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## *Teaching as Meditative Inquiry: A Dialogical Exploration*

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### **Abstract:**

This is a conversational paper that explores an unconventional pedagogical approach—*teaching as meditative inquiry*—as developed by Ashwani Kumar. This pedagogical contribution is explored and expounded upon through a related research methodology called *dialogical meditative inquiry (DMI)*. DMI emphasizes listening holistically, learning from silence, as well as having an open and vulnerable attitude to allow for a deeper engagement with self and other participants where inner thoughts and feelings may be expressed in meditative awareness. Through this dialogic approach, the authors explore the concept of meditative inquiry and the ideas of Jiddu Krishnamurti, as well as how these have informed Kumar’s professional practice as a teacher educator and scholar. Emergent themes from this dialogue include: 1) how Kumar’s concept of meditative inquiry began and developed; 2) the connection between holistic thinking and meditative inquiry; 3) differences in how “holistic” is conceptualized from Western and Eastern perspectives; 4) teacher education candidates’ perceptions of holistic education; and 5) examination of resistance toward self-inquiry and the instrumentalization of meditative approaches.

**Keywords:** holistic education; meditative inquiry; teacher education; creativity; dialogue; freedom

## L'enseignement en tant qu'enquête méditative : une exploration dialogique

### Résumé :

Conçu sur le modèle d'une conversation, ce papier explore *l'enseignement en tant qu'enquête méditative*, une approche pédagogique non-conventionnelle développée par Ashwani Kumar. Usant d'une approche méthodologique associée, *l'enquête dialogique méditative (EDM)*, les auteurs explorent et expliquent cette contribution pédagogique. L'EDM met l'accent sur l'écoute holistique et l'apprentissage par le silence, ainsi que l'attitude ouverte et vulnérable nécessaire à un engagement profond avec le soi et d'autres participants accueillant l'expression, en pleine conscience méditative, de sentiments et de réflexions internes. Usant de cette approche dialogique, les auteurs explorent la conceptualisation de l'enquête méditative et les idées de Jiddu Krishnamurti, ainsi que leur influence sur les travaux scientifiques et pratiques éducatives de Kumar. Les thèmes suivants émergent de ce dialogue : 1) la naissance conceptuelle et le développement de l'enquête méditative, selon Kumar; 2) le lien entre la pensée holistique et l'enquête méditative; 3) comment « holistique » est conceptualisé différemment dans les traditions intellectuelles de l'Est et de l'Ouest; 4) les représentations de l'éducation holistique que se fait le corps étudiant en formation à l'enseignement; 5) les réponses à la résistance à l'enquête introspective et l'instrumentalisation des approches méditatives.

**Mots clés :** éducation holistique; enquête méditative; formation à l'enseignement; créativité; dialogue; liberté

This is a conversational paper between myself (Ashwani Kumar) and Adrian Downey that explores an unconventional pedagogical approach I call *teaching as meditative inquiry*. Teaching as meditative inquiry is an existential and holistic approach to teaching and learning. The core purpose of this approach is to develop a deeper sense of awareness (Krishnamurti, 2002) through attentive listening (Aoki, 2005), asking fundamental questions, and engaging in authentic and open dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Freire, 1973) regarding education and life as a whole. This pedagogy invokes a deeper sense of ourselves, not only as teachers but also as human beings. Learning to observe one's body, mind and emotions, and to experiment with meditation and relaxation exercises are the experiential aspects of this pedagogy. Teaching as meditative inquiry rejects "banking education" (Freire, 1973) and all other forms of instrumental, transmissive and mechanical approaches to teaching. Instead, it centralizes and celebrates freedom, dialogue and creativity as the processes and goals of the educational experience (Kumar, 2017a).

The pedagogical contribution of teaching as meditative inquiry is explored and expounded upon in a dialogue between myself and Downey through a related research methodology that I refer to as *dialogical meditative inquiry (DMI)*. As with teaching as meditative inquiry, DMI has its philosophical base in the work of Jiddu Krishnamurti. I conceptualized DMI as a way to conduct a conversational research project—Reflections on Education, Creativity and Life: A Dialogical Meditative Inquiry (The Dialogue Project). As the present paper has emerged from the Dialogue Project, I provide a brief description of the project and the DMI methodology that it employed.

### **The Dialogue Project and Dialogical Meditative Inquiry**

The central purpose of the Dialogue Project was to allow me, through dialogical engagement, to conceptualize and theorize my ideas regarding a variety of topics, including teaching, learning and researching as integral aspects of meditative inquiry.

The Dialogue Project has been my dream project since I authored the book, *Curriculum As Meditative Inquiry* (2013).<sup>1</sup> I wanted to explore, expand and share my ideas dialogically because dialogue enables intense and direct engagement with the subject matter. Dialogue has been a central aspect of my life and teaching, as you will see in the reported conversation.

Dialogue is the essence of education. I have always appreciated those teachers who encourage dialogue and, naturally, all of the classes I teach are also dialogical in their approach. It is due to the significance I give to dialogue in my courses that I devote a good part of the first gathering to explore the meaning and value of a dialogical classroom with all of the students. Dialogue helps

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<sup>1</sup> *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* provides a detailed analysis of the relationship among consciousness, meditative inquiry and education by means of engaging with three key questions: 1) In what ways do the characteristic features of human consciousness—fear, conditioning, becoming, and fragmentation—undermine self-awareness in educational experience? 2) What is meditative inquiry, and how can it help in cultivating awareness, which, in turn, can help in the understanding and transformation of human consciousness? 3) In what ways can we re-imagine

develop a deeper relationship among the students and between the students and myself. In fact, as one of the participants in my classes, I want to learn as deeply as possible from the classroom conversations. Dialogue, to me, also allows for subtle insights to emerge beautifully when the entire class is able to see the essence of something together. Dialogue also allows for the play of conflicting and divergent ideas. One thing that I strongly encourage is that students participate actively in class. Unless there is a real passion to understand and to explore, and unless students and I ask authentic and meaningful questions, for me, true and transformative education is not occurring. While my style may make some students somewhat nervous in the beginning, because they may not be familiar with this kind of open and involved dialogical pedagogy, once they see my true interest in education and in their own learning, they begin to appreciate its value.

The significance of dialogue as a method of exploration and expression of ideas has become apparent to me over the past seven years in my role as a teacher educator. In my observation, the dialogues and discussions in which I have engaged, not only in my classrooms and academic arenas but also with wider audiences, seem to have a deep educational and meditative impact on the participants.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the classroom and beyond, these meditative dialogues often succeed in transcending instrumental or mechanistic views of teaching, learning and living. Furthermore, dialogue as a way of encouraging meditative engagement enables the same holistic listening and learning from silence that marks DMI as a unique methodology.

The dialogical meditative inquiry is an emerging and evolving contemplative research methodology that can be useful in guiding subjective and inter-subjective qualitative research. DMI is rooted in my dialogical practices as a teacher educator in and out of the classroom, my philosophy of education as described in my book (2013) and in the writings of philosopher and educator, Krishnamurti.<sup>3</sup> It also shares ground with Pinar's (2004, 2012) ideas around "complicated conversations".<sup>4</sup> DMI is not a deterministic methodology intending to find answers to predetermined

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curriculum as a space for meditative inquiry that may provide self-transformative educational experiences to teachers and their students? (Kumar, 2013, p. 13)

<sup>2</sup> Over the past seven years, I have engaged in dialogues regarding the meaning and significance of meditative inquiry (for example, see Kumar, 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Kumar et al., 2014, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a twentieth-century philosopher, educator and institution builder, a key figure in the Theosophy movement. His insights regarding life and education are contained in more than 70 books and hundreds of audio and video lectures and discussions that he held around the world. He created several schools in different parts of the world that continue to thrive even after his death and offer an alternative vision of education to the world. In his schools, awareness, freedom and inquiry form the core of curriculum and pedagogy. The following links offer more information regarding Krishnamurti, his ideas and his schools.

• Krishnamurti and his ideas: <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/about-krishnamurti/the-core-of-the-teachings.php>

• Krishnamurti's schools: <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/worldwide-information/schools.php>

<sup>4</sup> Pinar (2012) describes curriculum as a "complicated conversation" that happens autobiographically and socially. It is "threaded through academic knowledge" and "an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engagement in the world" (p. 47). Pinar envisions this complicated conversation to be at "the very core of education in a social democracy," though often silenced by the drive to script curriculum and align it to standardized tests (p. 222). This conversation "requires curricular innovation and experimentation, opportunities for students and faculty to articulate relations among the school subjects, society, and self-formation" (Pinar, 2004, p. 191). Framing curriculum as a complicated conversation allows students to encounter the world and themselves

questions. On the contrary, it is a possibilistic, open-ended and emergent process. It is a holistic and spontaneous engagement where questions and answers emerge in the moment, guided by the meditative inquiry and understanding of the participants.

The core of DMI comprises listening holistically and learning from silence. Listening holistically implies listening with your whole being—with your mind, body and emotions. In this kind of meditative listening, one hears completely and through silence and openness rather than with preconceived notions, which hinder deep understanding. Holistic and meditative listening creates the ground on which people can connect and communicate deeply, beyond judgements and a sense of “otherness.” Such listening enriches us and brings about mutual understanding. Listening in silence, which is a meditation, allows us to pay attention to our thinking, feeling and actions. The deep listening and spontaneous silences that are central to DMI allow that space where authentic and meditative insights and responses emerge freely. Listening and silence create the possibility of an open and vulnerable state of being, a more comfortable place for deeper engagement, so that inner thoughts and feelings may be expressed in meditative awareness.

It is important to highlight that, given the open-ended and emergent nature of DMI, this paper does not follow a traditional format with clear-cut demarcations of the research process. This dialogue is best taken as a whole, where various aspects of research, namely the methodology that guides this research, the theoretical perspectives that inform it, and the conclusions and findings that emerge are integrated and presented dialogically and holistically.

An opportunity to explore my ideas dialogically presented when I met Adrian Downey, the questioner in the conversation below. How Adrian and I met and how this work came into existence is discussed below to provide readers with the origin, context and methodology of this paper.

While Adrian was working as a music teacher in Northern Quebec, he discovered my doctoral dissertation, *Understanding Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry: A Study of the Ideas of Jiddu Krishnamurti and James Macdonald* (2011) and began to engage with my ideas. In Adrian’s words, There was something unique which drew me to Ashwani’s work, a combination of spirit and intellect that spoke to my Indigenous (Mi’kmaw) spiritual sensibilities as well as my background in critical pedagogy.

Adrian joined the Master of Arts in Curriculum Studies program at Mount Saint Vincent University in 2016. In the following year, I hired Adrian as my research assistant to help me with two of my talks for the Canadian Society for the Study of Education annual conference (May-June, 2017, Toronto). These two talks were titled “Teaching as Meditative Inquiry: A Self-Study” (2017a) and

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“through their own lived experiences” and their interaction with academic knowledge and study, as well as popular culture (Pinar, 2012, p. 215). Complicated conversation is one of the central tenets of Pinar’s curriculum theory, and it has inspired the work of many educators (e.g., O’Neil, 2014; Phelan, 2011). Given its emphasis on self-understanding, open-endedness and academic freedom, complicated conversation is an important part of dialogical meditative inquiry.

“Exploring the Relationship between Meditative Inquiry and Indian Classical Music: Implications for Educational Theory and Practice” (2017b). I proposed to articulate my ideas for these talks through dialogue with Adrian, and Adrian agreed.

I suggested that Adrian and I would have a series of dialogues on a variety of topics,<sup>5</sup> transcribe the dialogues, edit them extensively, and use the resulting text as the body of journal articles. It was an approach that was rooted in my philosophy of life and education, which authentically emerged from the work of Krishnamurti (Krishnamurti, 1953, 1954; Krishnamurti & Anderson, 2000; Krishnamurti & Bohm, 1985, 1986), and which has antecedents in education (McLaren & Rikowski, 2016; Mclaughlin & Kelly, 2009; Shor & Freire, 1987). Adrian says,

This approach aligned with the values of my Indigenous approach to research and knowledge. I saw specific connections in our mutual respect for relationships, story sharing, and the importance of oral communication and listening (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2000; Wilson, 2008).

In preparation for his role as the questioner in this dialogue, Adrian read through my statement of teaching philosophy, my course evaluations, as well as my proposals for the conference presentations. Based on Adrian’s engagement with those documents, and his knowledge of my work (2011, 2013, 2014) and the work of Krishnamurti (1992, 1968), he created a series of questions meant to stimulate meaningful conversation and deep reflection. Notably, the questioner’s preparation prior to the dialogue, and his or her ability to engage deeply during the dialogue itself are essential components of the DMI methodology. Adrian reflects:

During the dialogue itself, I asked prepared questions but also allowed for spontaneous reactions to what Ashwani was saying. Indeed, some of the most delightful insights in the dialogue happened when the engagement was the least structured—such is the nature of meditative awareness.

I did not see any of the questions prior to the dialogue as I wanted a spontaneous, existential and meditative exploration of my ideas, which is in keeping with the meditative inquiry approach.

Employing DMI, Adrian and I engaged with the following key questions in this dialogue:

- How did the concept of meditative inquiry begin in my life, and how has it developed over time?
- What is the connection between holistic thinking and meditative inquiry, and where do they meet?
- When students enroll in a class called holistic education, what is the idea that they have in their minds about the class and its subject matter, and how do I respond when students ask for the practical implication of an idea or are looking for viable classroom strategies?

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<sup>5</sup> Topics in chronological order included: teaching as meditative inquiry; Indian classical music and curriculum; music and curriculum; curriculum as meditative inquiry; meditative inquiry and indigenizing the curriculum; the work of Krishnamurti; and the art of dialogue. This dialogue on “Teaching as Meditative Inquiry” was the first in the series of seven.

## Dialogue on Teaching as Meditative Inquiry<sup>6</sup>

**Downey:** My first question is just to provide some context for our conversation and a broad overview for the readers. Ashwani, how did the concept of meditative inquiry begin in your life?

**Kumar:** I came across the work of a radical and widely regarded Indian poet, Kabir,<sup>7</sup> when I was in grade nine in New Delhi, India. His poetry, which was critical of orthodox religion and superstitions and pointed toward true spirituality and meditative inquiry, had a direct impact on me. At that time, Adrian, I was unaware of its impact, but now when I reflect back I can see that his insights deeply transformed my view of life.

Kabir's work is written in a day-to-day language and has a great appeal for many people. The main idea that Kabir presented was that true religion or spirituality has nothing to do with organized religion, dogmas and rituals. That was an insight that I absorbed immediately. My family, which is traditionally Hindu, never tried to force me to follow their religion. Surprisingly, they just understood that I was not interested in rituals and dogma and let me begin a life of inquiry in which asking questions about all aspects of life became an intense passion.

The thing is, however, my inquiry didn't turn me into an atheist or someone who is opposed to religion and spirituality. What I imbibed from Kabir's insight was that there is no real spirit in blindly following rituals and beliefs. If you want to find something valuable in life—call it truth or meditation—then you have to investigate and ask questions; you have to go into yourself. As a teenager, I imbibed that mentality of questioning everything, and my path has never strayed from that search. The major step in the direction of serious self-inquiry came from the work of Osho,<sup>8</sup> who is a controversial spiritual philosopher from India. I heard a discourse by him on *Gita* when I was in

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<sup>6</sup> The dialogue has been edited for clarity.

<sup>7</sup> Kabir was an Indian poet and philosopher from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. His work spoke out openly against the orthodoxies of Hinduism and Islam, putting forward the notion of a personal path to experiencing the divine. His work is an important part of Indian literature and is situated within the *Bhakti Movement* (see Hawley, 2015; Lorenzen, 1995; Pechils, 2014; Schomer & McLeod, 1987). *Bhakti* (Spiritual or Devotional) *Movement* at its peak (from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century) characterized a spiritual revolution where many sages including Kabir, Meera (a highly revered female poet-sage from India) and Guru Nanak (founder of Sikhism), through their poetry, criticized orthodoxy in Hindu and Muslim religions and emphasized an alternative path to self-realization free of the bondage of caste and creed. A renowned documentary maker, Shabana Virmani, produced a series of four award-winning documentaries on Kabir as part of *The Kabir Project* (see <http://www.kabirproject.org/about%20us>).

<sup>8</sup> Osho was a twentieth-century Indian mystic and spiritual philosopher. He authored commentaries on spiritual and literary texts, including the *Bhagavada Gita* (see the next footnote), Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1896) and Khalil Gibran's (1923) *The Prophet* (see Osho, 2013, 2014). Osho is appreciated for his interpretation and exploration of meditation, where creativity, laughter and play form the cornerstones of spiritual life (see Osho, 1996, 1998). Osho is renowned for his open criticisms of religious and political leaders and his views regarding sexuality. He was a controversial figure for the entirety of his public life, first as a professor of philosophy at University of Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh, India) and later as a spiritual philosopher (for contrasting views, see Joshi, 2009 versus Stork, 2018). The most well-known contention regarding Osho relates to his commune in Oregon, US, in the 1980s. Some Osho followers were convicted of crimes, while Osho pled guilty to immigration fraud in an Alford plea bargain (Way & Way, 2018). Osho returned to India in 1987 after he and his followers were deported from the US and were denied entry by 21 countries. He then continued his radical way of teaching until his death in 1990, leaving behind a vast body of work in a variety of media.



my early twenties. Have you heard of *Gita*, Adrian?

**Downey:**

The *Bhagavad Gita*?<sup>9</sup>

**Kumar:** Yes. I heard one of his discourses on *Gita* and was really intrigued by the ideas he presented. After that, one of my friends gave me a book by him in Hindi titled *Dhyan Sutra (The Principles of Meditation, Osho, 1989)*. I seriously engaged with the ideas offered in this book. I also experimented with the meditation exercises suggested in this book to de-stress my mind and body through catharsis and to carefully observe my actions, thoughts and feelings. Such experimentation laid the foundation for meditative inquiry and helped me understand my fears, my anxieties, as well as my social and cultural conditioning. This inquiry brought about a mindset to ask fundamental questions about life and created a thirst to find out the true meaning and purpose of living.

I realized that I needed to understand and discover myself, and that such an understanding cannot be given by an outside authority. I started to see that self-knowledge is gravely important and that one has to deeply inquire in order to understand oneself. This inquiry was an intuitive movement of the unknown to the unknown: How can I live without knowing myself? If I don't understand why I am afraid, why I am jealous, why I have worries, why I have anxieties, then what is the point of living?

As I continued my inner education, my schooling continued as well. Luckily, I had a few friends who were also interested in self-inquiry, and we explored intensely together. North America is lucky that its electricity works all the time. When I was growing up in New Delhi, we lost electricity almost every evening for several hours. During those outages, my friends and I would talk about the need for self-understanding and the factors—for example, fears and conditioning—that hinder self-inquiry. Significantly, this inquiry was intuitive and spontaneous. We didn't know why we were discussing so intently and intensely. We didn't know why we were interested in meditative exploration. We just kept exploring because exploring seemed the thing to be done at that time. This exploration kept feeding my passion to understand the meaning of life. The late Professor K. K. Mojumdar, who taught me during my undergraduate years at Kirori Mal College (University of Delhi), also contributed greatly to my love of dialogue and learning. While formally he only taught me three courses, I intensely engaged with him for about ten years.

What I learned from Osho became more intense when I came across Krishnamurti. I studied Krishnamurti's work seriously during my Bachelor of Education and Master of Education programs which I completed at the Central Institute of Education (University of Delhi). His radical ideas on education and life revolutionized my thinking. I began to see the problem of behavioristic and mechanistic education. I began to realize that human beings need an education that nurtures their

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<sup>9</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* is probably the most internationally known sacred text from the Hindu religion. It is a part of the larger body of text known as the *Mahabharata*. It presents a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna on different approaches to spiritual liberation.



whole being—mind, body, heart and spirit—rather than just being limited to competition, measurement and achievement. Krishnamurti's work became the basis of my doctoral research which I later published as a book, *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (2013). During my time at UBC, I met many remarkable professors, including William Pinar (my dissertation supervisor), Karen Meyer, Anne Phelan and colleagues who supported—through critical dialogues—my work on Krishnamurti and the significance of meditative inquiry in learning and living. Meditative inquiry kept unfolding through these dialogues, and they kept becoming more intense. When I joined Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) as Assistant Professor, I designed my courses in such a way that meditative inquiry—which supports dialogue, humanistic relationship, authenticity and creativity—became an essential part of all of them. In a nutshell, Adrian, that was the genesis and unfoldment of meditative inquiry in my life and work.

**Downey:** Based on my review of your teaching reflections, Ashwani, it seems that students have nothing but good things to say about the transformative impact of your approach to teaching through meditative inquiry. Could you speak about the connection between holistic thinking and meditative inquiry, and where they meet? Perhaps, you could also talk about them from both Western and Eastern perspectives, as I think their conceptions of holistic education may be different.

**Kumar:** Actually, I think the underlying current of my thinking and my work has always been that education has to be for the whole being, and that notion has become more refined over time, due to the deepening of my engagement with holistic philosophy of education and life (e.g., Aoki, 2005; Bach, 1970; Bohm, 1983; Freire, 1973, 1998; Greene, 1995; Hesse, 1981; Huebner, 1999; Kapur, 2015; Krishnamurti & Anderson, 2000; Macdonald, 1995; Osho, 1989, 1996; Ouspensky, 1949; Stone, 1934; Wooten, 2008) and my work as a teacher educator.

When I joined MSVU as an Assistant Professor in 2011, I had just defended my dissertation. In the winter of 2012, I was asked if I wanted to teach an elective course. After careful thinking, I decided to teach a course on holistic education. Since then, I have regularly offered courses on holistic education in the BEd and MEd programs, and students have shown a great deal of interest in the principles of holistic education in general and the work of Krishnamurti in particular. Meditative inquiry is the central thrust of my philosophy and practice of teacher education and graduate level education courses.<sup>10</sup> The meditative inquiry approach to teaching that I espouse, given its emphasis on self-understanding, dialogue and relationships, is deeply connected to the holistic education philosophy, which draws on Eastern as well as Western perspectives. In fact, Krishnamurti, whose work underpins my meditative inquiry approach, is a significant contributor to the growth and development of the holistic education movement (Miller, 2000a; Thapan, 2018).

The second part of your question around Western and Eastern approaches to the holistic

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<sup>10</sup> I offer foundations of curriculum studies and holistic education courses for MEd and MA students and social studies, philosophy of education and holistic education courses for BEd students. While this paper primarily explores my pedagogy with references to my courses on holistic education, teaching as meditative inquiry informs and is practiced in all of courses I teach.

education contains a subtle point. In the Western education system, which is also true for most of the contemporary educational structures in the East, the core purpose of education seems to have been individual growth and success. Education thus promotes egocentric activity. I think the roots of this focus may lie in the work of widely influential people like Nietzsche, who criticized Christianity and what he perceived as any kind of false morality. He said that everybody has to be their own master (see Chu, Morgan, & Wardle, 1999; Cox, 2016). In the West, a lot of emphasis has been given to “me and myself,” and education is fundamentally for “my own growth and development”.

The problem with the education system, not only in the West but also in the East, is that it has become too instrumental and too mechanical; it has become too focused on doing well on tests, getting into university and finally getting a job (Kumar, 2019). The holistic educators thought that that was a superficial way of dealing with human beings, and that contemporary education was contributing little to understanding personal conflicts and the global crisis. Holistic educators recognized that competition and market-driven education is causing many crises at an individual level because students are not happy with their educational experience (Doin, 2012; Lees & Noddings, 2016; Miller, Nigh, Binder, Novak, & Crowell, 2018; Noddings, 2003). Although students may not necessarily like the educational experience, they go through it for their economic survival, which causes a great deal of stress and anxiety. Besides, given their emphasis on individual growth and success, contemporary educational structures are not seriously considering the global crisis manifesting itself in ecological imbalance and consequent disasters, ever-present nationalistic conflicts and nuclear threat, and religious antagonism and widely spreading terrorism. It was in light of such contemporary and historical circumstances that the holistic education movement gained momentum (Cajete, 1994; Harris, 1980; J. P. Miller, 1988, 2000b; R. Miller, 1997; Palmer, 1993).

There is, however, a subtle difference, as you imply in your question, Adrian, between the so-called Western and Eastern conceptions of holistic education, which I have observed and would like to talk about. While I am afraid that my response may be too simplified, I will try, anyhow, as I think that a response to this question contains several subtle points.

Because of the human potential movement<sup>11</sup> in the West, which is a major influence on the holistic education movement, it was realized that we need a humanistic and positive view of human beings. The self—that which is the core of human experience—has to be positively regarded and developed through creative, introspective and intellectual means. This focus on the self and its development is the central point of difference between Western notions of holistic education and the work of people like Krishnamurti. For spiritual philosophers like Krishnamurti and Buddha (i.e.,

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<sup>11</sup> Human potential movement (HPM) was a psycho-social force that emerged as part of the countercultural current of the 1960s. It criticized the political, social and religious values which limited human beings from realizing their true and creative potential. It celebrated the significance of creativity and freedom in discovering one's true self. The evolution of HPM is closely connected to the work of humanistic psychologists Abraham Maslow (1943, 1964) and Carl Rogers (1961, 1969). The key proponents of HPM include Michael Murphy, Aldous Huxley and George Leonard, among others. HPM is one of the intellectual and philosophical sources for the holistic education movement.

non-Western perspectives), the self is the source of suffering if one is not intensely aware of its movement. Western psychology seems to think that there is a dichotomy between being jealous and the positive self, but that perhaps isn't the case. Jealousy is part of the self. It is not that there is jealousy in me, but that I am deep-down good; jealousy is part of me—it is me. Eastern thinkers like Krishnamurti tried to question this division between the so-called “good” self and the “bad” self. They said that the self in itself is the cause of suffering, but they didn't mean that we should suppress self or control it. Their intention was to encourage us to observe how the self operates in day-to-day life without calling it bad or good.

Krishnamurti, in fact, questions the whole notion of a separate, individual self. In his view, this separation, as an ego-centred activity, is the cause of individual as well as collective suffering. But this is not a suppressive or judgmental perspective, as it may appear on the surface. Through inquiry, one has to discover the subtle ways in which the self, through its competitive, comparative, and accumulative tendencies, causes conflict within itself and with others. In my view, it doesn't matter whether you are engaging with holistic education for mechanical gains or for spiritual gains, because if the focus remains on the strengthening of the self without understanding its deeper nature and structure, transformation still doesn't happen. The deeper connection between ourselves and the world doesn't happen; the connection is being mediated by egocentric activities. Understanding how the self functions in daily life, rather than its suppression or gratification, is the core of a meditative inquiry approach to education and life.

**Downey:** I think the difference is really in the underlying concept of how we deal with the problem of the self, whether we see it as a problem or whether we see it as something that simply *is* so that we may get a deeper understanding of it.

A follow-up question that I have is about your students, particularly in the BEd program. When students enroll in a class called holistic education, what is the idea that they have in their minds about the class and its subject matter?

**Kumar:** Not all students come from the same place or for the same reason. Many of the students come to the class because it fits their schedule and because they have heard good things about it. Then there are some students who have studied with me before. Those who studied with me understand that three principles are the cornerstones of my teaching: dialogue, freedom and creativity. Others might think that holistic education is just a “feel good” approach that lets students do whatever they want, and that it doesn't challenge students. Some think that it doesn't encourage them to study or to engage deeply, with rigour. Another criticism is that it is a religious education in disguise—like what Nietzsche was afraid of—making people weak by thinking about compassion or thinking about meekness rather than preparing them for the “rough world” ahead (see Chu, Morgan, & Wardle, 1999; Cox, 2016). Some people think that this class is about recognizing and doing away with the desire to be competitive or the desire to engage in cutthroat competition, which, of course, it is.

I would say that most students have no idea what holistic education is. After the course, however, many students have said that it should be a compulsory course because they feel that there is a lack of authentic engagement in their studies, generally speaking. In my observation, whenever students come across something authentic, they want to engage with it with their whole being. From what they share with me, it seems that in most of their other courses they are not expected to look at life and education from a holistic perspective. Most teachers and teacher educators are worried about provincial outcomes and developing strategies and techniques to implement them efficiently. The teachers are worried because they are not going to get a job if they don't follow what is expected of them. The teacher educators are worried that students are going to complain if they do not prioritize provincial outcomes. There are also a number of teacher educators who have bought into the outcome-oriented education without paying much attention to work in educational theory that time and again have refuted the educational value of instrumental approaches (Aoki, 2005; Eisner, 1967, 1990; Greene, 1995; Huebner, 1999; Macdonald, 1995; Pinar, 2012).

I came to MSVU with the mentality that the purpose of teacher education goes far beyond simply implementing curriculum outcomes. In one of my essays, I remarked that

I think it is also our responsibility as teacher educators to engage the pre-service and in-service teachers in meditative thinking about deeper questions related to teaching and learning and the political and historical context within which they happen rather than viewing teaching as a technical-instrumental act aimed at meeting pre-determined outcomes that often emerge in rather mysterious fashions. (Kumar, 2014, pp. 104-105)

Because of my education and learning with Pinar and other thoughtful intellectuals at UBC, because of other educators' work to which they introduced me, and my own engagement with Krishnamurti, I reached an understanding that truly meaningful education cannot be prescribed. If we prescribe education, it loses its whole meaning. The whole beauty of education is in discovery, creative engagement and exploration. I have seen that sometimes even the most educated people, the most sophisticated people, become so engrossed with learning outcomes, and I don't understand why. When I started learning Indian classical music, about which we will discuss in our future dialogues, I just wanted to learn it. I wanted to sing and play, but should I have established learning outcomes? For example: "I should learn this raga<sup>12</sup> by this day"; "I should learn this composition by this day." This is such a restrictive way of learning and living—learning and living are not linear processes.

Pre-service and in-service teachers often come to classes I teach with the perspective that learning is linear, sequential and outcome-based. They think that they have to be afraid of the authorities like school boards, parents and even the students they teach. When they come into the courses I teach, I try to open them up to a world where the most important thing to become an educator is to understand oneself and one's relationship to the world. I present a way of teaching and learning that asks them to understand how the socio-political context impacts them and their

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<sup>12</sup> A raga is a melody which delights the mind. Western musicians sometimes think of it as a scale.

thinking, and how we have been conditioned to look at education in a very narrow way. Having said that, I admire the openness that most students who participate in my courses exhibit. As the classes proceed, the majority of students, in spite of all the pressure they are under, begin to see the value in deeper, meditative explorations of themselves as human beings and teachers and their positionality and relationship within the socio-political structures.

While the majority of the students see the significance of meditative inquiry, there are also students who are skeptical. The primary criticism is usually that meditative inquiry and open dialogical exploration don't seem like practical approaches, and that they are not sure how they will fit in their classrooms. Of course, I tell them, "They will 'fit'. Are they not fitting in my classroom? These approaches will fit in your classroom if you engage with them and if they become part of your whole being—not as a conditioning, not because I am saying it, but if you see value in them. And then you will find ways to challenge the dominant paradigm that values competition, measurement and comparison, and you will create classroom communities where self-understanding, authenticity and deep relationships are the foundation of teaching and learning." I have taught so many students over the past number of years and many of them are experimenting with what they learned in the classes I taught. For example, one of my past students is a philosophy teacher in the Nova Scotia public school system. He uses Krishnamurti profusely in his classes to engage students with questions of fear, comparison, conditioning and conflict. I invite him and many other students as guest speakers to talk about their pedagogical experimentations with preservice students. These presentations are greatly appreciated by students. I should also mention two symposiums—one on "Meditative Living", for counsellors working in public schools of Nova Scotia (Kumar, Cosgrove, Doyle, Scott, & Stoffman, 2014) and another on "Holistic Education" at the Annual Celebration of Teaching and Learning (Kumar, Doyle, Macleod, Marble, & Philips, 2015)—both of which I organized at Mount Saint Vincent University with students so that we may share our understanding of and experiences with holistic and meditative education with the wider audience.

**Downey:** How do you respond when students ask you for the practical implications of an idea or are looking for viable classroom strategies?

**Kumar:** I respond to the psychological background from which that question comes first because that background results in a very limited view of education. The system of education is plagued with numerous problems, and students begin to see that easily given their firsthand experience of it. Beginning with where they are in their understanding of the system and its problems, we go deeper to find out the roots of the problems. They start to see that most of us are afraid; we want certainty, and we want everything laid out. Finding a job seems to be our biggest worry, and thus we want to treat education instrumentally, where its chief goal is to get a job. Once students begin to see fear and our desire to seek certainty as the root of the problem, which is underneath all the ridiculousness around testing, exams and competition, which is heightened in the era of neoliberal education reforms (Kumar, 2019; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Pinar, 2012), they ask, "What should we do then? We can't change the political system, we can't change schools overnight, so what can we do at our level?" In my response, I request them not to instrumentalize what we discuss

in the class—that is, not to treat our exploration as a way of finding techniques to solve their individual classroom problems. Meditative inquiry and exploration are not about practicing a technique. It is about bringing about a shift in our perception through deep understanding. Once a new perception takes place, which sees the significance of freedom and creativity in teaching and learning, we will discover our own ways of challenging and transforming the system.

I ask them, "Could you, rather than worrying about what strategies and techniques you can take to the classroom, first allow yourself time to engage freely and critically with the ideas we are exploring in the class? Take a moment to understand how fear underpins the system, how instrumentality underpins the system, how an obsession with measurement in every form underpins the system." Once we understand that, those oppressive structures will begin to break down within us because knowingly or unknowingly, we are conditioned by the whole ethos. The more we engage, the deeper we go, the more we begin to see that our conditioning is loosening, and because of that our classrooms will change. One student told me that he used to be so afraid of students that he would try to control everything in his class, but as he became more aware of his fears and tendency to control within, the external control loosened up on its own. His connection with the students started to grow, and a more intuitive and creative relational connection emerged where fear as a means of control was unnecessary.

To bring about superficial changes, we can borrow techniques and strategies from experts and take them to our classrooms. But, when your heart begins to change and when your whole being begins to change, then there is authentic transformation. It is like if your heart knows music, you can learn techniques, but if your heart doesn't know music, those techniques won't teach you music—won't give you a taste of what real music is. Techniques may teach you music, but that music won't touch anybody's heart, let alone yours.

**Downey:** When you came to MSVU, what effect did teaching and engaging with students on a weekly basis have on the concept of meditative inquiry and the way you approach teaching? It is fundamentally an approach to education which you are putting into practice every week. How does that change or reinforce the concepts behind meditative inquiry—how has it evolved since you finished your doctoral work, Ashwani?

**Kumar:** In essence, it has been the same. For example, the ideas that I should have my class dialogue-oriented and that students must have the freedom to express their ideas have been the same throughout. Earlier, however, because of the teachers I had and because of my own positive experience with dialogue, I would want everybody to speak. I, however, soon realized that some students didn't like that. So, I adjusted my approach to dialogue a little bit. I still ask everyone to speak sometimes, saying, "My intent is not to judge or compel anyone to speak, but I am really curious about what is going on in your minds." I suggest that they can keep their comments very brief, but that they need to take the responsibility to make this class a lively place. They can listen attentively if they don't want to speak, but once in a while, they've got to share something. They owe that much to the whole class so that it may become a place of learning and understanding. How I

have adjusted it, practically speaking, is that I have started preparing some questions in advance so that it gives the students some time to think things through. Then I ask them first to think about those questions individually. I may ask, "How does fear control our thinking and action? Think it out on your own, then get into a small group and discuss it. Then as a whole class, we can discuss that question." By the time I ask them to share, they are very comfortable. The valuing of dialogue has been the same since the beginning, but it has changed over time in the way I encourage more and more students to share their thoughts and feelings in the class.

**Downey:** Ashwani, you essentially just described a "think, pair, share" activity, which is a very common classroom technique that anybody would be familiar with—

**Kumar:** But when it comes to the whole group discussion, Adrian, we go very deep. The subject matter is very deep and challenging. I adjusted the approach so that it is comfortable for the students, but when it comes to the whole class, the nature of the conversations become intense and profound as we explore existential questions about fear, conflicts, sorrow and relationships, in the context of education.

**Downey:** So meditative inquiry is nothing about technique. Any technique that fosters dialogue can work within a meditative approach.

**Kumar:** Yes, but there is a small caveat to that; it is not a technique! Our reliance on techniques can make the mind superficial and dry so that it loses its intuitive and creative capacity. A lot of students have said that dialogue is a very good "tool" and they will use it, but I constantly remind them that it is not a tool. If you think of dialogue as a tool, you create a separation between you and the dialogue. What we are talking about is a way of being that has embraced dialogue. Dialogue *is* the way of being. In this way, no matter whether I am talking to you, just sitting in nature, or talking to students, there is a willingness, a desire, to learn from the other and engage with the other—to inquire together. So, it is not a tool that you can take to your classroom and implement; it is not a technique. Take meditation for example. I do relaxation exercises in my class, but I keep critiquing them, saying relaxation in itself is not meditation! Your whole being should be meditative; you need to create the ground in which your whole being becomes meditative and dialogical. That's why meditation and dialogue are not techniques. Freedom is not a technique; it is a way of being. In this approach, it is the whole gestalt that changes, not just a small part in your being that you want to change in order to attain some instrumental goals.

**Downey:** Yes, and to take up the musical example again, even though the core of your being as a musician is alive with music, and that's what you are focused on most of the time, at times you might focus on a specific technique so that you can better facilitate that musicianship.

**Kumar:** But it comes! If you are feeling very stressed, you may lie down and be still so that your whole being collects itself together. But if you think that laying down is a technique, then you are not going to look into the reasons for the stress. Techniques can make things very superficial, but if you have a deeper understanding, you can use techniques very well. If your heart knows the music, your techniques will be very good. In fact, they will make learning and playing music easy because



many intelligent musicians have created those techniques which can prove very useful. If, however, you think that by practicing techniques your heart will understand music, it won't happen. By understanding some techniques, you may think your being has the being of a teacher who is thoughtful and watchful as Aoki (2005) puts it, but it's not going to work that way. If you are a thoughtful and watchful teacher, you will use techniques, but the place from which they will be experimented with is meditative and thoughtful rather than mechanical and thoughtless. I think that's where the whole difference lies. One is a superficial way of approaching things; the other is a way of approaching things from the very depth of your being.

**Downey:** Changing gears a bit, one interesting element of your work are the four meanings of awareness in curriculum studies.

**Kumar:** Information transformation, social criticism, self-reflection and meditative inquiry.<sup>13</sup>

**Downey:** Yeah, and the last two are the crux of what makes the meditative inquiry so unique. So, I wonder about self-awareness and students' reluctance to self-examine in a serious way. Is that something you've come across, and how do you deal with that when you do come across it in students?

**Kumar:** Some students, because they are invested in or bought into the system, don't want to examine deeply. I never force students to inquire into themselves directly, and I do not ask them to share with me what they are inquiring about. The whole inquiry is, in a way, *indirect*. Through questions, readings and videos, a space is created where they begin to inquire into themselves, naturally. So, it's not a direct approach. For example: we will have a discussion on fear. I may ask questions like: What is fear? How does fear influence our lives? How does fear influence our work? How does fear influence our relationships? What is conditioning? Have we been conditioned very deeply in ways that have coloured our perceptions of ourselves and others around us? I thus create an environment in which reflection happens naturally, and they begin to inquire. Then the students will say, "Yes, of course, our whole lives are ridden with fear; we are so deeply conditioned and that is why we have so many barriers and divisions and categories; it is because of conditioning." They begin to see, but I don't have a set of questions for them to examine themselves. We examine the human situation, of which they are a part, and they begin to see that very soon.

**Downey:** It's a broader approach. You set the stage and then they are the ones that really do the reflecting about their own lives.

**Kumar:** Yeah, that's my role. Through readings, multimedia material, questions and discussions, I create a space for inquiry where exploration happens on its own. It is not a forceful, imposing, direct approach. It's a gentle, yet intense and indirect approach where you create an environment in which people begin to go deeper into themselves.

**Downey:** It's an invitation.

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<sup>13</sup> See the "Introduction" to *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (Kumar, 2013, pp. 1-17).

**Kumar:** It's an invitation. That's the perfect way to describe it, Adrian. If you want to participate, it's an invitation.

It is important to note that I try to balance these intense discussions with relaxation activities. For example, when I offer master's level foundations of curriculum studies courses in summer, I take students for silent walks in the beautiful Hemlock Ravine Park near Mount Saint Vincent University. They listen to nature and just pay attention to their surroundings. It's not just intellectual engagement; it's holistic engagement, and they begin to see the beauty of seeing and listening. There was a yoga instructor in one of the summer courses I taught. For her presentation, she brought yoga mats to the class. I asked her if we could use the yoga mats for every class, and she agreed. Every session in that summer course, everybody would lie down for twenty minutes after lunch (because it was a whole day course!) to restore their energy and then we would engage. At this time, I would often put on some good music (Indian classical music, Gurdjieff's piano music, or some other music that promotes relaxation) in the background. So, it's not a dry, intellectual approach that burdens you. It is an approach that will invigorate you. It awakens you and brings your creative capacities from deep within you. In this approach, the whole class is a community of friends who want to inquire together. Food is shared, rest is shared, meditation is shared and dialogue is shared. Students have often remarked, "We could have never imagined that a course on curriculum studies would involve all this!"

**Downey:** And there is this notion of building community, right?

**Kumar:** That is the core! A lot of students say that to me. They feel that in our class they have all come very close together. It is because they all pour out their hearts. I invite them to share their thoughts, insights and feelings, and they connect with each other through that mutual sharing. It is interesting for me to see how amazingly the classroom community works.

**Downey:** Can you have the serious self-inquiry without the community to support it?

**Kumar:** I don't see self and community as an either/or; the self *is* part of the community. Even when I am inquiring into myself, I am inquiring into you because as human beings we are connected. But having people with whom you can share your heart and with whom you can have intense dialogues is very important. I think they feed each other, they exist together. One student said in a joking way, "You know what, Ashwani? If I inquire into myself, it is not that I am paying attention to my conflicts and issues, I am taking care of everybody's issues. So, man, I am doing you guys a service." She said it jokingly, but that's what it is. If I inquire into my fear, I am inquiring into your fear too. That brings about compassion.

**Downey:** At the BEd level, there is a lot of pressure on students, especially when they go into their practicum placements to conform to a certain culture, and it's not a culture that supports this kind of deep inquiry. What advice do you give to students who, when they come back from practicum, say, "I get this, I really want to self-inquire, but there is not a community that supports this in our school?"

**Kumar:** There are several responses to that question. The first is, if you have serious interest, you will find a way. There will always be challenges because self-inquiry is very dangerous in that it undercuts all conditioning, mechanicalness and conformity. No matter where you are, there will be challenges to a truly meditative approach. So, a student who is interested in a deeper view of education must accept that from the very beginning. The second response to that question is that you need not force everybody to pursue this path—to do that would mean you haven't understood it. It is a gentle but intense approach. It is your conviction and your engagement that is going to touch people. It is not a political propaganda of which you need to convince people. There will, indeed, be challenges, but you have to meet the challenges through your own transformation.

**Downey:** In my mind, it relates back to what you said about the Western and the Eastern approaches to conflict in the self: suppression of conflict versus the embrace of conflict.

**Kumar:** Meeting conflict.

**Downey:** Yes. Does the conflict of having that negative culture in the school system to react to actually fuel your inquiry? Does having all these conflicts in your life make your inquiry stronger?

**Kumar:** For example, the anxieties among students—so many students are on medicinal drugs because they have so-called attention deficits, the external conflicts, and bullying?

**Downey:** Yeah.

**Kumar:** School is a microcosm of the society (see also Macdonald, 1995). It is a fertile ground where you may see all the ills of society. The approach of meditative inquiry is to meet those conflicts everywhere, and schools are not excluded from its purview. When teachers begin to understand that school is part and parcel of the larger society, they realize that it is so relevant to look into themselves and encourage students to do so because part of the problem is that we are living superficially, being influenced by media, fads and the dominant social practices and behaviours, rather than having a deeper connection within ourselves. I think schools are the perfect place for meditative inquiry.

**Downey:** Because of the rich conflict.

**Kumar:** The conflict that is already there.

**Downey:** My last question is about your own meditative inquiry. What are the directions that you're heading as someone who is practicing meditative inquiry as a way of life?

**Kumar:** First of all, I wouldn't say that I am practicing meditative inquiry because whatever you practice becomes mechanical sooner or later. The same applies in music, right? If you practice it and if you don't play from your heart, it becomes mechanical. I would say you can give this inquiry many names. You can say living fully, living meditatively, living creatively; the essence is that you are living with your whole being. In which direction is it going? There is no direction in life. Life is an unfoldment. To live is to keep on unfolding. I started learning Indian classical music just five years ago, and it has been unfolding since. It keeps on unfolding in different directions. Every day it

unfolds in a new dimension. Is there a direction? No. Is there anything I do to support it? Nothing. The whole thing supports itself. What supports life? What supports the growth of a tree? You can scientifically and mechanically say the sun. But what supports the sun? Is the sun practicing? Are waves practicing? Is the tree practicing? No. The whole movement of life and existence is happening on its own. The meditative inquiry is a way to become part of this existential movement. In fact, we already are a part of this movement but there are conditioning and fears that we have to understand and be free of. The more there is this intuitive understanding of life, the less there is the demand for certainty and direction.

**Downey:** That's a good answer. What are the challenges that you experience?

**Kumar:** I think the real challenge comes from the desire for direction itself. My desire for direction and society's desire for direction. In the West (which is also true for the East), there is a prominent mentality which encourages us to strive, struggle and compete constantly. In academia, it appears as the push to publish, get grants, and in various other forms of pressures. If your being wants to write something, publish it, but if it's not coming from your whole being, it is just striving and a response to outer pressures and inner desires and fears. The challenge is how to resist the outer pressure, which has also become inner pressure, to conform and do what everybody else is doing. The only response to that challenge is resilience to the pressures, whether it is coming from the outside or the inside, and that resilience is a meditative quality. It is not a fight. It is impossible to fight universities if they expect you to publish and to get funding because they are also under the same pressure at their own level. What is possible, however, is that one doesn't do what is expected of one out of any inauthentic movement, which is very difficult. It is a constant process of engagement, questioning and challenge—a constant renewal of your own thoughts, feelings and actions. We must ask if we are being authentic in what we are doing. It is a very challenging thing. The challenge is not to give in.

**Downey:** Those are the majority of my questions, although I do have some wonderings. Do you think you could respond to these questions as concisely as possible?

**Kumar:** Sure.

**Downey:** What is teaching?

**Kumar:** Teaching is a way of engaging with your whole being, with yourself and with students you teach.

**Downey:** What is learning?

**Kumar:** It is the same; it is engaging with your whole being in order to inquire and understand. They exist together, and so does the living. Teaching, learning and living exist together; they are one and the same thing to me.

**Downey:** What is meditation?

**Kumar:** To come into contact with life through intense awareness, bringing your whole being

together so that you can experience life as it is.

**Downey:** How do you know when you are aware?

**Kumar:** Your whole being is alive when you are aware. It is not a matter of seeking proof; your whole being is the proof. It is not *your* awareness or mine; it is simply awareness.

**Downey:** If you had one message to share with teachers in general, what would it be?

**Kumar:** You can't teach well if you don't live well, and you can't live well if you don't understand yourself. Self-understanding is indispensable and should be the goal of life and education.

**Downey:** Same question for students.

**Kumar:** Don't let anybody destroy your creative potential.

### Conclusion

This dialogical paper explored an unconventional approach to teaching—*teaching as meditative inquiry*—which I have developed over the years as a result of my theoretical work and pedagogical practice. Teaching as meditative inquiry is a holistic approach to education that emphasizes the significance of dialogue, creativity, freedom and meditation in teaching, learning and living. The meaning and significance of this pedagogical approach were explored through a conversation between myself and Adrian Downey by employing a related research methodology called *dialogical meditative inquiry* (DMI). Given its emphasis on listening holistically, learning from silence and having an open and vulnerable attitude, DMI allowed for a deeper engagement between the two of us and led to valuable insights into teaching and learning.

The beginning of the dialogue focused on exploring my biographical context around the development of the concept of meditative inquiry. Through the narration of my story, one sees the importance of dialogue and community to the development of awareness. The dialogue then moves into a discussion of the term holistic and two perspectives on its roots: from the Western intellectual tradition and from Eastern spiritual perspectives. The dialogue also taps into the meaning and significance of approaching self-understanding through meditative inquiry. At its core, the meditative inquiry is an existential approach to experiencing and observing one's thoughts, emotions and actions, as well as one's relationship to people and environment, non-judgmentally yet intently, to awaken a sense of deep awareness. In the meditative inquiry, one learns to be with one's thoughts, feelings and experiences as they are rather than suppressing them. This section also speaks to the uniqueness of teaching as meditative inquiry, in that it seeks a holistic engagement rather than merely an intellectual one. From this more philosophical discussion, the dialogue shifts into a practical one, exploring my teaching practices with particular emphasis around my response to student anxieties and my approach to creating spaces (in and outside of the classroom) where deep inquiry can take place. Here we explore the importance of avoiding instrumentalizing the meditative approach by turning it into a method or technique to be applied in the classroom. Yet, a close

reading of the dialogue will reveal practical suggestions for how to approach one's class in a meditative and holistic manner. The dialogue on teaching as meditative inquiry closes with a series of succinct statements regarding the nature of teaching and learning from the meditative perspective.

In conclusion, teaching as meditative inquiry should not be understood as a technique that can be employed to achieve instrumental outcomes; it is better described as a holistic way of being. It supposes that an educator sees the value of living an intensely self-aware life and actually lives as such. Such an educator is in a constant state of dialogue, always learning about his or her self through interactions with nature, friends, colleagues and students. Given that the educator authentically embraces that way of life, she will naturally invite students she teaches to do the same, not by implementing some practice or technique, but simply by being in a state of meditative inquiry herself. The students will be given an open space to explore their own selves and discover for themselves the beauty of life that unfolds when it is lived in a state of meditative awareness.

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