar, 2010, p. 186).

Laura: Whereas, if you have your own perspective of how you see the world—and a deep conviction—it will come out in how a child will see the world too. So that's kind of how I see spirituality. . . . It all comes down to someone who's not so happy with themselves, or is frustrated, is going to have a totally different way of teaching than someone who isn't, someone who maybe sees things in a different way, or who is rested and who is more relaxed; I guess I'm thinking of meditation. And not having to rush, because in our world we're always rushing. Everything is done on production, on how much you do. And then you have to say, look, I mean, do I want to force this on these kids? You know, do they have to [live like this]? They're so young. You know, let them enjoy life and enjoy learning!

Researcher: What do you think happiness is? Are you happy?

Nina: Yes, I do believe I'm happy. For me happiness is feeling fulfilled and content inside. There are obviously still things I really want in my life. Sometimes I feel like I do need those

things in order to be happier. . . . For myself one thing that has been challenging is to find a good relationship, and to be with someone. Because I always wanted to be with someone and to have children and a family. So I think I very much equate that with the happiness factor. Like, I will be super happy once I have all of that together. But I think that has gotten better, where I've been able to be happy even without that. Although sometimes I feel like, still sometimes it seems like something is missing, or I can't be fully content inside. But definitely for me happiness is about having that fulfillment and contentment. I think at the time when I'm fully engaged in *seva*, or my *sadhana* is consistent, I'm in knowledge and all of that, then definitely the feeling of wanting is not even there. Like, though I know I don't have that relationship that I really really want, I still feel so fulfilled and content. Sometimes I come out of that space—I think that's when those feelings creep up more. Like oh, why hasn't it happened yet? When will I find it? And all this negativity starts to come up. I'm not happy. But I think obviously it's in my hands, to keep myself in that space. And to know that I can be happy no matter what.

Nina: Well, I think the *prana* is getting increased and the *sattva* is increasing. I think when you're doing that then you have no choice but to be in that positive state. But I think that's what it is. I feel like it's just taking—the *sadhana* is just taking you out of that *tamas* or that *rajas* and getting you more into that *sattvic* state, increasing your *prana* and raising your spirits. It's like everything is still there, as it is, but [your] energy is being uplifted into a more positive state.

It just made me more connected with myself and I think what it means to me—I think my practice enables me to continue to blossom into who I am, and to stay connected with my true self. I think that's what it really means to me. Because when I'm not in that state then I feel like

I'm not connected to my real force, like I'm just getting bogged down in things that are really not important. Spiralling down into the negative energy and I just can't connect. But being with my practice, I feel like it helps me to rise above all of that and actually be in that true space. I feel like all this other stuff I'm getting caught up in is not, you know, it's not the reality or it's not the important stuff of life. So it helps me to pull myself out of that.

Connecting

Patanjali outlines a state of calm composure, with heightened awareness, as a discipline of yoga practice that improves the yogi's connection to others:

Sowmyataam. Sowmya means calm and composed. You can feel pleasant, but excited. That is not *sowmya*. Some people feel very pleasant but they do not feel calm. The pleasantness can make them feel very crazy and excited. So, along with pleasantness it is essential to be composed—*sowmyataam*. People who are happy create trouble for others. This is because they are not aware that, in their excitement and happiness, they say and do things that may adversely affect others. But if a person is calm and composed, he is more aware. There is awareness in a composed mind. You are sensitive to other's feelings and to your surroundings. So, what is required is a pleasant and composed mind. *Manaha prasaadaha sowmyataam*. (Shankar, 2010, p. 130)

Experiencing the level of the self in meditation (*samadhi*) brings a deeper state of connection, allowing the practitioner to experience the peace, joy, rejuvenation, and creativity that spring from the depths of his own being. This deeper connection with one's own self during meditation is said to deepen and enliven connections with others once the yogi returns to a state of interaction. "*Aatma vinigraha*—remaining in the Self; getting back to the Self. This is the *tapas* of the mind. The mind loses its way again and again. It needs to be brought back to the Self. And see the Self in everybody. Feel this person is also you and that person, too—everybody" (Shankar, 2010, pp. 130–131).

Nina: When I'm just moving from the heart, that is being connected. And when I'm smiling and actually feeling the joy from within (not just smiling on the outside but not smiling on the inside!). When I feel like joy is just there from within. I think for me that's really... for me that's what it means, having that connection.

It's like a cozy feeling. That's when I feel like, "Yes! This is what life is! This is where I want to be." Something about it just feels like this is the type of space I need to be in. Or that *this is it*. When I feel joyful and happy within then I'm not feeling like something is missing, or still pining for something. It's a fulfilling feeling. Even if not everything is the way I would like it to be, I'm still fine, I'm still happy. . . . When I'm not in that space then I'm just withdrawn within myself. Not really interacting with people, not connecting. When I'm in that space then I feel like, you know, I'm talking to people, I'm connecting with them, I'm—I want to be with them! And even the *way* I'm interacting, I feel I'm able to be there with that person a hundred percent—I'm not in my mind thinking my own things. I'm fully able to absorb what's in that person. To be with them, just have fun with them. Actually feel connected with people. I think in those moments it makes me realize, you know, I need to continue this, I need to be connecting with people because there are people who really do care for me and love me and they're happy when they see me! And that reminds me to stop withdrawing into myself and not connecting with everyone like that's not important, when it actually is important. I think it definitely affects the way I'm talking to them and everything.

When I'm in that space I'm more calm, and I'm able to be at ease a little more, and have fun with the students. Laugh with them more rather than be the disciplinarian, you know? Maybe let some things slide that I normally wouldn't. It gets me more in the positive space where I can just respond more calmly with students. Take that time to listen to them rather than trying to quickly get them into their seats. Maybe I'll take that time a little bit more: "Okay, what's really going on? Let's talk about it." You know, I feel more at ease and more go-with-the-flow. It definitely changes something in the interaction with the students.

They like it when I'm laughing too with them, and definitely if I show them I'm upset they get a little bit upset too and they're—I do feel that my presence probably does carry a lot of weight in the classroom as the teacher. Definitely they like it when the teacher's laughing with them too, and being silly with them.

Etienne: I think it's really good for me—to stay relaxed and to keep my mind more focused on what I am doing. And I have better listening with others, with my students, or my friends, or my family. I keep more time to understand them well, and I am more helpful to them.

I think I have deeper connections [with family members]. I can't say whether it is caused by meditation or not, but it seems to me that for one year, two years, we have had closer relations in my family.

Laura: Well, I think it's [my meditation practice that] helped me let go of things a lot. And by letting go—I feel like my relationship with my daughter... for a while it was hard. She was 17.

She had a boyfriend. I wasn't seeing her as much. It was really hard. Now I think our relationship is getting back to where it was. And I think I've just had to listen to her—make sure I've listened to her. And I've had to do the letting go. Like I've had to look at things and say, “Am I hanging onto this because of me?” Yeah, I think it has made a huge difference.

Discussion

My Understandings of the Narratives

I started this study by posing the question: How do teachers story their life experiences following their adoption of a regular meditation practice? After meeting and talking with Kate, Nina, Laura, and Etienne, and then considering and presenting their texts, I believe that the teachers' narratives reveal that (1) the teachers perceive their meditation practice to have a beneficial impact on their lives, and by extension their work as teachers; and (2) the impact their meditation practice has on their classroom teaching may not be obvious to an outside observer; instead it is experienced by the participants to be an enrichment of their inner world: a transformation of their thought patterns, feelings, and perceptions of events.

All the teachers discuss their practice as establishing them in a space of inner wellness or contentment that has helped them to be more present with others, improving their ability to make meaningful connections with their friends, family, and students. Nina expresses this:

When I feel joyful and happy within then I'm not feeling like something is missing, or still pining for something. It's a fulfilling feeling. Even if not everything is the way I would like it to be, I'm still fine, I'm still happy. . . . When I'm not in that space then I'm just withdrawn within myself. Not really interacting with people, not connecting. When I'm in that space then I feel like, you know, I'm talking to people, I'm connecting with them, I'm—I want to be with them! And even the *way* I'm interacting, I feel I'm able to be there with that person a hundred percent—I'm not in my mind thinking my own things. I'm fully able to absorb what's in that person.

Additionally:

. . . It gets me more in the positive space where I can just respond more calmly with students. Take that time to listen to them rather than trying to quickly get them into their seats. Maybe I'll take that time a little bit more: “Okay, what’s really going on? Let's talk

about it.” You know, I feel more at ease and more go-with-the-flow. It definitely changes something in the interaction with the students.

Etienne shares that “I think it's really good for me—to stay relaxed and to keep my mind more focused on what I am doing. And I have better listening with others, with my students, or my friends, or my family. I keep more time to understand them well, and I am more helpful to them.” And:

With my friends and my family, I can just hear them, and accept, and try to help them. Yeah, I'm a better listener. I can listen to them and not try to find an answer, but just listen. Then after, react. And I think I'm more empathetic with people. I'm less turned in on myself and more open to other people: their joy or their sadness.

Laura similarly reports that her relationship with her teenaged daughter has improved since taking up her meditation practice because she feels her mind is more open to listen and connect—less full of her own thoughts about how things should go, what should be said: “Now I think our relationship is getting back to where it was. And I think I've just had to listen to her—make sure I've listened to her. And I've had to do the letting go. Like I've had to look at things and say, ‘Am I hanging onto this because of me?’ Yeah, I think it has made a huge difference.” Laura, in telling the story about discussing an old family dog with her mother, also identifies awareness of her thought patterns allowing her to avoid arguments and create more harmonious personal relationships.

They also report an increased ability to remain connected with a part of themselves, to not “lose” themselves in activity. Laura explains:

I think that because teaching is hard—and there are a lot of demands on teachers today, and a lot of burnout with teachers, a lot of work hours and so many expectations—that it's really important that teachers stay connected with themselves. Because it's so easy as a teacher to just be doing and doing and doing for everyone else, and then you forget for yourself.

She shares that her practice helps her in this regard: “It helps. It's almost like when I do it every day, I can feel a part of me all day.” Kate too recalls feeling a sense of connection with herself when she started meditating: “When I meditated every day I got to just abandon that chatter level, and feel something deeper inside myself. And that was first of all very reassuring to me as a person that... that I wasn't losing the depths of myself in activity.”

Laura, Nina, and Etienne talk about meditation providing a “safe space,” a “shelter,” and about it freeing them from anxiety. Laura mentions that she has struggled with anxiety and that her meditation has brought her relief from it: “And it really helps anxiety. I don't know—I get anxiety and it's really really helped a lot. I can focus on the moment and relax. And I get through things a lot more easily than I did. It's like I don't think so much beyond. It helps you focus *now*. . . . Oh, it's, it's amazing.”

Nina talks about the “safe” and “cozy” space she perceives during her practice: “That space—I mean it feels safe. Or it's like... it's something I do where I just know it's going to help me. It's a space of reconnecting... a place where I can go to, where I can feel calm and just relax and reconnect. Be cozy again.” Similarly, Etienne describes his practice as a shelter: “I really like the time that I am sitting for meditation and the peace right after, but it has also made a difference in my lifestyle. It's difficult for me to describe it, but it's like a shelter for me.” Like Laura, he comments on meditation relieving his anxiety:

I developed the ability to adjust my breathing in different situations—when I'm nervous, for example. This had a truly great impact on my life. It helps me to connect with the present moment. When I am anxious about things I can calm my mind instead of having the worry run through my head over and over.

Additionally the teachers credit their practice with improving emotional regulation.

Nina, for example, explains how she has been able to let go of anger when things are not perfect. She believes this has created a shift in her classroom culture, yet she places most

emphasis on the fact that it has been instrumental in reducing the psychological weight and stress she feels:

I feel that it's gotten better in terms of how I'm dealing with it when things aren't going my way. I think it's a lot to do with my personality. Like, I want a structure and organization and things like that. When that perfectionism is there, I think that's when I get upset. . . . Once I sort of stood back [in the classroom]. Things were kind of getting chaotic and I allowed myself to stand back and watch what was happening, rather than just right away reacting to it. And then I felt okay. I felt, "Okay, it's not so bad. It's okay." Like, still things are getting done in this chaos, and just give it some time, see what happens, look at what the kids are doing. And that made me happier, to not be so *on* the kids, and mad. It definitely made me feel happier. Like, not so physically strained inside.

Etienne similarly talks about "having more rope" before he gets angry, and being able to quiet his upset mind, avoiding unhealthy emotional rumination. "It's easier for me to let it go now, when I have stress with my students. They don't get on my nerves easily anymore. I have more rope, before I snap." And:

With meditation it's easier for my mind to let go of a situation without it turning bad. Like after the event is over, I can stop thinking about it. Before meditation I would run the event over and over in my head. It was not stopping—it kept going. There was no end. It's not perfect, but it's better now. It's much better.

Nina also comments on a decrease in unhealthy emotional rumination:

That was one thing in my life I never knew how to deal with: my emotions. . . . I think if I'm dealing with something I get really bogged down in emotions and want to just stay in my bed, and I really get stuck in my emotions. That's one big change, that I'm able to get out of it. I think the intensity of them has decreased. And the way I'm dealing with them is quite different. Like I'm coming out of them much quicker. I'm not sitting there brooding over it as much as I feel I used to. So that's a huge change for me. It's allowed me to keep moving forward rather than just getting stuck in all of that.

Similarly Nina and Etienne also perceived that meditation helped them move past difficult break-ups. Nina explains that when she learned meditation she hoped it would somehow help her marriage, but in fact she found it helpful in healing from her divorce: "Even after one day, one evening, I think, of *sadhana* that we were doing, I could just feel myself feeling better. Just

coming out of the really low feelings. Feeling more connected with myself. Over that one weekend, that first weekend, after so many weeks I started to feel more like myself.” Etienne shares a similar experience: “And it was very good for me because, as I told you, I broke up—now it was almost two years ago—with my ex-girlfriend, and it was really difficult for me to pass through that, and the meditation helped me a lot.”

Finally, Laura, Nina, and Etienne all comment on feeling relaxed and calm during and immediately after their practice. Laura says:

Why I'm consistent with it is that I see clearly why it's helpful for me. And because I see how it helps me so much, I really want to continue it and I don't want to stop it because I feel it helps me a lot in dealing with so many things. And also it just helps me, just cut off from the world and just relax. And I feel so much better afterwards. So it's been a really, really helpful way to cope with day-by-day situations.

Nina describes that “once the kids leave I just close my door, shut the lights, and I have this armchair where I sit and I do my *kriya* or meditation. And it gives me that second wind of the day, and then I feel more refreshed to get the rest of the work done. So that helps.” And Etienne similarly explains: “When it's over and you open your eyes: peace. There's no rush. There's deep peace and an opened mind.”

I believe the teachers are all pointing to shifts within their inner world of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that, while too subtle to be obvious to an outside observer, represent powerful transformations from the perspectives of the teachers themselves. Miller (2010, 2014) argues that if we are to create students who are aware of and responsive to their inner worlds, we must first create teachers who are aware of and who attend to their own inner worlds. One of the qualities Miller highlights in contemplative teachers is “presence.” He explains that meditation teaches the self-discipline to remain present in the moment, instead of allowing the

mind its usual tendency to roam, and that being mentally established in the present moment allows the teacher to then be more present with students.

As much as possible, we should be present in the classroom. When students come to us and ask a question, they sense whether we are 'there.' I believe that more than anything students want our full, authentic presence, and through this presence the teacher connects with the students. Yet this is a real challenge in today's world and in the busyness of the classroom. We can get lost in our thoughts, and this hinders our presence. (Miller, 2010, p. 97)

In their narratives the teachers attempt to describe a profound yet intangible shift in their lives that has impacted their teaching. They offer as examples instances of modified thought patterns, feelings, and perceptions of events rather than examples of curriculum delivery or student interactions. I believe presence may be a fundamental element of what the participants in this research are reporting when they assert that they believe meditation has impacted their classroom practice.

The Teachers' Understandings of their Meditation Experience

It appears, based on the narratives in this research, that the longer the teachers have been practising meditation and the more they have immersed themselves in the philosophical study that traditionally accompanies yogic practice, the more complex are their understandings of their own meditation experiences. Kate and Nina, more frequently than Laura and Etienne, link their meditation practice both to their daily life experiences and to concepts in yogic philosophy. Not surprisingly, they both use terminology and refer to yogic concepts more than

Etienne and Laura, who have been practising for a shorter time and who report limited exposure to yogic philosophy.

Kate, for example, says, “I *love* knowledge, and by knowledge I mean unchanging truth about life,” offering the standard yogic definition of “knowledge” as “unchanging truth about life.” She shares her desire to learn meditation in order to break free from conditioned ways of thinking, in line with the yogic concept that meditation is a powerful tool in freeing the practitioner from mental conditioning, or *samskaras*: “I’m not really sure what they said in my TM course, and I don’t know whether they said this, or I just assumed this, but I thought that this meditation was a way to break out of my conditioned ways of thinking. And that’s what I really cared about.” She also reflects on her teenaged self who was worried about the state of the world before her experience of meditation, and afterward felt an ease and a freedom to observe her life and the world around her with a sense of dispassion, or *viragya*: “That I don’t seem to analyze so much and judge everything based on right, wrong, good, bad, the way I used to. That I just—that I don’t judge at all. There is kind of a flow that I am part of everything.”

I believe Kate is able to understand and articulate her experience through a yogic conceptual framework because of her long practice and her study with knowledgeable teachers and with a *guru*. She has studied in person with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and devoted a vast amount of time to studying his recorded lectures as well. She has completed many long, in-residence advanced meditation programs, and she spent five such months training to become a meditation teacher: “That winter I attended an intensive five-month course to become a TM teacher. I loved the knowledge on that course and I was a really attentive and diligent student.” She perceives a vastness in the possibilities offered by her meditation practice, even after 45 years of study and practice, demonstrating an understanding of the breadth and depth of the

study of yoga: “I have a vision of what the possibilities are from this technique, and I think that is the best possible thing I can do, to be practising it. And yet, so much of its potential is still beyond me, it’s still ahead of me, still bigger than what I have yet grasped.”

Similarly Nina spent more time (eight years) practising meditation and studying yogic philosophy than did Etienne or Laura, and is the only one of the three teacher participants to have completed a meditation teacher training, and also to have studied in person with a *guru*. She refers to the three months she spent fully immersed in yoga and completing her teacher training as the best time of her life:

That was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I felt like that was the *most incredible* experience of my life because I had never experienced being *so* happy. Like, that joy from within! All those things that we talk about in the [meditation] course. I was experiencing all of that. I was doing full-time *seva*⁶ there. I was throwing myself into everything. At the end of the three months I did [the teacher training course to become a yoga/meditation teacher].

She demonstrates a knowledge of yogic theoretical concepts. In her narrative of moving to China after her divorce she identifies the cause of her suffering as dependent on her internal state and not on external forces, a fundamental yogic principle: “But you know, sure. You can escape the place. But my mind was still in that same state I would say.” She is also able to offer a theoretical explanation for the reason behind her improved mood following her yogic practices:

I think I would have to say the practices, the breath [are what helps]. And the breath is increasing the flow of *prana* within me and giving me more clarity, more focus, more energy. I feel like there's less time where I'm just chewing on things in my mind—or, it gives the clarity to just get things done, rather than thinking about things. It just puts you in the space of action.

It is also worth noting that several times throughout interviews Nina displayed a sentiment of seeking or longing for the path of meditation she is on now, and feeling certain about things

⁶ Part of *karma yoga*, or the yoga of action, *seva* is a spirit of volunteerism or service to others.

being “right” in her life since taking up her practice. She talks about the homecoming she felt after her first encounter of yogic meditation: “At the end of the course I really felt light. But I only realized that lightness after that course ended—I don't think I realized how much burden I was carrying with me, emotional burden or whatever it was that I was carrying. . . . [It was] like my soul knew I've come home.”

Of all the participants, Kate was the only one able to clearly link her experience and study of meditation directly to classroom practice and curriculum choices. She placed emphasis, for example, on the awareness of the inner world she had nurtured through her practice—not merely as a reflective process after the fact, but in dynamic moments as she interacted with students:

a teacher has to [determine], “what is the truth of what's going on here?” Now, sometimes that means that maybe I'm sitting with a student and she's practising reading and I'm helping her out—but at the same time being aware of what really matters in this situation. Is it that she learns that the “th” sound is made by t and h, or is it that she learns that it's a joy to read, or a joy to learn something?

I would say that's an important aspect of a teacher's growth. In terms of teachers who just teach the very same subject matter to the same grade level year after year, after year, after year, I don't know how that could continue to be fresh to them—unless they continued to employ something like this, where they continually anew saw the value [to themselves] of what it was they were teaching and were constantly aware of and adjusting to what it was their students needed at the moment.

She also emphasized the necessity of teaching students to be aware of their own inner world and assisting them in trusting their intuitive knowledge. “Another of those principles is, basically put, saying ‘yes.’ And yes doesn't really mean whatever the student wants to do they get to do. But it does mean saying yes to the student's desire.” And:

The greater happiness comes from each day a student feels somehow better about how exciting knowledge is, how good they are themselves, how confident they are in their own being. . . . We have within us this vast ability to contact a vast reservoir of creativity and intelligence. And if we're not using very much of it then we live according to that level.

But it's there and it's available and sometimes we can sense it. And to be reinforced with the idea that we are great, we can do great things. . .

She shared her belief in the importance of nurturing intuitive knowledge by helping the students to discern whether their inner world is in agreement that the knowledge is true: “So it sort of helps the student realize, ‘Huh. Okay. So what she (the teacher) is saying makes sense. And it is out there, and it is in here. Huh. Okay. So, it seems to be reliable knowledge.’ And whether a student is cognizant of that process or not, it's going on.”

Kate also stressed the importance of helping students to see meaningful connections between the subject being studied and the student's deeper self: “So my own angle of all of this is: the most important possibility that any knowledge presents is to add to that person's personal growth, search, unfoldment. So I would argue that that connection is the most important of all.” She adds, “And not just the ability to learn, but the ability to actively make connections and see through to the clarity and depth that the subject brings, is more important than what's being taught. Having said all that, when that ability is in place every subject is fascinating.”

It appears from her narratives that Kate was not only able to experience the benefits of her meditation practice within her own inner world, but was able to understand them in light of the conceptual framework of yogic knowledge and apply them in her teaching, ultimately creating a classroom culture in which the daily activity reflected and complemented the daily meditation practice undertaken by her and her students.

The Narrative Process

The biggest struggle I encountered during the writing of this research was attempting to convey non-verbal communication into written text. The atmosphere in which we spoke, the look in

their eyes, body language, breathing, tone—the participants told their stories in a variety of ways. Is it possible to reveal the unsaid in the narratives? In part I have accepted that it is not and that this is simply a limitation of written text; however, I have also attempted to bring through as much of the unspoken as possible through setting and relationship descriptions, through the inclusion of sighs and laughter and trailing off, and through the inclusion of false starts and jumping between sentences. In the presentation of the transcribed text I also strived to find a balance between “cleaning up” the text enough that it was easily readable and maintaining its raw spoken style. I ultimately chose to edit text enough so that passages that were easy to listen to when heard in person are similarly easy to read in the transcription. The first readers of early drafts of this research commented to me that Kate’s story stands out among the narratives both in content and in speaking style. This reflects Kate’s natural style of speaking in well-crafted sentences. Additionally she was the only participant who edited her own transcript (though all participants were given this opportunity). She was so eager to be able to “help me” clean up the messiness of spoken phrasing that I ultimately suggested that she *not* polish her transcript so that it read like written words, but only amend what she felt were errors, and we landed on a middle ground.

Etienne is a good example of the limitations of forcing spoken conversation into a written format. In addition to literal translation issues, I felt I was not able to do justice to the experience of talking with him. I felt more insight from him in the interview than could be “translated” to textual form. In fact, all of the participants, at some point, expressed to me, in a variety of ways I could not capture, the powerful extent to which they feel meditation has impacted their lives, but I have struggled to showcase the emotion with which they made this claim, and sometimes missed capturing their phrasing as well. Although I thought I was

prepared for it, I struggled with participants sharing their most profound statements off tape. Having read about, and having personally experienced, participants offering powerful ideas as soon as the researcher thanks them and shuts off the recorder, I deliberately let the tape run long while I packed up, which in some cases did capture a nice anecdote. I was still plagued by this phenomenon, however, as I ultimately felt the ethical need to announce it as I finally turned off the recorder (just as I had let them know when I turned it on) and missed capturing some insightful comments, often as we were walking out the door together.

I had set out, when planning my methodology, to strive for a natural conversational style by cultivating relationships with my participants. Ultimately, I found that this took place with Kate but less so with Nina, Laura, and Etienne. Although the three-part interview model helped create a familiarity and ease by the last interview, and my acquaintance with Nina and Etienne helped us relate to one another, I don't feel I achieved a collaborative dynamic with them to the extent that we truly co-constructed narratives. By contrast, in interactions with Kate, I felt I was authentically sharing and building something together during the interviews. Hearing her interpretations of past events often made me pause and reconsider my own memory of the same occurrence in a different light, and therefore reconstruct my own narrative.

For the interviews with Nina, Laura, and Etienne I believe it would have been more effective to purposefully spend some time together, perhaps the first half of the first interview, with the tape recorder off (I was too afraid of missing things to try this, but could have simply considered this time as relationship building rather than narrative collecting). I think I should have shared my own stories with them more than I did. I did this to some extent, but perhaps not enough for authentic back and forth sharing to taking place. Additionally, considering the importance of place in narrative (Clandinin, 2013), I believe the study would have been

enhanced by my travelling to a participant's school and being present with them in their classroom before interviews. When designing the study I was pleased that interviews could be conducted without applying for permission to enter schools, which greatly simplified the ethics process. However, in retrospect I believe that observing the teachers in their own classrooms before beginning the first interview would have greatly enriched the results by having me enter a space that was "theirs" and by creating context and shared experience before I began to ask them about their lives and work.

Tensions and Implications

As I reach the end of this research I am struck by the benefits yogic meditation may offer to schoolteachers, as well as by the complicated tensions meditation brings up when applied in a secular arena. Embracing meditation within its traditional framework is challenging because it is by nature a holistic and spiritual practice. Understood in its wholeness meditation deals with personal spirituality, which our culture views as beyond the scope of the professional experience, and in fact not welcome in the professional arena. Yet broken apart from its framework, its benefits may not be as impactful, as far-reaching. In fact, in attempting to break the practice of meditation apart from its traditional framework and apply it as a standalone and secular practice for stress management, we may be diluting the effectiveness of the practice as well as participating in cultural appropriation.

In an online article published recently entitled *Yoga in America Often Exploits My Culture—but You May Not Even Realize It*, Rina Deshpande scrutinizes how fragmented yoga in the West has become from its roots as a philosophical tradition and lifestyle:

Growing up in Florida as a first-generation Indian American, I was raised to practice yoga, but it never required breaking a sweat, nor did it involve special attire or equipment. My family learned yoga by lecture and practice, but mostly it was embedded—hidden, really—in everything we did. This is because true yoga is not just a workout. Yoga, meaning “union” in Sanskrit, has many forms. But classically, it is an ancient Indian philosophy espousing an eight-limbed approach to conscious living. (Deshpande, 2017)

Deshpande cites a run-in with a white male in New York who thought yoga was simply the current trend coming out of the Brooklyn yoga studios and was surprised even to find out it originated in India.

To deal with the growing fragmentation of yoga from its classical framework, the government of India, in collaboration with a group of respected yoga *gurus* including Jaggi Vasudev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Baba Ramdev, has recently designed a quality control board that will grant accreditation to yoga institutes within India and worldwide that train yoga teachers in accordance with classical frameworks. It is a massive effort to try to protect the tradition of yoga from fragmentation, appropriation, and misrepresentation (*The Economic Times*, June 26, 2016).

Throughout my interviews with Kate and the three teachers there was much talk of God, the Divine, the soul within the body, etc. Based on the results of this thesis and on my lived experience studying classical yoga within traditional settings in India and North America, I assert that any research study in yoga that delves deeply enough into practitioners' experiences will offer revelations of this nature. Yogic meditation is not a religious practice, but it is also staggeringly incomplete to call it secular. And simply isolating meditation from its framework and calling it "secular" does not *make* it a secular practice. The question of whether yogic meditation is "secular *enough*" to be used as a professional development tool for teachers in our public school system is a complex philosophical issue. Evidence from the participants in this study reveals that this issue deserves to be studied and grappled with at length. Coming to terms with this question may be key to whether or not we can equip other teachers with the practices that these study participants have identified as so beneficial to their teaching careers.

I propose that the secularity of yoga is so complex a question not because of the nature of yoga itself, but because of the vastly different ways Western and Eastern worldviews conceptualize spirituality, religion, and God. Malhotra (2007) points out that the hegemony of language has confused conversations about Indic conceptions of religion and philosophical

thought in fields such as comparative religion. Sanskrit words, which are embedded in a particular worldview, when translated into English skew meanings and present a barrier to intercultural conversation—in many cases a barrier that is not even perceived by those involved in the conversation. To the Western Eurocentric mindset, for example, God is *a* God, like an Abrahamic God, a single force to be worshipped, often personified, looking down, observing (Malhotra, 2007). When the word “God” has been translated into English from Sanskrit the original meaning may have been a particular “God” representing one aspect or energy of life; it may have been a single universal energy underlying all of creation; it may have been one’s individual soul or spirit; it may have been a reference to the best qualities of ourselves; and it may have been the principle of conscious awareness. Can we say, then, that these two individuals are even taking part in the same conversation about “God”? It is little wonder that in the culture of yoga a practitioner can cite an experience of union with God, and in the next sentence claim that yoga is not a religious practice at all but deals only with one’s own mind, emotions, and consciousness.

To make matters more complicated, Charles Taylor (2007) makes the case that secularism itself is most often employed as a vague term. The most basic societal problem we have with determining whether an activity is secular or not, belongs in the public sphere or not, is that we are working with variant definitions of “secular.” He explains that a “secular” society may refer to the separation of church and state, according to which it is possible to live and work in a society without any specific personal religious belief being necessary for one’s political or social participation. Or, it may involve people losing interest and/or belief in religion, “turning away from God, and no longer going to church” (2007, p. 2), which results in a similar movement of religious expression out of the public arena as in the first category. Or, it

may consist “of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). This last phenomenon leads to a variety of ways of moving away from religion as people embrace other, easier options. He believes this last definition best reflects the tensions and complexity of the current move towards secularity in modern society. If this definition of secularity is most accurate, as he argues in *A Secular Age*, it raises questions about whether, as a society, we have even begun to truly decide how much religious presence is acceptable in the public sphere and in what capacity. And if this question seems clearer with regard to public schools, what about spiritual presence? How do we even define spirituality for the purpose of such a debate?

Another issue that commonly arises as a point of discomfort in North America is the manner in which the yogic knowledge tradition has been handed down from teacher to teacher to teacher for thousands of years. Much of Western society harbours fear, scepticism, and complex misconceptions towards the *guru*, and so the guru-system of maintaining and passing down the knowledge of yoga can incite worry or a knee-jerk rejection of authentic yogic practices. But it should be considered that in interdependent cultures, as opposed to independent cultures which predominate in the West, hierarchical organizational structures are conceived of in a different, and frequently more positive, manner.

In current social discourse on cultural appropriation, the focus (and rightly so) is the power dynamics of a dominant culture *taking* and using for themselves, as they wish. Another piece of this conversation, I believe, is about another kind of power: the positive power that a practice maintains when it's kept within its own tradition. When it honours the lineage from which it came, the practice itself is enriched.

Since the potential benefits to teachers (and their students) may increase by accepting the traditional holistic method of meditation practice, I believe this issue deserves further study and consideration. This may not be easy. It would require researchers who are well versed in two cultures (yogic philosophy and Western academia) to guide the dialogue in the beginning. But, at a time when cultural appropriation is at the forefront of social discourse, I argue that personal benefit from meditation practice is deeply connected to respect for that practice. Patanjali, in the first Yoga Sutra, teaches us that benefit can be gained from yogic practices when they are practised continually and diligently, with honour and respect for that practice. If we were willing to respect the authenticity of yoga in its classical form we could find a wealth of knowledge in this tradition with the potential to enrich our own approach to education.

From my research journal, Feb 26, 2017:

There is a tendency to simplify meditation when talking to those who have never practised. To appeal to the practical mind: "This will help you with your productivity. Increase your energy and your happiness." And that is true. But there is a bigger truth underneath that. It seems to be shared by those who embrace meditation as a daily practice for the rest of their lives. Like a profound secret. They could not conceive of a time when they would not continue to practise. It makes what was supposed to be a practice of stress management into a spiritual practice. It fulfills a deep longing. All the teachers and students interviewed in this study have at some point, in a variety of ways, shared with me that from their earliest childhood memories they experienced a longing of the heart, and that has led them to a life of meditation practice. And in truth what I remember most from my childhood at our school is the pure joy of being in a place that satisfied a longing of my soul.

Glossary

abhinivesha: fear; one of the five *kleshas*

abhyasa: a spiritual or yogic practice

acharya: a respected spiritual or religious teacher; one who teaches by their conduct

advaita: a doctrine of *Vedanta* associated with Shankara

asana: physical yoga postures; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

ashram: spiritual hermitage or monastery

asmita: ego-sense; thinking about one's self; one of the five *kleshas*

avidya: ignorance; believing the illusions of the mind rather than clearly perceiving existence as it is; one of the five *kleshas*

ayurveda: the Vedic science of healing for body and mind

bhakti yoga: yoga of love; devotion to God

brahman: transcendent, unified reality or truth

Brahma-sutras: a foundational text of *Vedanta* composed by Badarayana

chitta: consciousness; mind; memory

dharana: concentration; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

dhyana: meditation; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

dvesha: aversion; one of the five *kleshas*

dosha: in *ayurveda*, mind-body classification types based on the elements of nature; the three *doshas* are *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*

guna: characteristic; quality; the three *gunas* are *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*

guru: spiritual guide; "one who dispels the darkness of ignorance"

gurukul: a traditional Vedic school

hatha yoga: the study of yoga postures and physical techniques

kapha: one of the three *doshas*; made up of water and earth elements

karma yoga: yoga of action; service

klesha: a fundamental cause of suffering; according to the Patanjali's Yoga Sutras there are five

kleshas: avidya, asmita, raga, dvesha, and abhinivesha

kriya: "action"; throughout this thesis "*kriya*" refers to the yogic technique *Sudarshan Kriya*

Mimamsa: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; the study of ethics including self-evident truths, right-action, and duty in life

nidra: sleep; one of the five *vrittis*

niyama: self-discipline; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

Nyaya: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; the study of gaining reliable knowledge

paramguru: *guru's guru*

pitta: one of the three *doshas*; made up of fire and water elements

pramana: determining correct perception; looking for proof that something is true; one of the five *vrittis*

prana: life force; life energy

pranayama: yogic breathing exercises; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

pratyahara: the ability to disengage from sense experiences at will; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

raga: craving; one of the five *kleshas*

rajas: activity, restlessness; one of the three *gunas*

sabeeja samadhi: a state of *samadhi* experienced while in action; the coexistence of expansion and sharpness of awareness

sadhu: an ascetic; one who practices *sadhana*

sahaj samadhi: a mantra-based meditation technique

samadhi: temporary or complete dissolution of one's individual identity into a unified consciousness; one of Patanjali's eight limbs of *Yoga*

samskara: mental impression; psychological imprint; recollection

Sankhya: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; study of discernment and refined perception

santosha: happiness, contentment

satsang: being in the presence of truth, wisdom

sattva: light, joyful, pure; one of the three *gunas*

seva: selfless service

shankaracharya: a spiritual or religious leader of Vedanta; there are four shankaracharya positions, one at each of the four maths (ashrams) established by Shankara

suddha: in Vedic math, a mark representing 10, used in addition, that helps a child conceptualize the process of carrying ones

smriti: memory; one of the five *vruttis*

sowmya: the state of feeling joyful while remaining calm and composed

sukha: happiness; joy; bliss

sutra: aphorism; a condensed religious or spiritual teaching

swadhyaya: meditative self-study

swami: a monk (in the ten orders of renunciates established by Shankara)

tamas: dullness, lethargy, inertia; one of the three *gunas*

tapas: austerity; discipline; to burn

vata: one of the three *doshas*; made up of air and space elements

Vedanta: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; “end of the Vedas”; the study of the relationship between the un-manifest *brahman* and the illusory world-appearance

vikalpa: imagination or fantasy; one of the five *vrittis*

viparyaya: misperception; one of the five *vrittis*

Vipassana: “insight meditation” hailing from the Theravada Buddhist tradition

viragya: dispassion; being established in the attitude that joy comes from within rather than from attainment

Visheshika: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; the study of physical science and observable objective truths

vrittis: modes or conditions of the mind (when not absorbed in *samadhi*); Patanjali outlines five *vrittis*: *pramana*, *viparyaya*, *vikalpa*, *nidra*, and *smriti*

yama: ethics; one of Patanjali’s eight limbs of *Yoga*

Yoga: one of the six schools of Indian philosophy; “union”; the study of gaining knowledge by direct perception

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