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## Contemplative Early Childhood Leadership

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CONTEMPLATIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP

By

Mongkonrat Parks

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D.

Omaha, Nebraska

March 2016

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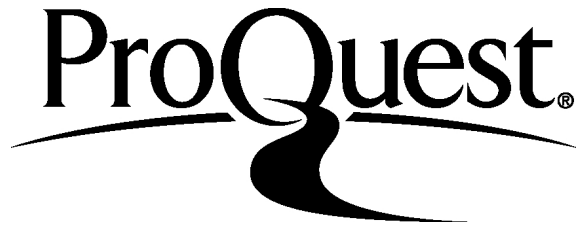
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## **Abstract**

### **CONTEMPLATIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP**

**Mongkonrat Parks, Ed.D.**

**University of Nebraska, 2016**

**Advisor: Dr. Kay A Keiser**

Contemplative preschool has a unique character and background that incorporates contemplative philosophy into early education. Contemplative early childhood leaders have also played a major role in synchronizing contemplative pedagogy with leadership skills in a unique school culture. These leaders have a direct impact on the quality and productivity of the student's education. Studying the leaders' professional growth will benefit early childhood educators in understanding contemplative leadership roles in a historical and contextual environment.

The purpose of this collective case study is to understand how contemplative school leaders implement contemplative education in their personal and professional lives. This study is an exploration of school leaders who have adopted contemplative practices in their life and implemented these techniques throughout the whole school in a preschool setting. The study explores qualities of school leaders most significant to creating transformation in schools.

The findings of this study include themes relating to implementation of contemplative practices to early childhood leadership; synchronizing a strong foundation of contemplative principles and practicality, contemplative staffing, and application of the mandala principle and five-qualities. Additionally, qualities of contemplative early childhood leaders that emerged included focus on present moment interaction, leading from inside out, and community engagement. Implications for further research are also included.

## Acknowledgement

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Rationale

Contemplative education was first introduced as a formal pedagogy in the United States about three decades ago, inspired by a group of educators who wished to bring a more holistic perspective to teaching and learning. While contemplative education shares some concepts with mindfulness, it is uniquely rooted in spiritual traditions. Brown (2005) described contemplative pedagogy as a synthesis of the aware presence of the teacher and effective instructional methods that cultivate deep learning. Contemplative pedagogy embraces a variety of methods and practices to support emotional awareness. It is a life method that incorporates mindfulness, meditation, and spirituality practices that lead to self-transformation. Teachers often introduce contemplative education through three contemplative practices: meditation, pause or wait time, and contemplating. As a result, contemplative practices help teachers develop intuition, loving-kindness, and compassion, which benefit teachers and students personally and professionally (Boorstein, 2002).

Contemplative education falls under the umbrella of mindfulness education. Many scholars discuss the meaning of these two terms. They describe mindfulness as the energy of being aware and awake to the present, and contemplative education as incorporating mindfulness into teaching and learning. Thich Nhat Han (2009) defined mindfulness as being in the present with your inner experience as well as outer experience. Studies show that mindfulness practice help teachers in multiple ways by reducing stress, supporting emotion, and creating kindness in the classroom. Beer (2010) explained that contemplative education, incorporates qualities of self-reflection and awareness, mutual

respect, open-communication, deep-listening and honesty in the educational setting. Rechtschaffen (2014) urged that mindfulness does not belong to any religion, but modern teachings of mindfulness have been influenced by the practitioners and scholars of the lineage so that they have implemented the spiritual point of view to experience the beauty of mindfulness in their practices through breath, body, mind, and heart. Haynes (2014) agreed that the diversity of contemplative practices rooted in the world's religious traditions enhances the educational experience in a unique way, specifically, techniques of awareness, concentration, and methods of developing attention. Thus, mindfulness and contemplative education have a shared context and vocabulary allowing them to influence each other.

The contemplative classroom is characterized by a variety of practices. Griswold (2010) illustrated the contemplative classroom by giving examples of unique activities such as stillness practices that include sitting meditation, guided visualization, body scan, and touchstone meditation; active practices that include volunteering, civic engagement and community service; and generative practices that include loving-kindness meditation designed to foster thoughts and feelings of compassion or devotion.

Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight, and compassion for oneself and others. This notion is integrated through spiritual practices to help educators transform themselves and bring the quality of basic goodness into the educational setting to transform the student's life (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011).

Further, this study also explores how the adoption of contemplative practices into leaders' professional lives can affect the whole school. This study also explores how school leaders are effectively creating transformation in school.

## **Early Childhood and Contemplative Education**

The pedagogy of contemplative early childhood education has been developed for more than three decades from the inspiration of educational visionaries like Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of contemplative education. One of the first contemplative early childhood programs was started at a lab preschool of Naropa University. Starting from an abstract spiritual concept, contemplative early childhood education has developed and simplified into a structured contemplative approach in the early childhood classroom. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (as cited in Crawford, 1993, p.12)

By paying close attention to how each child perceives the world, learns and manifests his or her own wisdom, the teacher's experience is not of dealing with ignorant people needing to be stuffed with information, but with tremendous intelligence of the students' part. Trusting in this, education is viewed as a celebration, not merely making the illiterate literate.

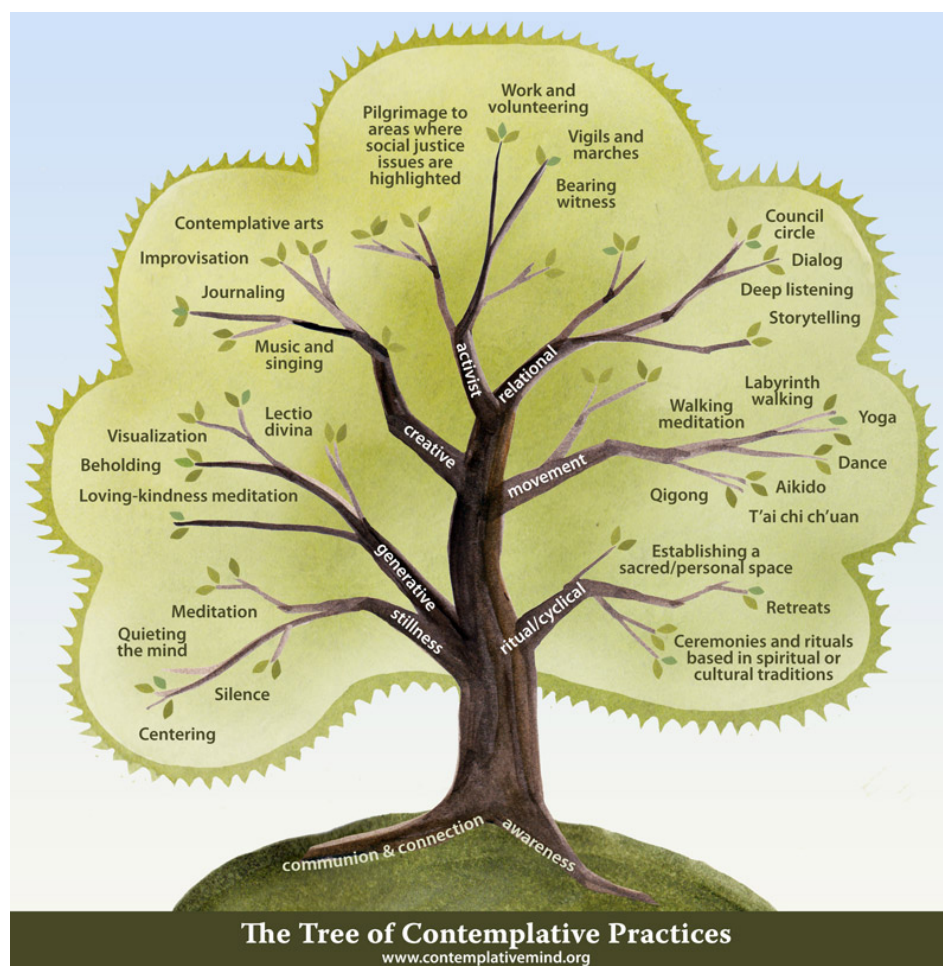
When stillness is the opposite of the moving dynamic in the classroom, contemplative practice may not seem to be practical. Brown (2011) showed that many teachers who do not meditate or practice contemplative disciplines struggle to apply mindfulness in their teaching, while experienced contemplative practitioners develop clarity and stability of mind and transfer the quality of calmness into classroom.

The leadership of contemplative early education leaders is key to applying the richness of contemplative philosophy to practical teaching methods. Contemplative early childhood leaders have a direct impact on the quality and productivity of the student's

education. Studying the leaders' professional growth will benefit early childhood educators in understanding contemplative leadership roles in a historical and contextual environment.

### Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study follows the model constructed by the Center of Contemplative Mind in Society (CCMS). The Tree of Contemplative Practice (Fig.1.) illustrates the diversity of practices. There are seven categories of contemplative practices: stillness, generative, creative, activist, relational, movement, and ritual/cyclical. These categories demonstrate how the practices have been integrated into educational institutions, contemplative communities and also individual practices in a tangible way.



*Figure 1.* The Tree of Contemplative Practices. This figure illustrates the diversity of contemplative practices.

This study also relies upon the definition of Quality of Good Works adopted by Naropa University. (Boyle et al., 2003) Naropa University was the first university to offer contemplative classes at the higher education level. The themes of Quality of Good Work in contemplative community are shared intention, wanting to serve, supportive environment, risk-taking, authentic communication, skillful means, and assessment/acknowledgement. (Boyle et al., 2003)

Qualities of Good Work at Naropa			
Share intention	Wanting to Serve	Supportive Environment	Risk-Taking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring about community</li> <li>• Commitment to mission</li> <li>• Encountering others who share passion for community</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Sharing common goals and vision</li> <li>• Need for clear articulation and communication of mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion for other/self</li> <li>• Respect for other</li> <li>• Spontaneous generosity/desire to share</li> <li>• Giving space to others</li> <li>• Feeling of respect and harmony</li> <li>• Lack of self-importance</li> <li>• Taking initiative/responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Whole person</li> <li>• Spaciousness</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Spontaneity</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Clear line of communication and clearly articulated structures and procedures</li> <li>• Community practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willing to be a flaming fool</li> <li>• Availability to change</li> <li>• Willingness to push the resistance</li> <li>• Willingness to face fear and step in</li> <li>• Inquisitiveness/curiosity</li> <li>• Not afraid of experimentation</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Stepping out of conventional expectation</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Taking the risk of questioning others, policies and management</li> <li>• Willingness to risk and work with conflict</li> </ul>
Authentic communication	Skillful Means	Assessment/Acknowledgement	Additional Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness/reflection</li> <li>• Willingness to hear and incorporate feedback</li> <li>• Clear, direct, honest</li> <li>• Deep listening and being heard</li> <li>• Heightened interest</li> <li>• Inquisitiveness</li> <li>• Structure that promote this(regular staff meetings, checking in. bow, circle)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient approach and achieving the goal</li> <li>• Clarity re: the goal/intention</li> <li>• Seeing a need and going after it</li> <li>• Useful work</li> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Precision</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• System awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- big picture/small picture</li> <li>- Short-term/long-term</li> <li>- Awareness of impacts/ripples</li> <li>- Opportunities to connect outside of own department</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gratitude</li> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Interest and appreciation for others' work</li> <li>• Reflection</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Celebration and acknowledgement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling valued</li> <li>• Want support-training?</li> <li>• Connection with others</li> <li>• Connection with the teachings</li> <li>• Responsibility (walk your talk)</li> <li>• Being heard</li> <li>• Communication/dialogue</li> <li>• Dedication to student journey</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Humor</li> </ul>

*Figure 2.* Table showing components of Qualities of Good Work from contemplative education perspective.

## **Rationale**

### **Problem Statement**

Early childhood education is a fundamental part of human life. Contemplative early education became a significant early childhood approach that incorporates social-emotional based learning, meditation, and contemplative practices. Contemplative early education has enjoyed a good reputation in the last thirty years, in part owing to the school leaders who administrate and lead successful contemplative preschools.

Administrators and school leaders are the essential elements to leading a successful school. By examining the multiple contexts of Contemplative Education, studying the role of school leaders, and understanding the conception and implementation of techniques designed to identify and improve the quality of school leaders, we can begin to create transformation in schools in a significant and profound way.

Contemplative preschool has a unique character and background that incorporates contemplative philosophy into early education. Contemplative early childhood leaders have also played a major role in synchronizing contemplative pedagogy with leadership skills in a unique school culture.

Beer (2010) conducted the only scholarly research focused on contemplative administrators in the workplace culture of higher education. This investigation of contemplative early childhood leadership found no empirical studies relating how contemplative early childhood leaders implement contemplative pedagogies in the early childhood school settings. The limited research regarding contemplative early childhood leadership inspired my interest to gain an understanding of the journey of contemplative

preschool leaders in both personal and professional life. Hence, it is necessary to conduct a study to investigate the phenomenon of contemplative early education leadership.

### **Purpose Statement and Significant of Study**

The purpose of this collective case study is to understand how contemplative school leaders implement contemplative education in their personal and professional lives. This study is an exploration of school leaders who have adopted contemplative practices in their life and implemented these techniques throughout the whole school in a preschool setting. The study hopes to discover the qualities of school leaders most significant to creating transformation in schools.

The results that will be generated from the study are intended to contribute to the knowledge base on contemplative leadership.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **History of Contemplative Practice**

Contemplative education was founded by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Buddhist spiritual teacher who migrated to England in 1963 following his escape from Tibet after the unsuccessful uprising against the Communist government in 1959. Trungpa became a Buddhist monk at an early age and as an adult studied comparative religion at St. Anthony College at Oxford University. He wrote and translated many books related to Buddhism and philosophy, which introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to the West. He immigrated to the United States in 1970 where he started a meditation retreat center, conducted a three-month retreat program, taught religion classes at University of Colorado at Boulder, and established Naropa University as the first university based on contemplative education. Midal (2012) addressed that Trungpa



wanted Naropa to be a place where many traditions could all present their own wisdom. By provoking such encounters, sparks would certainly fly which could help all of society (p.253).

Naropa University was founded in 1974 in Boulder, Colorado as a nonsectarian university. As the founder of Naropa University, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche was able to perpetuate contemplative education in the United States, sowing and cultivating the seeds of Dhamma that Trungpa carried from his Buddhist heritage. In addition to Naropa University, Trungpa also inspired other educational and religious organizations including the Shambhala Meditation Center and Nalanda Foundation.

Since its introduction to the United States, contemplative education has attracted attention in the education arena globally. Educators across the United States have experienced the benefits of contemplative practices and a number of contemplative programs and organizations have emerged over time. Many reputable universities in the United States offer contemplative programs such as Harvard University, New York University, and Vanderbilt University. Moreover, a group of scholars and educators have participated in contemplative associations such as the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE), Garrison Institute, and the Center of Contemplative Mind in Society as professional development organization. These organizations have promoted contemplative education to help teachers to apply contemplative practices in their profession.

One of the programs that Naropa University offers is early childhood education. Applying contemplative education to early childhood education made Naropa a unique and special program. Naropa also provided lab preschool for children in the area.

Contemplative early childhood education at Naropa adopted the concept of mindfulness, meditation, and other contemplative pedagogy.

Although the origin of contemplative education was from monastic traditions, it has become more secularized through education. After Trungpa passed away, his followers have continued developing and contributing to his teaching on contemplative education. Their efforts have given contemplative pedagogy a tangible presence in early childhood education. In a personal interview, Gene mentioned that Trungpa considered education as a gate to dharma (personal communication July 15, 2013). Contemplative educators, who believe and follow contemplative practices, are adopting contemplative practices in their work-at all education levels from early childhood to higher education.

Mindfulness education, first introduced in the United States in the 1960's, shares some common traits with contemplative education. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Mindfulness education is a form of holistic education that includes social and emotional skills that were left out of the education system. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is one of the most recognized forms of mindfulness education. The goal of SEL is to bring social and emotional based curriculum into schools. Since its introduction in the 1960's the SEL program has become prevalent around the world and has been shown to support emotional regulation and social skills for students (Rechtschaffen, 2014, p.17).

### **What is Contemplative Pedagogy?**

The paradigm of contemplative education can be interpreted in a different ways dependent on experiences, perspective, and practices. Brown, Simmer-Brown & Grace (2011) stated that the mindful teacher is a foundation of contemplative pedagogy, and

effective contemplative pedagogy requires more than the teacher's meditation practice. Brown stated in the article "Inner to Outer: The Development of Contemplative Pedagogy," that practice in contemplative education can not exclude emotion. Teachers work actively on emotion that arises in the classroom as a part of their contemplative practices by acknowledging and letting go of emotion as it arises. Hanson and Mendius (2012) defined contemplative practices as a self-transformation and the practices produce individual results. Grace (2011) stated that contemplative pedagogy is the cultivation of inner awareness through first person investigations.

Zajonc (2006) explained ~~about~~ the development of contemplative practices in six stages: respect, gentleness, intimacy, participation, vulnerability, and transformation. Through the first stage, individuals are encouraged to respect the opinions and beliefs of others through compassion and reverence for the other's outlook on issues. The second stage is gentleness, in which individuals are encouraged to approach their subject with gentleness and calmness in order to avoid distortion. Another stage toward contemplative practice is intimacy. While science detaches itself from its subject, contemplative inquiry moves toward becoming intimate with its subject. Participation, vulnerability, and transformation are the other three stages in contemplative inquiry (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003). Through participation, the inquirer approaches the subject closely and participates in the experiences of its subject, yet remains secure enough to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is when the inquirer is confident enough that the phenomenon of ambiguity does not scare him, and it is in this stage that the inquirer can reach a resolution. Therefore, the stages of participation and vulnerability lead to the final stage of transformation where the inquirer becomes fully aware of the subject and reaches the

objective of contemplation. This contemplative practice is what some philosophies and religions seek to achieve. The definitive practice in contemplative inquiry is when we consider, examine, and become aware of what the subject is experiencing. In Buddhism, this is referred to direct perception and Greeks refer to it as *episteme* or *dianoia*.

Boorstein (2002) illustrated the quality of contemplative practices based on paramita qualities, a Buddhist teaching related to inherent characteristics of the human heart and human lifetime.

The practice of:	Develops the habit of:	By:	And is supported by:	And manifest as:
Generosity	Sharing	Experiencing the joy of not feeling needy, the ease of a peaceful mind, the possibility of the end of suffering.	Realizing that life is inevitably challenging and discovering the relief that comes with the absence of self-centered preoccupation	Contentment
Morality	Calming	Discovering the joy of practicing Wise Action, Wise Speech, Wise Livelihood.	Experiencing the pain of contrition and remorse and the pleasure of making amends (the bliss of blamelessness)	Virtue
Renunciation	Restraining	Realizing that insatiable wanting is suffering	Discovering that everything passes including uncomfortable desires (insight into impermanence)	Temperance
Wisdom	Discerning	Understanding that although our minds are continually and inevitably challenged by desires, peace is possible.	Practicing Wise Effort, Wise Concentration and Wise mindfulness, the mindfulness training aspects of Eightfold path.	Clarity
Energy	Striving	Realizing that there is no time other than now (insight into interdependence).	Focusing on the formidable task of ending suffering, and remembering the possibility of peace.	Indefatigability
Patience	Abiding	Understanding “this will change” and “It cannot be other yet” (insight into impermanence and into karma)	Cultivating tranquility by practicing Wise concentration	Tolerance
Truthfulness	Disclosing	Discovering what is true and telling the truth in ways that are helpful	Experiencing the discomfiting isolation of guile (separation from self and other) and the ease (peace)	Intimacy
Determination	Persevering	Seeing clearly into the cause of suffering so that the resolve to change habits of mind becomes spontaneous	Validating through direct experience, the possibility of the peaceful mind and consolidating through repeatedly experiencing the spiritual faculty of faith	Tenacity
Loving kindness	Well-wishing	Celebrating positive qualities in other people, cultivating forgiveness.	Remembering that since suffering is universal, everyone is motivated by the desire to be happy.	Kindness
Equanimity	Accepting	Experiencing the happiness of impartiality by paying attention to whole truth of every moment	Intuiting and acknowledging that this is a lawful cosmos, just and comforting in its dependability, understanding karma, cause and effect, and interdependence.	Compassion

*Figure 3.* Illustration of the quality of contemplative practices based on paramita qualities.

In contemplative classrooms, there are activities that differ from a traditional classroom. Brown (2011) mentioned in the article “Inner to Outer: The Development of Contemplative Pedagogy” that in addition to meditation on a regular basis, inviting a mindfulness bell and employing wait time are main techniques for contemplative teachers. Every time the mindfulness bell rings, it is time for the class to pause, breathe and bring their attention to the present moment. The wait time method is used when the teacher pauses for three seconds after asking a questions. Grace (2011) suggested that contemplative practices in a classroom range widely and can include sitting meditation, compassion practices, walking meditation, deep listening, yoga, calligraphy, chanting, nature observation, and journaling.

### **Benefits of Contemplative Practices**

Studies have shown a number of benefits to contemplative practices in many areas such as teaching and learning, psychology, and neuroscience.

Byrnes (2012) investigated contemplative teaching by a kindergarten teacher in a contemplative elementary school. The study revealed a picture of contemplative teaching which features compassion, integrity and mindful awareness while also influencing teachers internally. Contemplative teaching also moves the teacher and students’ view from teaching the mind and head toward teaching the body and heart. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) cited in Rechtschaffen (2014) showed that a Social Emotional Learning program helps to increase academic achievement by 11%. Dencev and Collister (2010) studied how contemplative pedagogy appears to nurture an emergent community in the context of the graduate-level classroom. Graduate students engaged in reflection and conversation linking contemplative practice and current

educational themes resulted in a contemplative classroom that actualized a nurturing, safe, open and honest classroom community. Parents and teachers with strong contemplative capacities can tune into a child's natural inclination toward the contemplative and guide and nurture it by modeling contemplative behavior in everyday life (Jenning, 2008; Wardle & Weunharot, 2013). Griswold (2010) concluded that the use of contemplative practices in human service education has been a positive experience for students as the learning tools for dealing with stressors in their lives better enables them to prevent burnout in their work and personal life. Grace (2011) pointed out that contemplative pedagogy is not about teaching for goals or outcomes or even effort, but is about being in a lifelong path of self-evaluation.

Contemplative practices can also result in better self-regulation, self-motivation, and stress reduction. The research conducted by Barbezet and Bush (2014) shows that practitioners gain in attention and awareness, health and well-being, self-understanding and compassion, as well as having the capacity to increase and deepen connections with others. Roeser and Peck (2009) found that contemplative practices promise to improve the regulation of attention, emotion, motivation, social cognition, and behavior, and could be a potential strategy for reducing the risks children face and improving both social and academic outcomes through schools. In the school setting, Schoeberlien and Sheth (2009) pointed out the benefit of mindfulness practice in teachers. Among the many benefits are improved focus and awareness, increased responsiveness to students' needs, emotional balance, stress management and stress reduction, healthy relationship at home and at work, an enhanced classroom climate, and an overall increase in general well-being. Hence, contemplative practices play an important role in helping students deal with

emotional problems and in promoting students' academic achievement. Ellayatt (2002) said that contemplative practices which included meditation and other contemplative techniques help individuals discover their habitual emotional response and the resultant impact on their mind, body, and actions in the world. They help them to be present in the moment and to attain balance and calm in the midst of challenging circumstances (Wright, 2009; Zajong, 2006). This state of calm centered-ness helps people see things more clearly and increases openness to new ideas and diverse viewpoints (Bache, 2011).

There are a number of findings relating the impact of contemplative practices to teacher retention. Some studies show that nearly 40% of new teachers leave their profession after five years. The top five reasons cited include poor working conditions, testing pressure, low salary, threat of layoff, and burn out. Palmer (2007) states that contemplative practices can be a part of professional development and will help the educators keep their own hearts alive in settings where people too often lose heart in their work.

Higher education relates directly to producing school administrators and teachers. Mahani (2012) suggested that institutions of higher education must work toward integrating contemplative education and mindfulness into their curriculum in order to enhance student learning and understanding through contemplation and personal insight. Furthermore, it is essential that these institutions implement multidimensional educational strategies that encourage a vigorous and universal understanding of cross-cultural communication. Experience, contemplations, and transformation all play essential roles in teaching and preparing future graduates for the current global community. Contemplative education introduces strategies that can be used by higher education leaders in creating multidimensional and effective learning environments.



Schoeberlein (2009) conducted a study on contemplative practices related to neuroscience that indicated that regular mindfulness practice trains attention, promotes emotional balance, fosters a sense of well-being, and thus leads to physiological and anatomical changes in the brain associated with these experiences. Other changes in the body demonstrate further the benefit of ongoing mindful practice, including heightened immunity, improved stress-management skills, and reduced exposure to stress hormones. These health-related outcomes are relevant at school, since good health makes teaching easier and more effective. Moreover, Hanson and Mendius (2012) showed that what happens in your mind changes your brain, both temporarily, and in more lasting ways – neurons that fire together, wire together. In addition, what happens in your brain also changes your mind, since the brain and mind are a single, integrated system. Therefore, you can use your mind to change your brain to benefit your mind and everyone else whose life you touch. Davidson, et al. (2012) conducted research in neuroscience, cognitive science, development psychology, and education as well as contemplative traditions to examine the cultivation of positive development in a set of mental skills and socio-emotional disposition that are central to education. These include self-regulatory skills associated with emotion and attention, self-representations, and prosocial dispositions such as empathy and compassion. It should be possible to strengthen these positive qualities and dispositions through systematic contemplative practices, which induce plastic changes in brain function and structure, supporting prosocial behavior and academic success in young people. These putative beneficial consequences call for focused programmatic research to better characterize which forms and frequencies of practice are most effective for which types of children and adolescents. Results from such

research may help refine training programs to maximize their effectiveness at different ages and to document the changes in neural function and structure that might be induced. Contemplative traditions feature this worldview in a salient way, viewing many traits, particularly those associated with virtuous character, as the product of skills that one can cultivate through training. (p.154) At the heart of such practices is repetition and practice to cultivate more positive habits of mind. The idea of regularity of practice and repetition meshes well with neuroscientific understanding of how new connections are formed in the brain and the impact of regular practice on brain circuits and complex cognitive function. Roeser and Zelazo (2012) researched the effect of contemplative training on body, mind, and brain. They found that the brain evolved in response to contemplative practices students engaged in over time for extended periods under the guidance of experienced practitioners. As a result, these practices led the students to develop particular skills such as focused attention, emotional regulation, empathy, compassion for others, and even physical health (Worley, 2001; Worley, 2005). Kemeny et al. (2012) studied an effect of contemplative practices on negative emotional behavior and prosocial response. After an eight week intensive meditation session, participants reduced destructive enactment of emotions and enhanced prosocial response.

#### Definition of Term

*Contemplate* –to view or consider with continuous attention; using observation to view both inner and outer experiences and phenomena

*Contemplative education* –a philosophy that integrates introspection and experiential learning into academic study to support academic, social engagement, develop self-understanding.

*Contemplative pedagogy* –the science of education that adapts contemplative traditions to teaching and learning

*Contemplative practice* –activities that train the mind such as meditation, yoga, etc.

*Contemplative preschool* –a school for young children age 0-8- year-old that based on contemplative education methods and philosophy

*Meditation* –a practice to train the mind to focus and be awake and aware in the present moment.

*Mindfulness* – a quality of mind of being conscious or aware of something.

Contemplative early education leader an educator in the role of director or co-director who works in a contemplative preschool.

### **Limitation of the study**

This study is a collective case study of the roles and experiences of contemplative early education leaders in contemplative preschools. The study has limitation in the number of contemplative preschools and its findings cannot be considered to be representative of the experiences of all contemplative early education leaders in all locations.

## CHAPTER 2

### Method

The purpose of this study is to understand how contemplative early childhood leaders in contemplative preschool implement contemplative pedagogy in their leadership roles.

#### Research Design

This research study used collective case study design to explore this topic and used phenomenography design to examine the contemplative early childhood leadership in a contemplative preschool context.

The construct of the research study was that of phenomenography qualitative design as defined by Marton (as cited in Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p.218). “Phenomenography is the empirical study of the different ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, conceptualize various phenomena, and aspects of the world around us. The words experience, perceive...etc., are used interchangeably.” The process involves identifying emerging questions and formulating procedures from data typically collected in the participants’ own setting. Data analysis inductively builds from these particulars to generate themes and inform interpretations of the data. Through the use of bracketing (the process of setting aside one’s beliefs, feelings, and perceptions to be more open to given phenomena,) the researcher can experience a sense of “newness” to elicit rich and descriptive data through the study (Creswell, 2013, p.83).

I chose phenomenography design in order to explore the lived experiences of the contemplative early childhood leaders as they implement contemplative pedagogy in their

professional life. Phenomenography qualitative study as a paradigm of constructivism helps to understand the differing ways in which people experience and apprehend various phenomena of the world (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 220). The key features of phenomenography are uncovering differences in understanding, and locating socially significant ways of thinking shared across particular groups. I investigated the contemplative early childhood leadership in the contemplative preschool context.

### **Research Question**

This study aimed to answer the central research question: “How does the phenomenon of contemplative education manifest in the work of contemplative early childhood leaders?” Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative research questions should be open-ended, involving, and non-directional. Sub-questions further particularize the central questions into specific areas for inquiry, which also serves to focus further on the central phenomena (Creswell, 2013, p.140-141). Sub-questions for this study are:

1. How have contemplative early childhood leaders transformed themselves as contemplative practitioners?
2. What are the views, beliefs, values, and goals of their contemplative way of life?
3. How do they implement contemplative practices in their leadership roles?

### **Case selection**

In order to get in-depth perspectives, this study used purposeful selection. With the unique background and teaching method of contemplative preschool, the number of contemplative preschools are limited. So, I purposefully chose two contemplative

preschools that related to contemplative university as field studies. Creswell (2013) suggested that the case study or collective case studies will explore a real life, contemporary bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collations (p.97). The two contemplative preschools in this study are considered as bounded system because they were initially inspired by contemplative principles from the contemplative university. The first school examined is a contemplative university lab. Staffs of this school are graduated from a contemplative university and are contemplative practitioners. The second school was founded by a contemplative university alumnus who adopted contemplative principles as a school's core curriculum. The participants in the study are experienced contemplative practitioners with an existing relationship with a contemplative university as an alumni and adjunct professor who are actively engaged with activities related to contemplative education.

### **Data Collection**

Phenomenological studies have a variation of collection data but the primary method of data collection for this study was a phenomenological interview. This type of interview typically involves an unconstructed approach with an unforced flow of questions, documents, and participants observation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Data for this study was gathered in different phases through a semi-structured interview, observation, and documents.

The researcher contacted contemplative early childhood leaders through email to get permission to interview and observe the school during regular class time.

#### **Phase one: Semi- structured interview**

The researcher created an interview protocol to ask contemplative early childhood leaders questions under three topics that related to sub-research questions which were personal life as a contemplative practitioner; view, belief, values, and goals on the contemplative path; and implementation of contemplative education in the leadership role. The interview questions were developed to encourage an un-forced flow from the interviewees. The questions were open-ended to allow the participants to express their perspective on the topic. Each semi-constructed interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim including speaker's tone, pacing, timing, and pauses which can be important elements for data interpretation (Sevin-Baden & Major, 2013). The transcriptions were saved as a word document with personal identification removed. The aim of the interview was to enhance the depth of understanding from contemplative early childhood leaders. Furthermore, field notes were taken during each interview. This data was saved manually with personal identification information removed.

### **Phase two: Observation**

The researcher observed the contemplative preschool director's actions which included interaction with teachers and children in a classroom during school hours. This was conducted as an informal observation. The researcher looked at the school environment, interaction between contemplative early childhood leaders with students, staff, and parents. The researcher recorded the data by taking photos and taking field notes, and all data was saved manually with personal identification information removed. Observation resulted in qualitative data collection that was fundamental to understand and illustrate a culture or context of the research (Sevin-Baden & Major, 2013). The researcher used observations to collect the artifacts to describe the contemplative

preschool. The researcher followed the observation guidelines of Marriam (2009) that suggested to look at the following factors; physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversation subtle factor, and your own behavior.

Contemplative observation applied to this session. Contemplative observation is a common practice for contemplative educators. The researcher observed both the external environment and feelings, thoughts, and body. This technique was formalized by Brown (1999) and is defined as a method that synchronizes the observer with the learning environment; awakens and clarifies sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions; and develop knowledge and compassion. Contemplative observation is not only observing what is happening in the environment, but also what is simultaneously occurring within ourselves. The role of the observer will be passive participant. As passive participants, the researcher has minimal involvement in the field and the researcher seeks to be detached, observing rather than engaging, (Sevin-Baden & Major, 2013). After each observation session, the researcher contemplates what they have observed by meditation and reflection and records these observations in the field notes.

Contemplative reflection is helpful to take a fresh view of something and see what ever is being researched “as it is”. Data from field notes were saved as a digital file with personal identification information removed.

### **Phase three: Document**

Documentation is recommended to use in many of types of qualitative studies such as grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative approach. Documentation includes making records of things that may take written, photographic, electronic, or other forms (Sevin-Baden & Major, 2013). This study used textual documents and visual documents.



The researcher collected the school's public documents such as school websites, articles written by school's faculty about contemplative early education, school newsletter, school calendar, school agendas, etc. The researcher asked for permission from school directors to take photographs of environment, posters, displays, etc. Data from documentation will be saved in a computer with a secure password to protect the data.

### **Role of the researcher**

The researcher is a contemplative educator involved in the contemplative community at Naropa University. I attended contemplative summer retreats as part of a master's program in contemplative education.

The researcher have practiced meditation for fifteen years but found it difficult to bring the result of meditation to personal and work life until discovering Naropa University. Naropa provided authentic experiences as a contemplative practitioner. Studying at Naropa increased the researcher's understanding about contemplative education, including meditation, being aware of six senses as tools to remain in the present moment; deep listening to bring authentic communication to the community; and dialogue about experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Moreover, I was able to establish a connection to contemplative educators nationwide and worldwide.

With a background in early childhood education, I found that the contemplative community has expanded early childhood education methods and practices. Naropa's early childhood department has contributed to contemplative early childhood educators and contemplative preschools. My experiences at Naropa inspired and reshaped views of working with children.

The researcher have also seen the benefit of contemplative methods in parenting her one-year-old daughter. The same techniques that are used to awaken basic goodness in children in the classroom have personal application in the context of parenting. The benefits of contemplative education in working with children is a life-long commitment for the researcher in her role as educator, parent, and individual.

### **Participants and Setting**

This study consisted of the two contemplative early childhood leaders at contemplative preschools in Boulder, Colorado. Contemplative early childhood leaders are holding the position of school directors or co-directors. The participants in the study are in the preschools that bring contemplative practices into education. Contemplative preschool is a Buddhist-inspired preschool enrolling students from age two to six years old. The first preschool included in this study is a contemplative university lab preschool and the second school was founded by contemplative university alumni. Both school directors are life-long contemplative practitioners. Participation in this study was voluntarily and subjects could end their participation at any time without risk or harm.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis of this study will follow Creswell (2013) data analysis spiral following the phases of organizing data; reading and recording; describing, classifying and interpreting; and visually representing the data. For this study, the data will include data collection from semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation.

Following the interviews and data collection, all interviews will be recorded. Interview transcriptions, field notes, documents, and photographs will be organized and stored in a secure file.

Audio records will be listened to several times before transcription, to ensure accurate characterization of the information about contemplative early childhood leadership. Transcriptions of the interviews will be verbatim to preserve the exact words originally used. (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013)

Transcriptions will be thoroughly reviewed for the purpose of noting key ideas and concepts. These notes will be compared with field notes, documents, and photographs.

Data will then be described and classified in the form of code and categories to create the theme of the study. Any patterns that show a relationship or correspondence of two or more categories will be identified. Data will then be comprehensively reviewed, analyzed, interpreted, and represented visually in graphics to represent findings.

This study will follow a collective case study design, thus, the interviews, field notes, and documents will be analyzed for each case as multiple data sources.

### **Validation Strategies**

Validation of this qualitative study is at the foundation level so the researcher should be able to lay claim to the strength of the findings and demonstrate that they are true (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Credibility of this study is established using the validation strategies of triangulation, member checking, peer review and researcher's reflexivity.

The data is triangulated with different pieces of data collection which are interviews, observation field notes, and documentation. The researcher conducted field studies independently and possesses prior knowledge of contemplative early education leaders and is experienced in contemplative education practices. The researcher

acknowledges potential bias resulting from prior knowledge and experience. The researcher will provide a rich description of each case by presenting the participant's voice. Lastly, this study will be reviewed by other qualified professionals who are familiar with contemplative education and qualitative data analysis to ensure the accuracy and quality of the study.

All participants will be treated in accordance to the ethical guideline of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB). There are no identifiable risks of participants in this study. Some considerations will be kept in mind in dealing with participants of contemplative early childhood leaders. First, all participants will talk about their personal and professional life of their contemplative journey. Second, there is a possibility that the participants in this study will feel uncomfortable discussing their experience or talking about their personal situations. Lastly, personal history offered a way to gain entry and conduct the study in a respectful and trustworthy manner.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Findings

The purpose of this collective case study is to understand how contemplative school leaders implement contemplative education in their personal and professional lives. This study is an exploration of school leaders who have adopted contemplative practices in their life and implemented these techniques throughout the whole school in a preschool setting. The following research questions informed this study:

1. How have contemplative early childhood leaders transformed themselves as contemplative practitioners?
2. What are the views, beliefs, values, and goals of their contemplative way of life?
3. How do they implement contemplative practices in their leadership roles?

During in-depth interviews, the participants described their experience as contemplative practitioners and contemplative early childhood leaders, and they also discussed implementation of contemplative practices in their leadership roles.

The research findings that this chapter reports are based on analysis of the following data sources: semi-constructed interview, observations, and documentation.

### Study Findings

#### **Topic 1: How have contemplative early childhood leaders transformed themselves as contemplative practitioners?**

The beginning of contemplative early childhood leaders in contemplative education life was from their personal inspirations. Nevertheless, the embodiment of their

personal interest and the world of contemplative education started by joining the contemplative community in the variety of gates that Chögyam Trungpa established. The story of Eve and Diana on their transformational in contemplative education illustrated their life as contemplative practitioners.

**Eve, leader of Bloom Preschool.**

Eve is a contemplative early childhood leader, teacher of young children, and professor of early childhood programs. She is originally from Massachusetts and moved to Boulder, Colorado in 1974. While she taught at a community college, one of her students connected her with Bloom Preschool and Naropa University. She has been a co-director at Bloom for fifteen years. She has gained understanding of contemplative education through her work by integrating her background in early childhood education, school administration, and contemplative point of view. Eve was a part of the group who participated and developed the early childhood program at Naropa University.

After Eve became the director at Bloom, she decided to pursue the second master degree at Naropa. Eve shared her experiences of being in the first-cohort of the contemplative education program. She shared that the summer retreat, which is mandatory for the program, happened at Shambhala Mountain Center in Ft. Collins, Colorado. She vividly recalled living in platform tents during summer retreats. Meditation in a peaceful and quiet place surrounded by nature was quite phenomenal. She has continued contributing to contemplative education as adjunct faculty in the contemplative education program and participating in the contemplative education community.

Her advocacy in contemplative early childhood education is evident in her professional awards and memberships, such as the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Boulder County Association for the Education of Young Children, membership in the Early Care and Education Council of Boulder County, and the Professional Pathway Committee, working to provide professional development opportunities and training to the local early childhood community. She is especially interested in issues surrounding quality of care for young children and how professional development and those in leadership roles inspire and support quality programs. She is currently an adjunct faculty member in the Contemplative Education program at Naropa. Eve acknowledged that:

The other thing in the early childhood program at Naropa at that time, I took, taught, or participated in the TA program for every class within the early childhood program. For instance, Richard was the only one teaching in the early childhood program at that time, so I took a Maitri class with Richard even before I got into the master's program.

Currently, Eve has still devoted herself on contemplative early childhood education.

**Diana; leader of Tiger preschool.**

Diana had a passion in Buddhism since her early age. She read her first Dharma book when she was thirteen and became Buddhism when she was nineteen. She was the only one in her family that became a Buddhism. Since she was young, she had strong intention that she wanted to be a teacher and wanted to work with children. She has been interested in religious study since she was teenager, however, she pursued her undergrad

degree at Naropa and double majored in religious study and education. Diana expressed that “Teaching and working with children is really a path of awakening.”

She discovered that Buddhism and education were influenced each other and she defined that “Teaching is a contemplative practice”. From her small inspiration and passion, she founded Tiger Preschool which is one of the most reputation contemplative preschool. The school has strong roots and grows in a beautiful way. Diana told:

This school came together in a very organic way starting with a few children in 1995 and began growing, growing, growing.

Diana is faithful, sophisticated, and insightful in contemplative education. She is a lifelong contemplative educator, and her path to becoming a contemplative early childhood leader spans the last 20 years. She has pursued a master’s in Educational Psychology at the University of Colorado.

**Topic 2: What are the views, beliefs, values, and goals of their contemplative way of life?**

The journey on the contemplative way of life of contemplative early childhood leaders has happened in an organic way. The views, belief, values, and goals on the contemplative way of life are individual but nature of its notion is interconnected. The important concepts that emerged from interviews and data collections were

1. Meditation
2. Contemplative art
3. Contemplative movement
4. Wait time
5. Present moment interaction



6. Quality of openness
7. Teaching is contemplative practice

### **Meditation**

Participants experienced the benefit of meditation in both personal and professional life. Eve has practiced meditation through the Shambhala tradition as a part of her personal contemplative practices. While she said that her meditation progress was at a slow pace, she reflected that measuring progress in her practice was an ability of letting go and being aware of the present moment, that it is a time to start the moment again. As Eve explained, “The progress really is, you know, that every minute is a time to begin again. So you let that go, just like you put a random thought in storage at that time. So here is another day, another chance.”

Eve has deepened her understanding of contemplative education through practicing meditation following the Shambhala tradition. She is a life-long meditator and continually attends meditation retreats. Eve shared that:

I took Shambhala level in the Shambhala center. Shambhala training is about working with meditation, and they have levels of that. It is more about deepening the connection level of meditation; some of them are in a weekend or a couple weekends and you go and do a lot of meditation. I think Shambhala training is one of those gates to the Dharma that Trungpa inspired, because he tried to make it in a secular way. Some approaches have so many religious trapping and overlay that it does not seem approachable. So I think it is still one of the middle way that we all can touch and reach from where we are, and it is very accessible

Diana is a life-long meditator, and she meditates daily and frequently attained long Dharma retreats. She echoed that:

I find that sitting meditation in stillness connects her with herself and helps her to refresh her mind.

### **Contemplative art**

The participant experienced different form of their contemplative practices. Both of them perceived contemplative art as a tool to slowdown, express emotions, experience the power of being in the present moment.

Eve has done Ikebana or Japanese flower arrangement as her contemplative practice. Ikebana is manifested in the practice of contemplatively bringing the aesthetic aspect of nature to an expressive art. Ikebana is a meditative practice incorporating an expression of feeling and emotion by being in the present moment and letting the inner wisdom arise in an organic way. Eve has also provided Ikebana training for teachers and parents at Bloom Preschool. Eve described her experiences:

I do Ikebana as a part of my contemplative practice. It is not just meditation. I like physical meditation, and especially Ikebana, because it reflects what is going on. . . . You cannot escape what is happening in yourself. It is kind of like sitting with your thoughts. It manifests very physically right in front of you. So once in a while, I would not say every year but every couple of years, we do Ikebana training for the people who are interested, and it is available if they take classes of Naropa.

Diana experiences art as a contemplative practice that connects her to the world. She shared that:

For me different art form that I always do is mosaic art so I can see what is happening in my mind

### **Contemplative movement**

Both participants had done contemplative movement.

Diana considered dance as her contemplative movement. Mindful dancing can be one form of contemplative movement. She stated that:

I dance a lot and do a lot of other contemplative movements. I feel that it is really wonderful I think.

Eve has also mentioned about Taichi, Chi Kong, Akido as a part of contemplative movement that she has done and encourages the teachers to practice.

### **Wait time**

Eve has found that some essential elements of the contemplative way of working with children are wait time and pausing. It is a crucial strategy of working with yourself, and a tool to delay thought and let the mind work in an organic way without judging in conflict situations. She explained the contemplative nature of wait time:

Wait time and pausing are an important piece of working with yourself and being able to have a space to understand what is happening, either in yourself or in a situation. For instance, when you are working with children, rather than diving into fixing things all the time, can you work with your impulse? Adults have their impulse, especially, when a conflict situation is arising with children. You know, *go fix it*, but have we prepared the children. Over several years that they might be here, by the time they are four or five years, they are really capable and skillful to be able to resolve the conflict.

### **Lineage tradition**

Eve values the lineage tradition that has passed along through Chögyam Trungpa's students and followers. Lineage tradition is a foundation of community building in contemplative preschool. Especially, Bloom Preschool has a deep connection with Shambhala lineage and Naropa university. Eve described the connection to this lineage:

We work very clearly with a connection to Naropa. You know that we are part of lineage tradition, and I think that when people come through, it is something that is more as a felt sense thing . . . than anything we say. But, you know, they see what the teachers are doing with the children--how the children are with each other and see how teachers facilitate that, so I think that they are attracted to something that I am always pretty quick to credit to Trungpa for establishing a variety of gates to the Dharma, and I think that is the one of them.

### **Present moment interaction**

Working with an impulse or breath when conflicts happen is a part of the present moment interaction. When conflict arose, Eve firmly recommended a contemplative teacher can just be still and observe what is happening. The contemplative way of working with children provides tools to resolve the problems when conflicts arise:

Children have been in the same group which has also allowed them to develop their relationships in a strong way. Can we step out of the way, not ignore. . . . can you step out of the way and take that breath? Make sure that you are energetically connected with the children.

### **Quality of openness in contemplative education**

Diana described that contemplative education embraces a lot of openness:

It is not just we do not have things formed. You have seen a lot of forms, but it has to be approached with a lot of open-mind, so that is one thing.

Diana pointed on a quality of openness in contemplative education. She described that:

Contemplative education does not have a solid foundation and framework but quality of openness that make the contemplative education model fit any individual. I feel like the educational model cannot be put in a box in any kind of permanent way. It does not fit because it is related to individuals as human beings. It is really changeable and we are always changing, so one model cannot fit one person.

### **Teaching is a contemplative practice**

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Eve values the lineage tradition that has passed along through Chögyam Trungpa's students and followers. Lineage tradition is a foundation of community-building in contemplative preschool, especially, Bloom Preschool. It has a deep connection with Shambhala lineage. Eve described the connection to this lineage:

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Diana shared a story of Chögyam Trungpa in his teaching:

“My favorite story about Chögyam Trungpa is how he used to prepare for his classes. He was prepared, apparently (I have never met him) but down to the most minute details: what he was wearing and how he was standing, very precise rehearsing of teaching his lesson. And his practice was to walk to the threshold of his classroom door where he would drop his preparation like baggage at the door, and let it arise fresh. Most of the time, what he planned to teach, he would teach, but in a sense of openness. Curiosity really guided him in a practice of preparation. Like baggage at the door. I love this very much, because I feel that to really meet children fully, you have to have a plan you can tell to the school. And when you see people that do not prepare, the chaos does not serve anyone. Preparation is critical, but it is just as critical to drop that preparation in a certain

way, in a kind of *let it go*, to know that there is just a tool and some bricks.

Really, if you are going to build a house, you really have much to do. In some sense, once the house is being built, you really notice the brick, you know. So the brick is important, but the vision is important, too.

### **Topic 3: How do they implement contemplative practices in their leadership roles?**

Implementation of contemplative practices in contemplative early childhood

leadership that emerged from data are:

1. Synchronizing a strong foundation of contemplative principles and practicality
2. Contemplative staffing
3. Application of the mandala principle and five-qualities

While the themes are reported as being separate, there is considerable overlap among themes. However, from a holistic point of view, participants' responses to the interview questions often addressed more than one theme, and some responses were common to all. The interview data are described where they appear to fit most logically.

#### **Theme 1: Synchronizing the foundation of contemplative principles and practicality**

Responses to interview questions and data from documentation indicated that synchronizing a strong foundation of contemplative principles and reality was the critical element of being a contemplative early childhood leader. On one hand, contemplative early childhood leaders continually deepen their understanding of contemplative principles; on the other hand, they also seek the middle way to balance their belief and reality and make the paradigms of contemplative early childhood education both practical and accessible.

Contemplative early childhood education from Eve's perspective was a Dharma that Chöyam Trungpa simplified to be easily accessible in a secular context. Eve recalled that "I think Trungpa established a variety of gates to the Dharma, and contemplative early education is the one of them."

Bloom Preschool is one example of balancing contemplative principles with practical educational requirements. Bloom was the first contemplative preschool recognized in the field. Eve described how Bloom participated in the State rating program. A few years ago, Bloom Preschool qualified for a grant under the Colorado rating system called Qualistar Rating. Qualistar Rating is a program for evaluating the school system by looking at five components: learning environment, family partnership, training, and education, adult-to-child ratios and group size, and accreditation. Earning the Qualistar Rating grant shows that Eve has effectively balanced contemplative principles with the practical demands of the state education system.

Belief and practicality were the concern of Diana in her leadership roles:

Two fold -- just like it is with everything. You can boil it down. The fermented freedom boiled down is, you know, practicality and vision. My job as a leader of the school is very practical in some sense, but it is completely visionary. I have to hold a vision of the main thing. I have to hold the vision, but the vision without the practicality and the whole thing will fall apart.

Eve affirmed that she could balance the vision of her leadership role by being aware of the middle way in her belief:

The vision was established a long time ago. There is the vision of the school that has to do with a quality program for young children and their families. I think as I



said, underneath some of that is the doorway to the Dharma aspect, but that is not in all kinds of circumstances. It is a part of being a high-quality contemplative program for young children.

Another practical consideration that cannot be neglected is financial stability. Retaining and attracting the quality of teachers to develop the depth of the program is crucial and requires a financial commitment:

The goal is being a high-quality contemplative program for young children and for the families. We do have to have financial stability. That is important. We have to be able to attract and retain great people as employees, so really good teachers. You can do that, again, by having financial stability and by being able to offer people reasonable pay and by being able to have benefits.

In the article, *what is contemplative preschool?*, was written by Bloom's former director. Bloom preschool was in tight budget circumstances and it was difficult to retain experienced teachers, had frequent turnover in leadership, and lack of continuity of staff development. A decision was made to increase the enrollment. Bloom continued to learn from its own experiences. The business element has been a consideration aspect for Bloom, but later Bloom became a subsidiary of Naropa that helped Bloom to balance the business and contemplative tradition in a practical way, Scott (1991).

By balancing vision and practicality, Diana shared her thoughts about using present-moment interaction in dealing with conflicts that happen. It sometime seems as if vision or belief are not compatible with real life:

We have present-moment interaction and connection between teachers and parents. Of course, teachers and parents, and parents and children, but you know

all of this moment we connect to each other and have a lot of wisdom that has been arising just from the connections. If we put this on the other side of the scale, honoring the present moment on the way, then in a moment, magic happens and a lot of learning happens.

As Diana explained, using contemplative practice to be in the present moment can help teachers, parents, and children to create meaningful learning experiences through shared wisdom and insights that arise from everyday circumstances. This example shows how contemplative principles and practical methods can be balanced by early childhood school leaders.

### **Theme 2: Contemplative staffing**

The contemplative school leaders interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of teachers to the success of a contemplative preschool. A quality contemplative early childhood program requires experienced contemplative early childhood teachers. Interviews indicated three elements necessary for maintaining a well-qualified staff of teachers:

1. Staff selection
2. Retention
3. Professional development

#### **Staff Selection**

Contemplative early childhood leaders look for three qualities in their recruitment process: openness, curiosity, and familiarity with contemplative education.

Eve said that in regards to staff selection, she looks for people with some kind of openness and curiosity about the Shambhala world. Diana said she looks for people who are open to cultivating and understanding contemplative education:

There are a couple of things about staff selection. One is there are requirements for a license. For certain people and certain positions, that is a consideration. That is legislation. And then the amount of experience people have is important, because if they demonstrate a certain kind of commitment, that means they're not just stopping off here for temporary. It's an easy job to get and they move to something else.

DIANA said:

Children need people who are alive and vibrant teachers. And to have vibrant, alive teachers, they have to have a space to bring what they have to offer into the classroom, so the curriculum model has to be flexible to allow teachers to offer who they really are. Otherwise the model is too tight. Then no one can actually be who they are. There is not enough space in it.

The consideration of looking for teachers who were a part of lineage tradition of contemplative education is addressed. Lineage tradition referred to the unbroken chain transmission that can be traced to the Buddhist teacher. In this study, it specifically refers to everything that Chögyam Trungpa contributed that is included in the Shambhala tradition, Naropa University, contemplative education, etc.

### **Retaining**

Both contemplative early childhood leaders talked about how respecting and honoring the inner wisdom of teachers helps to retain the teachers in a contemplative

preschool. The principle of practice at Bloom Preschool specifies “respecting the passion and style of teachers.” Following this practice has shown people are the best when they feel appreciation and have freedom to be themselves within the aim of the school. It will help teachers bring out their inherent intuition, love, and personal style.

Diana has encouraged the teachers to bring their contemplative practices, whether they are yoga, music aspects, or contemplative art to the classroom:

The curriculum model has to be flexible to allow teachers to offer who they really are. Otherwise the model is too tight. Then no one can actually be who they are.

There is not enough space in it.

Not allowing teachers to overwork was Diana’s principle to preserve the quality of teacher work.

I have kind of a rule -- people aren’t allowed to overwork. I feel it reduces the quality of teaching. So I tell people, “You cannot stay” and “You have to leave.” “Do not stay after that unless you have a reason and really want to;” otherwise, the expectation is that you do not work too hard.

The low turnover at Bloom Preschool reflects that it is good at retaining teachers. Bloom has created the emotional environment to be a community that has authentic communication and genuine relationship. Principle of practice of Bloom preschool stated that honoring the basic goodness in everything helps to create community. Basic goodness is a way of viewing things in a positive way and believe that each individual has a basic goodness as a gift from nature. Low turnover develops the depth of the program. Eve shared:

I think longevity of teachers is a measure of program success. We do attract people and they do stay with us for a long time, so we do not have turnover. That was an incredible measure and it is something you can broadcast. I think I always tell families that we have a quality program because of the quality teachers that we have and we will be able to keep them. We have a very low turnover.

Encouraging staff to have contemplative practices and being flexible for staff to nourish themselves helps retain quality teachers, and the importance of these practices will be explained as part of professional development.

### **Professional development.**

The professional development activities commonly found in contemplative preschools were daily group meditation in school, flexible leave for teachers to have long retreats on their own, and contemplative practices introduced in staff training.

Teacher's daily meditation was found in both schools, although in slightly different forms. Bloom Preschool has a community time in the morning and afternoon for teachers to meditate routinely. Beginning to gather the energy by Morning meditation includes setting intentions for the day. To end the day, teachers meditate and dedication of merit. Both schools had encouraged teachers to engage contemplative practices including meditation on their own.

Offering flexibility for teachers to do retreats and take a couple of weeks off of work was available at Tiger Preschool. Diana believes that it is nourishing for teachers and the benefit of the practice will be passed on to children. Diana shared that:

Megan, who was not here on Monday, just finished a three-week long Dharma program, and it was convenient for her to go because I can find the substitute for

her. But then she comes back and she is nourished and she has much to offer to the children. It is a way that I prevent turnover: a certain degree of freedom, pay as high as possible, but more than that, just appreciating people who are here--really appreciating them--and cultivating that warmth so people want to stay because it is a fun, warm, working environment.

Eve echoed this point in her support of teachers' contemplative practices:

I think almost everybody here does have some kind of what you consider contemplative practices. Not actually the Shambala lineage setting tradition, but other kinds of those traditions... there are either yoga practitioners or Vipassana, which is another kind of meditation.

Bloom Preschool and Tiger Preschool both include contemplative art in teacher training. Eve has provided Ikebana, or Japanese flower arrangement training to teachers every couple of years. It is an artistic discipline and meditation that is a part of professional development. Diana shared her idea about contemplative art for teacher training:

The arts . . . all arts can be contemplative art forms . . . any art. So the teacher's mind is holding the way that art form is a contemplative art form, but it is so much about teacher training and teacher preparation.

Moreover, Bloom Preschool is a part of Naropa University's lineage. Teachers at Bloom can take classes and attend the conferences at Naropa University without expenses. Eve said that: "It is available so they can take classes at Naropa. Everybody here can take classes at Naropa."

### **Theme 3: Mandala principle and five-qualities**

The Mandala is a principle rooted in Tibetan Buddhism. It can be defined in many ways, such as a sand artwork, magic circle, or ritual geometric shape. The basic knowledge of the mandala principle has been passed down through the Shambhala lineage. Brauen (1997) explained in his book *The Mandala Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism* that there are four types of mandalas. Two are outer mandalas that were made famous as artworks of powdered color painted on textile. Two are inner mandalas: the mandala as a form of meditation and the body as a mandala.

Findings from this study will focus on the inner mandala underlying the cosmos system and energy body of people. The contemplative early childhood leaders interviewed have used the mandala principle to view their schools as a holistic system and to understand the qualities of individual teachers. As a holistic system, the mandala refers to the interconnected nature of the energies of individuals. Each individual has his or her own energy and character that impacts the whole system. As a method for understanding the qualities of individual teachers, the mandala shows that an individual as a human being contains the five-qualities that are earth, water, fire, wind, and space. Each element has a dualistic quality, which means it has both positive and negative aspects manifested by each energy. The five-qualities are known by other names, such as Buddha energy, Buddha quality, and Maitri- energy (Chogyam & Dechen, 1997).

The water element, or “Vajra” in Sanskrit, is symbolized by the color blue. The quality of the water element is the brilliant clarity of mirror-like wisdom. Evans, Shenpen, and Townsend (2008) stated that in the mirror-like wisdom of bare of awareness, cognition is pure, effortless knowing; intellect is unfiltered by bias;

perspective is wide open to clear understanding. The mirror-like wisdom quality is gifted in naturally picking up on the pattern in the world, resulting in spontaneous and accurate analysis where the knower does not get in the way of knowing. On the other hand, water can flood and destroy things, so distorted water energy manifests as anger, aggressiveness, hatred, and violence.

The earth element, called “Ratna” in Sanskrit, is associated with the color yellow. Earth is manifested as the wisdom of equanimity, a peaceful balance, harmony and a panoramic awareness which sees the value in all things. This wisdom has a sense of contentment, boundlessness, richness, wealth, prosperity and unending generosity. According to Evans, et al. (2008) the earth quality is resourceful and bountiful. An individual exhibiting the healthy aspects of the earth quality is not impressed with him or herself even at ease, needing neither praise nor gratitude. The negative side of earth element is shown as a bloated sense of pride or deflated sense of inadequacy (Walker, 1995, 309). Humans have taken natural resources from the earth to manufacture products resulting in wealth and prosperity, so the earth element can refer to arrogance, pride, fixity, and willfulness. The Sanskrit word *ratna* refers to jewels, which included gold, referencing the golden wealth and abundance represented by the healthy manifestation of this quality.

The fire element is known as Padma energy in contemplative principles. Red is the symbol of the fire element. Walker (1995) noted that the bright red light of the purified element of fire is said to shine from the heart center of primordial Buddha and is described as the wisdom of discriminate awareness. This wisdom of fire energy manifests as empathy, intuition, desire, and passion. The fire element is the primary wisdom of



poets and artists, illuminating and refining their aesthetic. The padma quality can also be characterized by an obsessive desire to magnetize or grasp the most pleasurable and ideal situations. When people manifest its confused quality, they can cling to what gives pleasure or become overly emotional. Brown (2001) defined the fire element as beneficial in developing communication and aesthetic awareness in students.

Wind or Karma. According to the dualistic vision of the air element, experience of our spacious nature can be perceived as groundless anxiety. Air or wind can be manifested as a sense of panic, because air is invisible and intangible. Air energy can generate paranoia and fear. The positive qualities of wind are observed in free-flowing energy and efficient progress toward a goal. Trungpa (1999) addressed the liberated energy of air as self-fulfilling activity and accomplishment (p.163). The power of air is expressed within a person as responsive, active compassion that has no hesitation in meeting a situation directly and as needed.

Space or Buddha energy is not an element exactly like the other four: earth, water, fire, and air. The wisdom energy of space is the ultimate source of the other qualities. White is the color that represents the space element. The experience of spaciousness is discovered in its natural condition as unlimited intelligence in unbounded space. (Trungpa, 2003, p.183). The liberated energy of space is infinite, unrestricted intelligence and pervasive wisdom. On the other hand, the negative aspect of the space element can be internal ignorance, torpor, stupidity, and depression.

The contemplative early childhood leaders interviewed use the mandala principle in their work. As a lens to view the school, Eve shared about how she uses the mandala principle in the staff selection process:

To find out where they fit in our school. Some of us have done considerable work with Maitri energy so they are aware of the mandala that exists. Even at the level of how your school runs. When we were hiring people, we were usually very aware of where they fit in the mandala and having our mandala energy have a little bit of balance to it.

Eve specifically explained about the five-qualities:

We know that the people who come into this field almost always seem to have a lot of Padma energy because it is a relationship-based field, but everybody cannot be just Padma, otherwise we could not get other things done. Or Ratna is another one that I think . . . part of that, I think, is a feminine-side of energy, and more women find themselves in this field, but you need to have Karma, you need to have Buddha, you need to have Vajra to have balance. Not just in order to have balance, you know, just [to have] the whole and also on the team. That is something that is a part of the selection process and I think it can work energetically. Usually I can figure that out. We have a working interview so people are almost a part of us. So people have to go in sometimes, in a classroom, so it is not just an interview with our questions. Let's see how it works, and then how it makes that.

Eve mentioned her application of the five qualities in teaching developed by Richard Brown to use as a teaching guideline for early childhood students at Naropa University:

Water or Vajra- clarity of intellect and insight into the student.

Earth or Ratna- resourcefulness and generosity toward the student.

Fire or Padma- communication and aesthetic awareness of students.

Air or Karma- contemplative pedagogy as effective action

Space or Buddha- openness and awareness

Diana experienced the Mandala principle and five-quality training at Naropa University, and she has used the five-quality principle in her curriculum model:

There are five equal kinds of things. It is a very incredible situation. Vajra, we called the precision of insight, and all science and mathematics are coming from these guiding principles. And then, for instance, Padma was about authentic communication which was where all the art and world languages were coming from. It has to do with exchanging and connection. And then Ratna is all about connection and inter-connection to all humanity. Science was in Vajra...Blue ...So yellow is about richness... I studied this so much and this is a primary thing that is guiding me, practically speaking. But anyway, Ratna is about richness, abundance and it's about warmth to it. It is kind of about humanity-- social studies and history all together. And Buddha...a regent to a present moment... the white one is about contemplative practices so the curriculum is kind of contemplative practices and we have many things . . . ikebana, origami, contemplative photography, brush stroke, yoga, walking meditation and many things. And then the green (Air)...synchronized activities was an embodiment of things. Right Karma green is all about actions and that required embodiment. All of the mostly PE was sitting on that one, which is important that we have them balance.

As the supervisor of the school, Diana shared her experiences of taking care of the

school:

Your heart has to be very big. You know how to do this with education. It has to keep stretching your heart, so even when I am doing my paper work, I try to keep my heart feeling the children and I keep my priority there with them.

Diana has a method to communicate with children, a simplified version of this complex principle of Mandala energy. She said to children in free-play time: “I can feel spicy energy in here. Can you go tell Nate that you need help?”

In the journey of being contemplative early childhood leaders, each of these women wears many different hats, such as mother, preschool teacher, meditator, advocator, activist, professor. Within these roles, they hold strong intentions and passionate commitment to contemplative early childhood education.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Discussion**

This study explored perceptions of contemplative early childhood leaders about their leadership roles in a contemplative preschool. A collective case study design was used as an approach to get an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study. Thus, two contemplative early childhood leaders from two contemplative preschools shared experiences of their contemplative practices and contemplative leadership. This chapter provides the brief overview of the study and a discussion of the findings as related to literature. Additionally, implication for practice and recommendations for future study are presented.

### **Overview of the Study**

The literature about contemplative early childhood education mainly focuses on contemplative pedagogy (Coburn, et al., 2011; Rapetti, 2010) teaching and learning aspects (Byrnes, 2012; Carenza, 2011; Geseesai & Cha, 2012; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Height, 2010; Herbers, Antelo, Ettlign, & Buck, 2011; Kroll, 2010; Langer, 1997; Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005) and contemplative parenting (Desmond, 2004; Dosick & Dosick, 2004; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Kasl, 2012; Miller, 2006; Race, 2013; Thich, 2014). There are no study addressed to the application of contemplative early childhood leadership. The primary focus of this study was to explore the following questions:

1. How have contemplative early childhood leaders transformed themselves as contemplative practitioners?
2. What are the views, beliefs, values, and goals of their contemplative way of life?

### 3. How do they implement contemplative practices in their leadership roles?

In order to gain insight into the experiences as perceived by contemplative early childhood leaders and to gain an understanding of their experiences as contemplative early childhood leaders, two contemplative early childhood leaders participated in a semi-constructed interview to gain in-depth data. Observations and documentation were also a part of the data collection.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The qualities of a contemplative leader were described in the literature. Boyle et al. (2003) presented research in *The Path of Contemplative Administration*, outlining five themes identified as central to contemplative administration: openness, clarity of intellect, appreciation, and gratitude, communication and relationship and effective action (p.7-11). Beer (2010) conducted research on contemplative administration in higher education and also emphasized inner quality and outer actions, explaining that having a personal connection to spirituality is a significant aspect of having strong self-identity.

Through the participants' perceived experiences, three major themes were discovered through data collection including the interviews, observation, and documentation and thus provided insight into the beliefs and perceptions of the participants. The themes that emerged were: 1) Present-moment interaction; 2) Leading from inside out; 3) Community engagement.

### **Present-Moment Interaction**

Being in the present is a foundational concept of contemplative practice. It is a state of focusing the mind on what is happening right in that moment. Weaver & Wilding (2013) explained that being present refers to a capacity to be awake, relaxed, and alert in

the moment so that we can effectively engage with others (p.57). It is a result of training of the mind to be aware and awake in the present, which benefits the contemplative early childhood leader in many ways, such as promoting clarity in intellect; cultivating care and compassion; being courageous, supporting self-reflection; and minimizing the judgmental mind (Hayward & Hayward, 1998; Midal, 2012; Robinson, 2004; Trungpa, 1999).

To improve present-moment interaction, Brown, Simmer-Brown & Grace (2011) stated that presence is cultivated through meditative practices that open and clarify the heart and mind of the teacher to promote healthy communication, sharpen the intellect and foster creativity (p.1). Ellyat (2002) explained that contemplative awareness is characterized by mindfulness of the present moment, empathy and compassion for others and insightful wisdom (p.56). Byrnes (2012) emphasized that as a teacher, taking the time to listen and to be present with students has revealed his compassion and unconditional love, making a stronger connection with students (p.5).

Both of the participants in the study discussed the benefit of being in the present moment. They attributed present-moment interaction with nourishing the connection between self and others, leading to a greater understanding of self and other in a compassionate way.

### **Leading from inside out**

The self-transformation of the contemplative practitioner is a result of consistently applying contemplative practices. The quality of being transformed reflects on body, speech, and mind. The contemplative early childhood leaders who participated in this study are both experienced practitioners with lifelong commitment. Their contemplative

quality naturally inspires and leads others to a path of self-transformation, in other words, leading “from the inside out.” Beer (2010) expressed that contemplative administrators have a personal connection to spirituality; however, recognizing one’s own positive inner qualities and putting philosophical ideas into concrete application is the only way to change and achieve effectively in personal, instructional or global contexts (p. 225-226).

Weaver & Wilding (2013) assert that teachers can shift the education system from inside out by changing their own practices and approach. Changes in an educational system come from teachers who have been developing and sustaining their own social and emotional capacities and model and teach these capacities to students (p.138).

### **Community Engagement**

One unique quality of contemplative early childhood education is community building through placing a high value on the basic goodness of all members of a community, whether they are persons or things. Crawford, who was a former director of Bloom preschool, claimed that contemplative early childhood community aimed to create an environment in which young children would be encouraged to fully open to themselves and to their world, have many opportunities for creative and artistic self-expression, develop secure and supportive social and emotional relationships, and freely explore the natural world (p.1). Thus, contemplative early childhood education fosters an appreciation of the surrounding world as a sacred world by honoring every object and person with their own dignity and recognizing that they have their own power, quality and place. Furthermore, the contemplative community is aware that the atmosphere of the school comes from the environment. Contemplative leaders who have been trained in the



Mandala principle are able to use their senses to balance the energy in an atmosphere, creating an environment that invites healthy community engagement.

According to *Principles of Five Dimensions of Engaged Teaching*, Weaver & Wilding (2013) stated that investing in relationships and utilizing effective strategies to engage students, staff, families, and community members directly impacts students' learning and well-being. Three stages that were suggested to cultivate a caring community were strengthening community through connection; creative, positive closure and anchoring learning (p.107). Both participants in this study agreed that parent involvement is a way to strengthen the community, and both schools require volunteer work for parents and organized fundraising events to build a connection among teachers, parents, and students.

### **Future Research**

This research focused on how contemplative early childhood leaders perceived their experiences of contemplative practices, and being a leader, and the implementation of contemplative practices in their professional lives. Considering the limitations and findings of the study, there are implications for future research that may be considered. While this study explored a new area by focusing on the experiences of contemplative early childhood leaders, there remain a number of possibilities for future research.

First, further research is suggested to explore contemplative early childhood in the areas of students' transition to elementary school, the experiences of parents in the contemplative preschool, and the curriculum of the contemplative early childhood preschool.

Second, continued study on contemplative early childhood leadership should be conducted to focus on social-emotional aspects of the leaders, the leaders' professional development, and community involvement.

Lastly, a comparative study of contemplative early childhood preschool in different contexts, such as Catholic school, Buddhist school or Islamic school, would enrich understanding of this field of education.

### **Conclusion**

Being contemplative early childhood leaders is the vanguard of enlightened positive changes. Initially, contemplative early childhood has been a passion in early childhood education, and contemplative education leaders have a strong belief that contemplative pedagogy has a potential to transform and change the whole person and the world. Contemplative early childhood leaders apply consistent quality in their practice of the components; being open-minded, believes in building the genuine relationship, faithfulness, being self-reflected, cultivate inquisitiveness, courage to encounter the usual, and not afraid of the sharp edges.

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