EDUC 816

Developing Educational Programs and Practices for Diverse Settings

Contemplative Approaches and Perspectives in Education

Assignment 1- Field Study

“She”.

By

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I chose her because she is someone I admire and respect. I am constantly surprised by the breadth and depth of her inquiry and contemplative practice. Despite her knowledge and skills, she is modest and does not set herself apart as an expert. When I am with her, her presence encourages me to be a better person. She is supportive, encouraging and wise. She is the first to bolster my confidence when it is lacking. She lives by her ethics of compassion and peace but is not pious. She truly leads from behind.

I chose questions that allowed her to choose the direction of her narrative and, hopefully, not to be led by mine. I wanted to know how she came to have contemplative practices and how have they evolved. I presented my questions through email at a time when she travelled to another province to be with her mother. In deep winter months, she has confided these visits are periods of retreat and quiet contemplation.

Before reading her words, I attend to my thoughts. I notice my anticipation and curiosity. What are my expectations and preconceived judgments? Like peeling back the layers, I will go deeper each time I read her words.

First reading, I notice how she sets the tone for contemplation, describing a ritual of tea while observing nature. I scribble the single words that linger.

PRESENCE.

RELATIONSHIP.

ALLOWING.

MEDITATION.

HEART.

NATURE.

I ponder more slowly, digesting her journey, that exceeds 25 years. Beginning as an introspective and contemplative child, she found wonder in a leaf or a pebble but was told to “hurry up”. I smile and relate with similar accusations of “dawdling”. I wonder, are we all innately contemplative or are some more so than others?

There were trials of meditation, met with frustration from striving to control the “boring” chatter of her thoughts. Declarations of “I can’t do it!!”. There is comfort in knowing she has been there and has struggled too. Movement practices and walking in nature brought with them a silence of mind not yet experienced through sitting meditation.

She entered a period of time where her contemplative inquiry and practice created a forum for relating to others and providing service. She recognizes how she provided a contemplative space for others through deep listening. I am surprised to learn she studied energy work and healing, becoming a practitioner for many years. This is perhaps at the far limits of my acceptance, taxing my critical “that’s not scientific” brain. Yet, I admit, it makes sense, as I have felt it. I challenge my inner skeptic to ask more about this later. And I do. I will note my discomfort at the use of the word “psychic” but comfort at the use of “intuition” and “gut instinct”. She acknowledges holding this space for others can leave her feeling vulnerable. A state she does not find easy to maintain. We will talk of how it left her with a sense of disembodiment, after focusing on energies above the neck. She tells me she attended the workshops of a woman healer, who introduced her to First Nations healing rituals and sweat lodges. I am intrigued and will later ask her to describe her experiences in greater detail. Though I still do not understand, I will keep inquiring. I am pleased that we have reached a new level of trust, borne from her sharing this with me.

From that point, she sought embodiment through a “more somatic form” of meditation in the vein of a Tibetan Buddhist tradition, choosing meditations on sound and breath. As I read, I enter into more familiar territory.

*“…presence….a way of being in relation to life or some aspect of life, as it presents itself”*. Later, there is a reference to a *“deeper wisdom than (my) ordinary thinking mind”*.

I am reminded of the phrase “heartfulness”, as I read how contemplation is a means of connecting with her heart. She describes feelings of stillness in her belly and being open in a peaceful way. Throughout, there is a sense of allowing thoughts and sensation to arise without striving. There is a faith that when a question is asked, the answer will arise without prompting. She names her teachers, some more familiar than others. I make note of the strangers and intend to find out more about them.

When I ask her how her contemplative inquiry and practice have affected her life, I sense irritation in her answer. If contemplation is a way of “being” and not a way of “doing something to” your life, then she cannot separate her inquiry, practice and life. I feel gently scolded by her reminder.

Her journey has come back to the importance of acceptance and compassion for self. She experiences its value and wishes share it with others. Later, she will tell me, through this process she has garnered insight and confidence as a practitioner and potential teacher. This has led her to conclude “Yes. I have done a lot haven’t I”.

As for me, I have far to go and much to explore. Like a child in the snow, I am jumping into the footprints of those who went before me. In these words, she has laid out her path gently and humbly. Some footprints may be too deep for me but I know she will help me to forge my own path, eventually.

Lastly, I am struck by the beauty of her prose. I extract quotes that invite contemplation.

*“…merging my awareness with the vast silence that is the infinite space at the source of love”.*

Later, I will silently repeat these words as mantra while I sit in meditation.