THE ESSENTIAL PRESENCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE SECULAR CLASSROOM AS EXPERIENCED BY SIX FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between women teachers' personal spirituality and their roles in the secular classroom. Included in the research was a study of literature related to spirituality in the workplace and contemporary as well as traditional writings on women's spirituality from various cultural viewpoints. Also included were studies done on the effects of spiritual teaching in the classroom.

A research group approach that involved a number of reflective strategies was employed in an attempt to understand more fully the interrelationship between participants' self-identified spirituality and classroom teaching. The participants in this research group, including myself, met numerous times over a six-month period and remained in contact throughout the writing of this thesis. Reflective strategies included discussions, readings, journaling, and survey responses. In analyzing the data, I examined transcripts of our meetings and the written submissions completed by group members. I did not attempt to artificially impose an analytical framework on the results; rather, I allowed themes and pictures to emerge from our work together. The themes identified included Spirituality and Sexuality, Recreation and Re-creative Ritual, Physical Activity, New Learning, and Personal Relationships. The research group also evolved over the course of our meetings and continued to meet informally since we ended formal discussions.

Concerns and questions regarding our spoken need to lead integrated lives are discussed. The literature and the responses of the participants serve as links in understanding the importance of our spirituality to our workplace functioning.

Implications concerning areas of teacher/student classroom behaviour are presented. As we engaged in the research process in an attempt to understand ourselves, we also identified professional implications. These professional implications included concerns to be addressed and positive applications of the results.

The objective of this study was not only to answer my personal questions regarding the integration of my spirituality and my teaching, but also to encourage support and further study of the issues among other women teachers. It was also to encourage an ongoing evaluation of our education system and how the spiritual needs of teachers and students may be addressed in a secular classroom.

To Aiden Kathleen and Noah Peter
and the babies yet to come. You
are my reason to live intentionally,
with integrity, both inside my
classroom and out.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Throughout my teaching career I have struggled to balance my inner life and my outer life. While other areas of my life have more easily lent themselves to intentional harmony and integration, the interactions in my classroom and the curriculum material I teach have always presented a challenge for assimilation into my value system. One model which has been helpful to me in trying to envision a balanced life has been that of the Native medicine wheel with its four quadrants representing the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of human "being". I want to convey this balance to students, I want to make value-guided choices myself, and I want to teach students at a deeper level than the academic curriculum mandated offers. At the same time, I need to meet professional standards and obligations in reference to demonstrable proficiency by students in specific curriculum areas. I have therefore struggled to assess for myself what is "right" teaching.

Priestley (1996) says that "curriculum is much smaller than education" (p. 5) and "we are being asked [now] to create not teachers but curriculum communicators . . . " (p. 5). I have never wanted to be a "curriculum communicator" and yet there are some compromises which have seemed necessary in order to belong to the profession I have chosen. Fox (1994) contends that these compromises have hurt and deprived the very young people who are purported to be served by this profession (p. 170). Csikszentmihalyi (1993) states the case for a broadened curriculum clearly, " . . . if we continue to teach physics separately from ethics, or molecular biology without concern for empathy, the

chances of a monstrous evolutionary miscarriage are going to increase. To avoid these possibilities, it is imperative to begin thinking about a truly integrative, global education that takes seriously the interconnectedness of causes and effects" (p. 276).

Attempting to live cohesively in the classroom with my physical, emotional, mental and spiritual selves, I have sought out people – other teachers – who might have found some answers to the difficulty. I have asked the questions: How does my spiritual life affect my teaching? How does this affect my students? If the spiritual aspect of my being is as real as the others (and I believe it is), then what are the unseen effects upon what I teach and upon those I teach? As Priestley (1996) states " . . . any curriculum practitioner who does not recognize the fact that values are being communicated throughout the whole timetables of a school is in the greatest danger of all" (p. 5). How can all this be assessed? And, finally, what has happened to the profession of teaching wherein historically teachers were holy people, called upon by the Divine and sought after by men and women to be healers of the spirit and visionaries of the truth? "The 'voice' that rings in the classroom needs to be not only "artistic and aimed at naming yourself [but also] political and focused on naming the world" (Lensmire, 1994, p. 10).

It is the challenge to answer these questions and to live cohesively in my classroom that has interested me and caused me to further investigate the experience of other women teachers who define themselves as spiritual women. The issue of the marriage of spirituality and the secular classroom is of particular importance at a time in our history when values are being questioned on every level and when young people are faced with the perplexities of rapid changes both in their physical and cultural worlds.

Definition of Terms

The definitions of "spiritual" or "spirituality" seem to equal the number of different people attempting to define those terms. Phil Lane, aboriginal teacher and designer of courses in the study of Native Spirituality, was asked during an interview to describe the spiritual quadrant of the medicine wheel. He answered, "I believe you also need to recognize that there is something which we can't see, touch or understand. Some people call it the Greater Power, some call it God, and others call it Spirit. There's something beyond our understanding and comprehension. That's what guides us, that spiritual belief. The more you honour it, the more it gives you inner strength". Fox (1995) states, "Our minds want to be stretched to experience the infinite, another word for which is Spirit" (p. 172); while Spretnak (1993) maintains that to be spiritual is to "have communion with a reality that appears to be beyond the conscious self" (p. 209).

Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, which are more body-centered than the Christianity of the Western world, locate our connection to our spiritual nature in what is termed the "seventh chakra", at the very top of the head. This entry point into each human being is believed to allow the life force to pour endlessly into the body, mind and emotions from the greater universe, or God. Christianity places more emphasis on the spirit being outside the body. Indeed, for many Christians, body and spirit are two quite separate entities. Part of the teaching of the traditional Church has been the necessity of subjugating the body to the control of an external God spirit. This may partially explain why defining the concept of spirit and spirituality is so difficult within our culture.

It is now important to say what these terms do *not* mean in the context of this study. Neither spirit nor spirituality refers here to the specifically religious context most

commonly associated with them. While some of the literature examined contains references to God and/or faith communities and some of the participants express their own beliefs in God and their own faith, it is accepted that there are many examples of spirit in the world and that all people are spiritual regardless of any formal or traditional religious association.

Because of the difficulty in naming the exact individual nature and understanding of spirit and spiritual, I chose to allow the participants in this study to self-define themselves as spiritual women and also to ask each one her own particular definition of the terms. Together we formed a loose working definition of both spirit and spiritual, which encompassed the notion of our awareness of our connections to all parts of our world, seen and unseen. Throughout our discussions this definition became more concretely inclusive of an awareness of our connection to the unseen forces which have through history been named as God or Divine energy; an often un-named force beyond the human dimension. As illustrated in the transcript of session four (Appendix B), our attempts to define what we meant by these terms continued throughout our meetings:

> S. (trying once again to define spirituality) ... it's beyond but its eternal and internal ... a security from within, from knowing an inner strength or an inner force, guides you, supports you, is not judgmental ...
>
> *other discussion ...*
>
> L. I refer to it as the nurturing IT!

The other term, which is used throughout the study, is the so-called "secular classroom". This term is used to define a classroom, which operates within the public school setting rather than one contained in either a separate (as defined by the Education

Act in Ontario) and/or private school. As such, it is a learning environment where neither formal religious training nor specific denominational, sect, or faith practices are taught. While an overview of world religions may provide the course content in some school settings, this is accepted to be a course under the auspices of the social sciences department, which is taught from an objective viewpoint rather than as a basis for spiritual development.

Educational Importance of Study

Why is it important to assess the impact of teachers' spirituality on the classroom and to work towards a greater understanding of the many forms of spirituality and the many facets of teaching? The results of this study have both personal and education related applications. Readers who have been seeking validation and support for their attempts to assimilate their own spiritual values with their classroom practices will find that support among the stories of the participants and validation from the literature, which describes a need for such integrated assimilation. They will find a voice for their spirituality and will be able to identify other teachers whose struggles resemble their own. As Fischer (1988) names the connecting of one person to another as "spiritual friendship" (p. 196) and speaks specifically of women helping other women to understand their varied roles from a spiritual perspective: "Spiritual direction [with a friend] ... can help women trust their sense that their path to God and style of prayer is rooted in their experiences" (p. 208).

This study also adds to the understanding of the hidden or implicit versus the explicit curriculum taught in classrooms and throughout school systems. If there is no

mention of spirituality or purposeful development of the individual spirit in our school system, then over a student's 13 year educational career we have effectively taught by omission that the topic is not important.

> . . . schools have consequences not only by what they do teach, but also by virtue of what they neglect to teach. What students cannot consider, what they don't know, processes they are unable to use, have consequences for the kinds of lives they lead. (Eisner, 1985, p. 103)

The other facet of hidden curriculum, which this study aids in the understanding of, is that we teach as much by action and example as we do by words and assigned exercises. Body language, eye signals, and voice tone are all tools for unspoken communication in any setting and, we are told by psychologists in the popular media that these tools convey far stronger messages than verbal communication. This being so, it follows that teachers who are aware and comfortable with their own spirituality and value the spiritual reality around them will communicate that awareness and comfort to students while indirectly imparting spiritual value.

It is my belief that with enough support and documented research, curricula *can* be changed and school board priorities can be altered. This seems to be an opportune moment in Ontario to speak of necessary changes to the curricula as the current government has moved in exactly the direction deplored in much of the literature – cutting costs by deleting from schools those very subjects which encourage the development of the spiritual. Spretnak's (1993) comments about public education in the United States echo the thoughts of many Ontario educators:

> Since there is widespread recognition at this historical moment that [the United States] system of public education has become shockingly ineffective, a sweeping reorientation seems possible. A curriculum that is built on fundamental processes of the universe . . . would honour and encourage both the particular and the communal. It would ground creativity in awe and respect for the larger reality, the web of life. Instead, alas, we hear nothing but talk of educational reform that will meet the demands of the global market. It does not require much imagination to envision the dismal future that will result if ecological depth, critical thinking and creative unfolding continue to be passed over in a reorientation of our educational system for the narrow demands of the technocratic imperative. (p.189)

Limitations of this Study

In order to examine the relationship between spirituality and classroom teaching I chose to ask participants to explore their own experience as teachers and to do so by self report. Csikszentmihalyi (1997), when describing his Experience Sampling Method makes the following observation:

> . . . Foucault and the postmodernists have made it clear that what people tell us does not reflect real events, but only a style of narrative, a way of talking which refers only to itself. While these critiques of self-perception illuminate important issues that have to be recognized, they also suffer from the intellectual arrogance of scholars who believe their interpretation

> of reality should take precedence over the direct experience of the multitude. (p. 20)

The women in my research group told their own stories, from their own perception. I realize that all self-reported memories and stories are open to bias. However, when discussing as intimate an issue as personal spirituality, subjective "direct experience" was what I wanted to think and write about, not the objectively reported findings of academics. I will discuss the issue of self-reporting further in the chapter dealing with analysis.

I chose to include only women in this study as I believe men experience and describe their spirituality quite differently from women. The literature shows that this is particularly true with the body/spirit connection which many women can now identify as being fundamental to their understanding of God, "Feminist theology must fundamentally reject the dualism of nature (body) and spirit" (Rosemary Radford Ruether as quoted in Plaskow and Christ, 1989 p. 161). To include both genders in exploration and discussion would be informative at another time but would require, I believe, some complicated translations on both parts.

The six women participants and myself all teach at the same high school within the public school system of Ontario and we have all known each other for a number of years. We are all between forty and fifty years of age and have an average of twenty-five years teaching experience at the secondary school level. As women of this age and at this time in our lives, we acknowledged that we were more inclined to take time to reflect upon our inner selves than we had been able to during the years when our careers were first starting; our partner relationships were new; and many of us had young children to care for daily.

Within the time span of this study education in the Province of Ontario experienced some major curriculum changes under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris. These changes impacted on all of our classrooms and professional development as we adapted to restructuring within our school boards and within individual school. All the commonality we shared facilitated trust and communication initially, but as discussion became more personal, familiarity appeared at times to hinder progress rather than aid in full disclosure.

Research Questions and Overview

How do other women teachers experience their spirituality within the teaching profession? How is their spirituality evidenced in the secular classroom? These questions motivate this study. The research provides an opportunity to further my own understanding as well as an opportunity to focus my attention on a subject, which intimately affects my personal life. I believe the answers to these questions lie in the shared stories of women teachers themselves and that common understanding will come as we talk to one another.

In the second chapter I examine the literature and describe both historical and current thinking on spiritual teaching/learning. I also focus on writings from various world religions which describe women's connection between sexuality and spirituality. Chapter Three chronicles the research methods and describes the difficulties of carrying out this particular type of research and in Chapter Four the experiences, responses and views of the participants are described and analyzed. In the final chapter I examine the implications of this study for four distinct groups of people: myself and the other five participants; our present and future peers and students; school boards and Ministries of Education; and

other people who may read this and connect with some of the concepts discussed here. In addition, I comment on what I have learned from this work about the personal and professional integration of the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual aspects of who I am.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The literature related to spirituality and the secular classroom can be divided, for organizational purposes, into three categories: the relationship between work (with emphasis on the work of teaching) and spirituality; Aboriginal, ethnic and traditional writings regarding the integration of our *whole* selves; and the communicating of spirituality as a means of teaching moral and spiritual values. These headings provide a framework through which I discuss the relevant research and writing. Many of the works addressed overlapping category boundaries, the result being a web of related research rather than a linear analysis. Since all participants in this study are women, I have also included literature which relates specifically to how women have traditionally experienced and expressed their spirituality.

The Relationship Between Work and Spirituality

> A healthy adult does healthy work and integrates body, soul, spirit and work. Thus, a spirituality of work completes [us]. (Fox, 1994, p.11)

Work, for Matthew Fox (1994), is not a function performed for a pay cheque or even for physical sustenance, it is a holy calling, a fulfilling of our need to contribute meaningfully to our own and to the community's existence. Throughout his writing, Fox

suggests that our "outer work" that in which we engage daily, should mirror our "inner work" that is, our personal growth towards wholeness.

In order to practice spirituality in the workplace, Fox (1994) believes the building of community between like-minded workers is an absolute necessity. These communities would build dreams, encourage adventure and challenge peers in the discipline of growth. "The primary gift that adult [teachers] need to share with the young is the practices of discipline that allow the inner search to go on in depth" (p.181). It is my view that such a gift can only be given by adults who possess it themselves, which begs the question of how much of a like-minded community is the staff of a school? Do teachers feel encouraged and supported by their peers in both their outer and inner work? As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) argues, " . . . when there is reason to think that we are appreciated, job satisfaction is usually high; whereas the greatest source of stress in the workplace is the feeling that no-one is interested in supporting our goals" (p.113).

While Fox (1994) centers on the spiritual aspect of work and relates our inner selves to some experience of God and the sacred, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) offers a different perspective on *centered* or *focused* work by discussing the satisfaction of the "autotelic worker" (p.144). Csikszentmihalyi defines "autotelic" as referring to a "self-contained activity, one that is done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward" (p. 67). This is similar to Noddings' (1992) reminder that "occupation" originated from the idea that one did well at what occupied one's energy and focus. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) goes on to focus specifically on teachers by stating that "teaching children in order to turn them into good citizens is not autotelic whereas teaching them because one enjoys interacting with children is" (p. 67). The inner

work here flows with the outer work and integrity is the result. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) stresses that the experience he is describing does not include a relationship with the Divine. Rather, his is a strong belief in our ability as human beings to progress psychologically, through logical thought processes, to a state of peace and happiness.

> We realize that being at the cutting edge of evolution on this planet means that we can either direct our life energy toward achieving growth and harmony or waste the potentials we have inherited, adding to the sway of chaos and destruction. (p. 4)

Much of his writing regarding the necessity of meaningful work parallels that of Fox, who teaches that our work is meant to be an expression of who we are at our deepest level: work is central to the well-being of the individual for both these writers. Csikszentmihalyi is adamant that productive and satisfying work is the outcome of a healthy culture and that an "autotelic" worker is one for whom work and self are completely integrated. By using a lovely example of an old woman who herds sheep on the slopes of the Alps, Csikszentmihalyi delineates the necessity of finding meaning in the most mundane of tasks: beauty in the most ordinary of circumstances. The old shepherdess is not only content in her daily round of fields and pathways, she is joyful with the complete satisfaction and fulfillment of being connected to her natural world. Using Fox's vocabulary, Csikszentmihalyi would be speaking of the sacred.

Through the comparative biographies of five women, Mary Catherine Bateson (1990) describes the complicated weaving that is necessary to balance busy lives. Writing autobiographically, she examines her own continuing attempts to integrate self and work, while remaining committed to personal relationships and civic responsibilities. As an

academic, researcher, and writer she notes the struggle towards integration of self and work: "One of the things that haunted me while I was at Amherst was the different meanings of 'work' and 'home' that hide behind what is becoming a false dichotomy for many men and women" (p.122). She singles out education and the training of teachers for special criticism: "Yet many professors are also narrow, quite incapable of being good deans or presidents because their entire training has been as Johnny one-note. For many this extends to the inability to teach – if teaching means being attentive to the needs and interests of others" (p.181). She writes passionately about a woman's need to integrate life and to be the same person in all avenues of her being. According to the women Bateson interviewed, to do otherwise, to live in a compartmentalized fashion, is to court physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dis-ease. Her father, anthropologist Gregory Bateson, believed that the first thing children should learn was how the various life-systems are interconnected (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 272). Without this knowledge he believed that children would be unable to make any real sense of their world.

Hill, Vaughn, and Harrison (1995), Aboriginal women teachers in the United States, report that they have viewed their work as a holy calling and have treated it as such daily. The women speak of the joy of helping each child discover his/her potential and connectedness to the Universe. As Hill claims, "my bottom line is to ask, "What difference does it [my being here] make to the child?". . . That's where it begins and ends for me!" (Hill, in Hill, Vaughn & Harrison, 1995, p.7). Hill's statement parallels Fox's sacred connectedness to meaningful work, Noddings' occupation, Csikszentmihalyi's autotelic experience and Bateson's integration of the world of self and work.

Integration (and thereby, integrity) comes neither easily nor cheaply for any of the above writers. They are constantly reassessing, improvising reactions and challenging past decisions while regularly taking risks in connecting with self, peers and others. A process of self-reflection is embarked upon by necessity. Self-reflection is a process which may include dialogue with others, but will almost certainly center upon some variation of journaling, writing, and the keeping of a diary in order that thought and self-discovery take some identifiable form. The vital connection made by Rasberry (1997) between writing, teaching, and pedagogy leaves little room for doubting the intimate relationship between writing and self and others' reflection and discovery.

For classroom teachers, the risk of meaningful connection intensifies as the "other" mentioned above will include peers, students, parents, administration, the wider community and a host of other participants. Crediting a former professor with initially sparking her interest in the social impact of curriculum, Mary Rose O'Reilley (1993) says that she pondered this question for many years: "Is it possible to teach English so that people will stop killing each other?" (cover insert). As a college English teacher she views education as the "fostering of a critical encounter with the intellectual and spiritual traditions of mankind" (p. 87) and urges teachers to form relationships with students that involve risk of self, but also allow for community growth and awareness. She stresses the need to protect our spirits from being crushed by the pressures teachers feel to conform to a set of educational and professional expectations, which stifle personal growth. The most stifling of these expectations may be the we/they separation of teachers and students, which is recognized as professionally acceptable in most schools. While being able to

remain physically separate, the very nature of the spiritual self, written about by Bateson and O'Reilley, defies separation from other human beings, including our students.

Howard Gardner (1999), working on Project Zero at Harvard University, has defined eight alternate intelligences. While several of these intelligence scales relate to concrete measurements such as linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial and bodily-kinesthetic abilities, two of them relate to areas which specifically connect with Noddings' circles of caring (which will be discussed in more detail later). These are: Intrapersonal: the awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, and motivations and Interpersonal: the awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, and motivations. Gardner has suggested that spiritual intelligence may be a separate area to examine, but he is reported to have rejected it for now since spiritual intelligence is too hard to define at the present. I will continue to read his work in the future to see whether he is able to fit spiritual intelligence into his working criteria for defining specific intelligences.

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Aboriginal, Ethnic and Traditional Writings Regarding the Integration of our Whole Selves

When "spirituality" is entered as the search word on the teachers' network, an American based web page (http://www.teachnet.org/) the result is "No Matches Found for Search" while the same search conducted at the site of "First Nations - Canada's School Net" (http://indy4.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/canada/can-schl.html#top) yields seven good matches and many more peripheral mentions. In their paper, *Living and Working in Two Worlds*, Hill, Vaughn, and Harrison (1995) write of the need for Indian women to be teachers of Indian children if the culture is to survive with its spiritual values intact. The primary

commitment in Native schools to sacred learning and spiritual teaching has fallen to the imposed importance of business and industry. Native leaders and teachers know this to be the wrong course for young people and have tried to reinforce cultural and spiritual values wherever possible. "Culturally, a woman was a repository of ritualistic knowledge and her status increased with age . . . women were responsible for much of the children's education" (Hill, Vaughn, and Harrison, 1995, p. 2). Within their culture these women are honoured as the wise women they are and they are free to expose their students in the Indian schools to as much spiritual teaching as possible. In fact, throughout the study, which examined both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives of teaching and of the necessity for spiritual content in formal curriculum, mention is made of how vital it is to this Aboriginal school system that all other subjects are integrated into the teaching of the *spiritual* and to creativity of expression (which is seen as a direct gift from the Creator to each child). Unfortunately, these Native women write of having to "unlearn" some of their training in order to be true to their calling as educators. They were taught to focus on the printed curriculum and teach to specific guidelines set down by boards. It was only after they were hired by Native bands and allowed to teach the cultural values that they were able to find integration of work and self. Interestingly, each woman states that this has not led to the deterioration in quality of more conventional curriculum work produced by students, but rather to an excitement and passion in the classrooms which they had hitherto not known.

Almost a hemisphere away from North America, the early Celts taught that only poets could be teachers and, until the end of Celtic society, there were very few male poets. In Celtic society spirituality and teaching were intrinsically joined and the teachers

(holy people) brought both knowledge and inner healing. The description of Celtic holy women is similar to that of the Native Shaman who brings wisdom for both inner and outer "worlds of the soul." For the Celts, Christianity appears to have been the final force which led to the subjugation of women and the institutionalization of knowledge. As early as 100 A.D., schools in Ireland were established under the guiding hand of male clergy who were strongly tied to the ruling government. The fireside learning of values and culture was replaced by a more formal and politically influenced education. This was a primal separation of work and home for both student and teacher. "It was not until the establishment of the monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – whose principal God was heavenly and male, that women began to be forbidden public office and prevented from working in the professions" (Brooke, 1997, p.14).

The Native Studies Department of the University of Brandon, Manitoba, under the leadership of Phil Lane, past-Chair of Native Education, has published an alternate curriculum guide, "Teachings of the Sacred Tree, " which gives many examples of classroom learning strategies stressing the integration of the sacred with the secular. Lane left the University to become a consultant but still gives summer workshops to educators dealing with all aspects of consciously teaching the spiritual in secular settings. In a personal conversation during the summer of 1996 he expressed to me his disappointment that more non-Natives did not enroll in his courses, as he felt the lack of spiritual teaching in non-Native classrooms could only be detrimental to the students, the teachers, and society in general. I agree with his concern and it is the work of this thesis to explore the presence and practice of spirituality within a secular classroom.

Spirituality as a Means of Teaching Moral and Spiritual Values

Fox (1994) outlines specifically the type of education young people need in order to grow as spiritual beings. He urges schools to become "wisdom schools" as opposed to "knowledge factories." He says of the art and music curriculum " . . . [education] would thereby honour the artist by inviting her to teach not just art but life – to teach images which are within all of us" (p.170). Later in the same chapter he writes "What folly our culture has gotten itself into, censoring the word "spirit" so that our young do not hear it. . . adults afraid of the Spirit should not be designing schools for our children" (p.172).

Huntington Lymon, at the University of Virginia, is concerned about specific aspects of the curriculum, largely through language, and the effect on moral education of students (Lymon, 1997). These are valid interests, but the core of the matter still lies with the basic communication between two spiritual beings --- teacher and student --- and why and how that communication is transmitted. It is not enough to only examine the specific language used in instruction. Communication occurs at many levels beyond verbal exchange; to concentrate only on language oversimplifies the process through which students learn and by which teachers teach.

Hill addresses the root of the problem when she says, "Human beings are not being taught who they are and how they are supposed to live together . . . Children need to be taught about community " (Hill, 1997, p. 2). Her perceptions echo those of Noddings (1992) and Spretnak (1993) who believe that schools should be centers where students and teachers alike learn to care passionately for all elements of creation, including themselves, above all else. The path of caring, to Noddings, is a life-long walk embarked upon together by teacher and student. Using the image of concentric circles,

Noddings (1992) illustrates the focus of caring by labeling the innermost point the "caring for self" which involves taking time to maintain a healthy lifestyle and listening to our own bodies' rhythms. Teaching children to love themselves by appreciating their own uniqueness and the special gifts they bring to a classroom setting would foster the type of positive self love Noddings writes about. The next, or inner circle: "Caring for spouse, children and students", emphasizes our need to form meaningful relationships with those around us and to feel ourselves to be an appreciated part of their well-being. Interdependence and friendship are lessons which would form the basis of curriculum here: the art of maintaining life-long, mutually beneficial relationships as well as the ability to reasonably assess another's need and our ability and/or willingness to meet that need out of genuine caring rather than obligation. As the circles widen, Noddings writes of caring for strangers or distant others which involves an understanding of and commitment to the web of global relations. The awareness that what happens in our small community has a ripple effect on communities miles away connects students to their counterparts around the world and teaches responsibility for the consequences of our decisions and actions. Caring for animals, plants and the earth involves the concepts of eco-justice, conservation and intelligent distribution of natural resources. Geography taught from such a perspective would illustrate the connections between our own well-being and that of the natural kingdom. Ravaged rain forests, dying whales and shrunken ozone layers are not accidental events but are directly connected to choices made in consumer economies. Students who learn from a basis of caring for the whole world will understand that these choices need to be examined if the whole circle is to continue to be sustainable.

Lastly, Noddings writes about caring for the human-made world and caring for ideas. These are inter- related as they both involve valuing the good that has evolved through human beings' thinking, creating and inventing. To appreciate both the growth and development of humankind and the potential for further good is to understand one's own place in history and to have hope for the present and future generations. Art, music, literature, science and drama are all venues through which a student might learn of the past and be excited and challenged for the future (Noddings, 1992). A curriculum based on these circles would constantly reaffirm the connectedness of all things. Cross-curricular activities would involve the frequent examination of how one discipline affected another. How does the buying power of North Americans affect the coffee co-operatives in South America? What are the moral implications of buying sports shoes made by underpaid women in over-crowded factories? Students and teachers, supplied by the daily reporting by media of global events, would examine during every lesson the cause and effect of their actions as related to each other and the larger community. I believe that students who are effectively taught their own responsibility and their reliance on the world community would develop a deeper sense of the intrinsic worth of both themselves and others. With technology communicating to every student the latest global tragedy or act of senseless violence, students need guidance in developing the ability to care as well as affirmation that they can make a difference on a human scale, not simply learn facts and figures. I share Noddings' (1992) argument that:

> We live in an age troubled by social problems that force us to reconsider what we do in schools . . . Too many of us think that we can improve education by designing a better curriculum, finding and implementing a

> better form of instruction, or instituting a better form of classroom management. These things won't work. . . I have argued that education should be organized around themes of care rather than the traditional disciplines. (p. 173)

Spretnak (1993) also believes that the education system could be the heart of universal change:

> What if we were educated to nurture awareness of our inseparable relatedness? . . . Young children feel a magical connection with people, animals, trees and flowers that could, through the progression of years in a cosmologically grounded education system, be gradually enlarged to include knowledge of the ways relatedness is explored by mathematics, science, literature, the social sciences, music, fine arts and so forth. (p.188)

Noddings frequently points out that teachers can only communicate caring if they do, in fact, care. Priestley (1996) addresses the same problem by saying " . . . nobody seems to have asked what it means to be a *teacher* . . . I have already suggested that the first requirement of anyone who is going to educate (about spiritual values) is that they themselves might be examples of the process" (p.12). Both writers would agree with Fox (1994) that the conveyance of spiritual values in the classroom for the purpose of building vibrant, positive communities is absolutely necessary.

> Recently I heard that the New York public school system has eliminated art classes from its curriculum because of budget cuts. The notion that art is a luxury item to the minds and spirits of children – that it can be dropped like

> a sugary dessert from our diets – contradicts the laws and habits of the universe as we know them; the universe that is intrinsically creative, always begetting, always birthing, always doing new things. What a pity that our human-devised work worlds, including that preparation for work we call education have yet to realize the intrinsic value of creativity. (p. 116)

Compare the writing of Fox with what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states on the same subject matter:

> Our culture seems to have been placing a decreasing emphasis on exposing young children to musical skills. Whenever cuts are to be made in a school's budget, courses in music (as well as art and physical education) are the first to be eliminated. It is discouraging how these three basic skills, so important for improving the quality of life, are generally considered to be superfluous in the current educational climate. (p.112)

Both writers, although using different terms – spirituality and flow – to name the quality which they are discussing, emphasize the short-sightedness of school boards when music and art courses are slashed from the budget. Both clearly state that the quality of the education of children suffers dramatically from such program cuts, leaving the distinct impression that the current educational climate can only result in dis-integration at every level.

The envisioned role of schools and teachers that Priestley describes is one in which education plays a major role in helping to achieve a just society where the contributions of all are valued (cared for). O'Reilley (1993) describes our current situation as urgent:

> As we try to center and recompose ourselves and our students, I think we teachers are in a race with death for the future of mankind. On the one hand, we are learning that all of us are knit together in a web of connections. We are seeing that community-building, group problem solving and the fostering of mutual interdependence are central to our task as liberal arts teachers and vital to a positive vision of the future. At the same time, lethal forces are on the loose. (p.138)

The literature supports the notion that the marriage of spirituality and the secular classroom is an uneasy yet vital union. There appears to be a groundswell of interest in the topic as many educators assess the current system and the tools it offers students with which to deal with a changing and at times frightening world. For too long, spiritual education has been viewed as the teaching of religious dogma with undertones of control and subjection. Extreme examples are the practices of the church-run residential schools for Aboriginal children, which are now coming to public attention through the media. Article after article documents the use of religious teaching in these institutions as a weapon to destroy the children's past cultural learning and spiritual practices. Not only could the children not speak their own language, but any evidence of their belief in traditional spiritual practices was punished as an act against God. The Bible became a book of rules to be followed unerringly in order to avoid harsh Divine discipline. In recent years both the Anglican and United Churches in Canada have issued apologies to those adversely effected by the Residential School system in Canada, but lawsuits continue as ex-students try to reclaim damages for various abuses suffered in these institutions, including cultural deprivation. On September 1st 1999 the Toronto Star reported, in the

wake of a Supreme Court ruling against the Anglican Church, "forty healing grants have been awarded [by the Anglican Church] to date to assist community-based healing initiatives." These initiatives are all dealing with the physical and cultural abuse suffered by students enrolled earlier this century in supposedly spiritual school settings.

While not all purging of spiritual beliefs has been as brutal as that experienced by children in these schools, various denominations have used their own school systems to teach a narrow view of the world based upon the prescribed doctrine of religious leaders. In these places the study of religion is not synonymous with the study of spirituality as often the exact subjects through which children experience their spirituality – art, music and drama – are the most tightly controlled. There seems to me to be a fear that, if the children's spirits were set free to create in these areas, they might not be willing to embrace the various learned catechisms.

Now, as the world becomes smaller and more interconnected, the teaching of spiritual values, rather than religious dogma, has become a necessity if we are to sustain a healthy world community. It is not enough for students to be told what to believe or to recite articles of faith determined by those leaders generations before. In order to experience their own sense of completeness and belonging and to find a meaningful place in a complicated and fast-paced world, students need the guidance of spiritual teachers in the discovery and exercise of their spiritual selves.

Women's Spirituality - Focusing on Body/Spirit Connections

I chose to concentrate this study on women teachers only, believing that men and women experience their spirituality differently. The literature from a variety of religions

and faith groups supports this belief. Ancient goddess-worshipping peoples and present day feminist theologians alike have observed that women experience sexuality and spirituality as being inter-related. (By sexuality I mean all aspects of their sexual selves including the cycles of menses, childbirth and nurture, sexual orientation, sexual relationships and physical sexual features.) Labowitz (1998) states the case strongly when she comments on how women grow in a relationship with the Divine:

> Through the voices that are both ancient and new, we learn not only that the Bible is our wedding contract with God, but that when we touch our bodies, we touch God: when we pleasure ourselves, we pleasure God; when we shed blood, we shed the blood of God; when we birth new life, we birth new forms of God; and as our bodies change, our image of God changes. (p. 29)

She goes on to acknowledge throughout her writing that this thinking is very uncomfortable for many within the Christian Church who believe that body and spirit need to be separate and that desires of the flesh, or the earth, are sinful, while desires of the external spirit are pure and Godly. How did this change take place?

> . . . when you change the story, you can change a whole culture. This is what the patriarchal era did in history . . . it occurred over several thousand years as northern warrior tribes invaded the Near and Middle Eastern regions and brought with them male deities to whom the goddesses of the regions they conquered were forced to submit . . . the stories changed from goddess-oriented tales honoring a woman's body to god-oriented tales of dishonouring women and covering up the mysteries of her body . . . stories

> with simplistic tales, yet they moved deep into the psyche of the people pushing the goddess into centuries of oblivion. (p. 71)

The goddesses of early cultures were closely attached to the earth and sexuality. Surviving images from pre-civilization depict Goddesses whose feminine forms are richly endowed with full breasts, curving hips and thighs, rounded bellies and obviously sensual pelvic areas, and yet the physical representations of all deities worshipped in major religions to-day are decidedly male. Christianity, therefore, is not alone in its patriarchal dogma. Buddhist author Lenore Friedman (1987) writes:

> Why write about women's bodies from a Buddhist perspective? First we are women. In unmistakably female bodies we practice the Dharma. Our bodies define and delight us . . . from birth to death we are never without them. Menstruation, sexual union, childbirth, nursing, menopause, aging, dying – each is a huge embodied experience. Each links us to the physical world, to the moon and tides, to our fellow mammals, to creatureliness in all its myriad forms . . . The Absolute is here, we say in each embodied moment – when we breathe, when we sweat, when we bleed, when we feel desire. Even then? Even then, we say. No other time. (Friedman and Moon, 1997, p. x)

Each one of women's unique physical experiences has been revered at some time in history for its mystery and/or beauty. Menstruating women are still seen by Lakota Indians as being so full of spiritual power that " . . . in their presence any male-owned or dominated ritual or sacred object cannot do its usual task . . . among the tribes, the occult power of women, inextricably bound to our hormonal life, is thought to be very great"

(Allen, 1986, p. 47). In Mesopotamian mythology, the world was created by the clotting of the Goddess' menstrual blood (Labowitz, 1998, p. 62). Robertson Davies' character of the old Gypsy woman in *Rebel Angels* secretly mixes her daughter's menstrual blood into the tea given to a would-be suitor to guarantee a romantic interest.

Similarly, women's creative force was honoured and the mystery of child bearing revered by the ancients. "Pre-contact American Indian women . . . understood that bearing, like bleeding, was a transformational ritual act. Through their own bodies they could bring vital beings into the world – a miraculous power unrivaled by mere shamanic displays. They were Mothers and that word implied the highest degree of status in ritual cultures" (Allen, 1986, p. 28). Chrisman, quoted in Friedman and Moon (1997), says beautifully:

> Each one of us owes our life and breath to a woman. To create life on this earth some woman has opened and cried. Whether by squatting, by standing, by dancing, on all fours, or on her back. Whether by scalpel, by breath, by prayer, by song, by grace, or by will. Whether at home, in the fields, beside a road, in a hospital, or in the water. Whether by cracking, by slicing, by oozing, by tearing, or by pushing. Some woman has opened, some woman has cried. This I know from my body. This I know from giving birth to my son. (p. 59)

This activity was usurped by the male Judeo/Christian God who created Adam in his own image, and then reversed again the natural order when Adam "gave birth" to Eve.

The next physical experience, which has had special significance for women is menopause, when we enter into another phase of our lives beyond child-bearing years. The Lakota people believe that this is when a woman's wisdom is at its most powerful as she has entered the time of reflection and wisdom. In that culture the moon is referred to reverently as "Kokum," meaning grandmother. When menstrual cycles are past, women have entered the time of their lives when their energy need no longer be consumed by the physical and emotional rigours of child-raising and they are able to focus on the spiritual aspects of life. Labowitz (1998) says of Leah, the rejected wife of Jacob in the Old Testament, "But this [her passing into menopausal years] is not the end of Leah's journey, only another turn in the ascending spiral" (p. 41).

For women, it seems, our physical stories parallel our spiritual stories. This is often difficult when our cultural images of God are exclusively male. The need to experience God and all things spiritual in relationship to our bodies forces us to review not only our attitudes to our own bodies, but also the way in which we image God. Sally McFague (1987) suggests that women need to be able to see God as "mother . . . lover . . . friend" (p. 5) while Griffin adds "sister" (Plaskow and Christ, 1989, p.105). Each of those images presents a powerful metaphor through which women can experience the Divine.

A final aspect of how women experience their connected physicality and spirituality is through the telling of their stories to each other. Across cultures women share an understanding from generation to generation.

> My mother told me stories all the time, though I often did not recognize them as that. My mother told me stories about cooking and childbearing; she told me stories about menstruation and pregnancy; she told me stories

> about gods and heroes, about fairies and elves, about goddesses and spirits . . . she told me stories about herself, about her mother, about her grandmother . . . She told me stories about living and about dying. And in all those stories she told me who I was, who I was supposed to be, whom I came from, and who would follow me. (Allen, 1986, p. 46)

Again, the need for women to tell their stories crosses cultural and religious boundaries: in Jewish tradition " . . . women largely relate to each other through telling our stories and validating each other's feelings . . . " (Labowitz, 1998, p. 94).

The telling of our stories brings about a profound understanding of what we miss when we do not speak:

> The stories of the women drew us back into a kind of knowing that had too often been silenced by the institutions in which we grew up and of which we were part. In the end we found that, in our attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice (of women), that voice educated us.
>
> (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1997, p. 20)

It is this understanding of the necessity for women to speak their stories that led me to choose a research group strategy for this thesis. I wanted women to be comfortable in a group setting to tell the stories of their spirituality and to explore with each other what connection there was between their spiritual and professional selves.

CHAPTER THREE

Method and Introduction to Participants

If I care enough to speak the truth, *my* truth,
my story will speak for itself.
(Albert, 1996, p.11)

Focusing on Spirituality in the Secular Classroom

The need to focus research on the place of spirituality in secular school classrooms has been identified by Priestly (1996), Purpel (1989), and Noddings (1992), and a number of other researchers. Beck (1997) defines "holistic" as coming from the classical Greek *holos* meaning *whole* or *entire* and then explains that . . . *holistic education* is concerned with the whole person – mind, emotions, body and so on – and the whole environment – social, cultural, physical etc. – in which the person lives and learns. It is to be contrasted, for example, with schooling which just focuses on academic learning and disregards emotional forces and social networks in the classroom . . . The 'whole person' we are talking about here includes the "soul" or "spirit" . . . our soul (including our spirit) is the whole of us, our whole way of being . . . meditation and feeling are part of ordinary experience and must be taken into account by educational theory and pedagogical practice (p. 2). When we read and hear the connection between all aspects of our personalities put so simply and logically it is hard to understand why the plain-ness of that truth could ever be lost in the writing and practising of curriculum. It is as if a simple mystery has been uncovered. My reaction to Beck's speech is "Of course! Surely anyone can hear/see the truth here! It is so very simple!" In my years of teaching I have discovered that this "simple truth," while so clearly seen by some, has been lost in the trend towards the

"harder," more objective subjects. If constant effort is not made to integrate these areas of study into *whole learning,* technological competency becomes the goal at the expense of personal development. There is no doubt that technology can be of benefit to a more spiritual, *holistic,* curriculum. Upitis (1997) makes this statement:

> On the whole, convivial uses of technology include those in which communication – real communication, not shallow or contrived communication – is enhanced, where creation of thoughts and artifacts is enriched (e.g., the use of computer tools to support writing, composing, drawing) and where multiple ways of presenting ideas are made possible. (p.168)

To know that there is a body of research which gives voice to my concerns empowered the continuation of this study and inspired me to further discover how some of the spiritual women I teach with feel about the subject.

Fox (1995) and Ellis (1995) stress that educators (teachers) have needed historically to be in touch with their own spirituality in order to properly teach children and youth. Again, Beck (1997) addresses this issue head-on by maintaining that teachers must be willing to grow and to take risks if they are to add anything of value to their students' learning, " And given that young people now spend so much of their time in school, it is irresponsible – I would say immoral – for educators to devote all that time to a narrow band of academic learning goals, no matter what the traditional view of schooling has been" (p. 6). Upitis, (1997) focusing on the possible convivial uses of technology stresses that the curriculum is enriched by this teaching only when " . . . teachers, mentors, peers - help guide the process in responsible and deeply human ways. Then we

witness an expanded curriculum rather than a narrowed one, increased intimacy and community rather than loss of connection and discontinuity, experiential learning that is guided by a sense of the aesthetic rather than by accountability . . . " (p.168). Rasberry (1997) puts it poignantly when he asks, "Can anyone teach who does not live poetically?" (p. 16).

Within the current education system in Ontario there is little, if any, possibility for the open and active teaching of spiritual values. Indeed, that practice appears to be discouraged by the present Ministry of Education as courses which more easily lend themselves to the natural exploration of spiritual themes, such as music, drama, and art, fall victim to financial cutbacks. Discussion of spiritual topics is routinely expected to be limited to specific senior high school courses, i.e., World Religions. This is not to imply that spiritual values cannot be taught through the core subjects of mathematics, literature, science, and history. The difference lies only in the intrinsic necessity for connection in art, music, and drama courses. Each of those subjects allows individual students to experience themselves and others in relationship by its very nature. Expressing oneself to the viewer through art, making music in a band with fellow musicians, taking on the character of another person in a dramatic production are all activities which naturally involve connections with others and thereby encourage the awareness of our interrelatedness. However, it is apparent to me, both from personal experience and from the discussions of personal integration included in the literature, that teachers who view themselves as spiritual beings cannot arbitrarily leave that facet of their selves out of their daily contact with students no matter what the subject being taught. Because spirituality is seen to be an integral part of every experience, all subject curricula can be taught with spiritual

applications when the teacher intentionally examines classroom activities. How the teacher's spirituality manifests itself in her life and where that comes together in her teaching are questions which have provided me with countless hours of reflection and form the basis of my investigation into this topic.

Approach to Research

Because this topic is a personal search for me as well as an academic undertaking, I chose to use a heuristic approach to enquiry, that is the form of enquiry which asks: "what is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?" (Patton, 1990, p. 71). Bearing in mind Foucault's criticisms of self-reporting, as outlined in the section noting the limitations of this study, nonetheless this approach seemed best suited to my desire to legitimize my own perceptions and experiences as well as allowing me to discover the answers other women have found to the question I posed: "What is my experience of being a spiritual woman and teacher in a secular classroom, and what are the essential experiences of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?" (adapted from Patton, 1990, p. 71). Heuristic inquiry with its emphasis on relationship and connectedness and the personal search to know answers suited the feeling I had about the process of investigation. Both the personal experience and intense interest of which Patton (1990) speaks are shared by me and the five women who are part of this study, albeit from varying perspectives of secular secondary school teaching. The experience of "Eureka . . ." translated, "I have discovered" (Patton, 1990, p. 71) is one which we set off together at the beginning of this study to find, having each admitted that we had many questions and were looking for

some shared experiences in which to find empowerment. The development of a sense of Patton's "connectedness" within the group was at times an unexpected delight and, at others, a force to be reckoned with when communication became intensely personal and potentially destructive.

Specific Research Strategies

This qualitative study examines the experiences of six secondary school women teachers, including myself, who define themselves as spiritual people. Each of the participants volunteered to be part of this study after having read my thesis proposal, and agreed to view the process as one of joint discovery. From the onset of our meetings, I stated that I did not have answers and that the process we embarked upon was as much for my personal growth as for academic achievement. It was very important to me that I not be seen as an expert in any aspect of the study. My only advantage was, perhaps, to have read more of the pertinent literature than my colleagues. As they expressed interest in the topic, I made available any books or articles I had, and shared any new insights my reading gave. I did not want to assume the role of an objective outside observer or to interview my colleagues individually, as I believed both strategies would hinder the development of group cohesion and, like Boese, (1995) " . . . I believed that the dynamics of the group would enrich the personal accounts and stories. I also felt that the group approach would enable me to be an active participant in the study rather than an uninvolved observer" (p. 72).

Bateson reflects on how many women's stories reflect our cyclical, creation-centered life and I became more aware as the group meetings progressed how intrinsically

true this was as we tried to connect at a deep level with each other. The data we built contained metaphor after metaphor which related to pregnancy and/or menses, both experiences which are gender exclusive no matter how intentionally we might try to cross the gender bridge, and both so completely feminine in their illustration of how we experience the world. The consistent application by participants of these metaphors to their spiritual journeys justified my decision to limit this research to women. Translation of metaphor would be the primary and consistent problem if men had been included.

The primary methods of data collection were individual journaling, written responses to specific questions, and group discussion. The specific forms of personal journaling varied with individuals and were the creations of individual experience; however, specific directions were provided to ensure some common elements were discussed. From the time of my first conversation with each participant I asked that they keep some form of record which would note (a) the moments within their classrooms when they were particularly aware of spiritual dimensions, (b) particular reflections that came to them either throughout the school day or at home when thinking about interactions with students, and c) any pertinent 'outside' events or influences which affected their perception of spirituality with the classroom. These journals were shared on a meeting-to-meeting basis as a form of "check-in" at the beginning of our time together. Most people chose to write their thoughts in prose, but some women occasionally chose alternative forms of expression, such as drawing and poetry and cartooning.

Using Fox's Spirituality of Work Questionnaire (Fox, 1994, p. 309), I asked the group to choose the six or seven most meaningful questions for themselves. After initial consultation we agreed to devote discussion to the following:

-- Do I experience joy in my work? When? How could it be increased?

-- Do others experience joy as a result of my work? Directly? Indirectly?

-- When did I first feel drawn to the kind of work I do? Have I lost touch with that feeling over the years?

-- How is my work a blessing to generations to come? What am I doing to reinvent the profession in which I work? How am I returning my work to its origins of sacred?

-- What ways of doing Sabbath, of resting and letting go of work, do I engage in? What rituals do I engage in?

-- What inner work have I been involved in over the last five years? How has this inner work affected my outer work? How does my outer work affect my inner work?

We also agreed to maintain a continuous dialogue on the question Fox raises as to what is innately sacred about our work.

In order to facilitate meeting times and discussion, we agreed to meet at different homes for supper immediately after school on agreed upon days. I insured that each participant was given the specific question(s) to be discussed prior to the meeting time and each woman agreed both to write her response (an agreement which unexpected demands on time sometimes precluded) and to share her responses verbally within the group. As mentioned earlier, at the first meeting we also agreed to accept the working definition of spirit and spiritual as being the awareness of our varied connections, both to ourselves and all other parts of the universe. The combined answers to the chosen questions formed the basis for further discussion of the elements of spirituality found in the teaching of individual teachers and in their respective classrooms.

The time for meeting as a group varied and lengthened as the research went on. Following our 'check-in' time when we shared journal writing, most sessions began by using Matthew Fox's questionnaire regarding the spirituality of work as a jumping off point. Usually we focused on one question each session, giving each participant time to express answers and to explain her responses in light of her own story. My intent was to focus on one question per session and to give each participant plenty of time to express her responses. This approach was the most difficult to facilitate as the questions often sparked so many answers from each woman that we had to struggle to keep within the prescribed time frame and still explore each answer thoroughly and allow each participant adequate time to explore her own story. To be sure that I 'heard' from everyone, after the third session I began to ask that we write our answers before coming. I collected the written responses and added them to my recording of verbal responses.

Chronology of the Research Group Activities

The group met initially informally in a staff room for my primary explanation of how we would progress. Since we all taught at the same high school it was fairly easy to arrange places and times without structuring specific days of the week. After two morning meetings we decided to change the time to after school when interruptions could be minimized. We agreed to meet over supper at different homes. The meetings were audio-taped and some of the tapes were transcribed. During these meetings we shared many thoughts and feelings; we listened, laughed, cried, ate and drank litres of coffee with the more than an occasional glass of wine.

Six women secondary school teachers made up the group. Some were married, while others were separated and divorced; all had children but some were grown, some were teens, and one was an infant. We all knew each other initially but with varying degrees of intimacy. The women became a part of the group after reading my thesis proposal, expressing an interest in participating, and signing a consent form. After the first meeting they were each aware of the reading, writing and discussing commitments that would be asked of them, but the exact time dimension was left open within reason as we knew we could not, and did not want to, erect barriers to fully understanding our topic. Thus, we agreed from the beginning that we would meet for a minimum of two months and then decide how much longer we needed to go.

As noted earlier, I chose to use Fox's (1994) questionnaire as the central activity as it specifically addresses the issue of spirituality and work. Realizing that we could not answer all the questions and still leave time for individual insight and a sampling of other activities, I purposefully narrowed the choice to certain questions, which stirred my personal reflections on the place of spirituality in my profession. After consulting the group, I chose questions which would spark group discussion and which addressed specific issues I thought were most intertwined with teaching.

Along with the group meetings there began to be many informal conversations, which continued the discussion begun when we met together. An unexpected outcome was the amount of lunchtime discussion and the number of encounters in the school halls, which led to further talk among us of the experiences we shared. I had not anticipated the depth to which most of us became involved in our thinking about spirituality in the secular

classroom and I was not aware until the time for analysis began how meaningful some of the unexpected reflections on the group process became.

Session 1: We began by discussing what the word "Spirituality" meant to each of us and then comparing our understanding to those of Fox, Spretnak and Lane. I introduced Fox's (1994) book, The Reinvention of Work, and explained the journalling aspect of our research. Our assignment for the second meeting was to reflect on the question "Do I experience joy in my work? When? How could it be increased? How does it relate to the pain and difficulty of my work?"

Session 2: We shared our journals and discussed similarities of experience. Then we moved on to sharing our responses to the assigned question. Next week's question : "Do others experience joy as a result of my work? Directly? Indirectly? How could it be increased?"

Session 3: After taking turns verbally sharing our journal entries, we moved on to the question, "Do others experience joy because of my work? How?" This sparked discussion of our freedom to instill joy as opposed to our work as "curriculum communicators." Once again it was difficult for all of us to keep the discussion focused on one area as we all had our stories to tell of students who had expressed joy in our classes. This was a very uplifting session.

Session 4: Journaling took a back seat at this meeting as we spoke about "What ways of doing Sabbath, of rest and letting go of work, do I engage in? What rituals do I need to participate in?" The woman whose home we were in took special care to arrange candles and scented oils with dimmed lighting and special appetizers in honour of our topic and the atmosphere contributed to the relaxed discussion.

Session 5: During this session we answered, "What am I doing to reinvent the profession in which I work? How am I bringing justice, compassion and celebration to the world by way of my work? How am I returning my work to its origins of sacred?" Included in this discussion was the addition of a similar question, "How might the dimension of the sacred be included in the training for the work I do?"

Session 6: Our last formal session was focused on the questions "What inner work have I been involved in over the last five years? How has that inner work affected my outer work? How does my outer work affect my inner work?" Due to the particularly personal nature of this question I asked each woman to consider carefully what part of her responses she wished to be recorded and to indicate to me if there was some part of her story which she was not comfortable in sharing with the wider audience who might read this study.

These group meetings could not have come at a better time for all of us as we had just come through the Ontario teachers' province-wide protest action of 1997, and we were feeling sad and defeated in our profession. The lure of being able to meet and share our sadness while searching for meaning and hope was profound. However, it is, and was, inevitable that the emotional impact of the strike and its aftermath would pervade our initial discussions. Whereas we acknowledged that the spiritual dimension of teaching was of utmost importance to each of us, our combined emotional turmoil affected journal entries directly and responses to questions indirectly. We agreed that it was easier to become less emotionally involved when answering specific questions.

Introduction to Participants

All names used are pseudonyms and identifying biographical details have been altered. Each participant was asked to read and sign a letter of consent which outlined the purpose of this study and provided explanation of the process which could be followed if questions arose. These letters are included in Appendix A.

Lisa

Lisa is 47 years old and has been divorced for 10 years. She is the mother of two daughters. Anna is away at university and Erin, who lives with Lisa, is finishing high school. A secondary school teacher for 24 years, Lisa has taught many subjects across the curriculum but generally gravitates towards the slow learners and students with behavioural challenges. Lisa presently teaches English and provides resource room assistance to students with specific learning difficulties.

While spirituality for Lisa during her growing up years was centred on church activities, she grew away from formal religion as a young student. Nevertheless, she has always been aware of a spiritual dimension to both herself and the world. Lisa, who comes from a family of high achievers admits to often having a problem with self-esteem as an adult. She credits her own struggles in this area with her ability to relate to students who struggle both in school and in relationships. Recently Lisa has entered into a new romantic relationship after being afraid to commit to anyone for many years.

Jo-Anne

Jo-Anne is 50 years old and has remarried after a difficult divorce. She has two children from her first marriage. John is 18 years old and lives with his father and Stephanie is 15 years old and lives with Jo-Anne and her husband, Dale. Dale's 14 year

old daughter, Karen, also lives with them. Jo-Anne has taught for 28 years at the secondary school level and currently teaches senior English and supervises a Peer Mentoring course within the Social Sciences division.

Jo-Anne has been involved in a traditional church for much of her life although she is open to various different aspects of spirituality, especially in nature. Her animals are of primary importance to her and she often uses animal illustrations in her teaching. Music and exercise are also priorities for Jo-Anne, who tries to maintain a regular schedule of practice and study in these areas.

Sheila

Sheila is 44 years old and has been divorced for 12 years. She is the mother of one daughter, Penny, who is away at university. Sheila entered teaching as a single mother, supporting herself through her studies. She has climbed up the administrative ladder, becoming a department head and achieving her Principal's qualifications recently. While having taught many subjects, Sheila currently teaches English during the formal school year while acting as Principal for the board's summer school.

Coaching many girls' sports teams as an extra-curricular activity has enabled Sheila to see students in a different light from other teachers. An avid skier and outdoors person, her experiences with the student population are not limited to the classroom.

Sheila has no formal religious affiliation although she was once a regular church attender while growing up in a small Ontario town. She recently visited a local faith community and has expressed some interest in returning.

Catherine

Catherine is 47 years old and is in a second marriage to a man whom she describes as her soul partner. She has one daughter, April, who is 10 years old, from her first marriage and one son, Ethan, who is 2 years old from this relationship. Catherine has taught for twenty-three years and is a Drama specialist. She has also done some local acting and directing. She is currently teaching Drama part-time.

Catherine's involvement with organized religion has been sporadic since early childhood but she is currently peripherally involved in a local church congregation, feeling that some church involvement might interest April.

Ruth

Ruth is 53 years old and has taught for 26 years. Her initial qualifications were in Physical Education and Science although most recently she has been in Guidance. Ruth is married with no children of her own but her husband has a grown son and daughter who live in another city. Ruth lives in the country with her husband and cats.

With no formal religious affiliation, Ruth does not attend church or any other faith gathering on a regular basis. She is interested in all aspects of human behaviour, including the spiritual, and one can sense her deep commitment to helping young people develop to their full potential in every way. Her marriage relationship is of primary importance to Ruth but she also fulfills commitments to an aging mother, her siblings, nieces and nephews, and step-children.

Jennifer

I am 49 years old and graduated from a Faculty of Education 22 years ago. I married my high school boyfriend and we have four grown children and two

grandchildren. We live on a small farm outside a typical southern Ontario village where we raise chickens and turkeys for market and grow a large vegetable garden. Not having always taught in the Ontario public school system, I have experienced classrooms from Grade 6 to Community College and have spent several years teaching in Special Education settings for behaviourally identified students. I am currently teaching English full-time.

For most of my life I have been involved in some type of religious congregation but have moved further and further away from the church as I have grown older. I now belong to a group of women who meet regularly to discuss spiritual issues and consider this group my spiritual home. Unlike this group, the five women in my research group were not initially a specific support to one another outside the professional realm. As women teachers we had all been connected at varying levels through school activities before this study began, but we did not know many details of each others' lives beyond the classroom. Part of the interest in forming such a group, even for research purposes, was to get to know each other better on a personal level by sharing stories and eating together in one another's homes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Research Data

The task of analyzing the data collected through meetings with the five women participants proved to be far more difficult than I had imagined at the beginning of this study. When it came time to analyze the data, I was amazed and somewhat daunted at the wealth of responses we had collected. Again I shared the experience of Boese (1995) in trying to ascertain which method could possibly best capture the individual and combined reflections, stories and struggles of the group. Having sought understanding of how the spirit relates to teaching through the writing of Noddings (1992), I finally decided to employ her 'circles of caring' as a preliminary tool with which to organize the data. Sorting through the responses to loosely connect them with her circles of caring for self, caring for others, caring for strangers, and caring for the world at large gave me a starting point from which to begin to analyze the data.

After re-reading my notes and listening to the audiotapes, I became aware that so much communication is lost when nuance of speech and body language is ignored. For example, tears welling in a speaker's eyes as she relates her frustration with a particular question are hard to capture on the written page; a hand placed over another's in understanding of past hurts and present anger cannot be seen by reading the transcript. I struggled with whether to include these evidences of great emotion because sometimes the intensity of the intimacy made reporting feel like voyeurism. I felt like a news reporter who intrudes upon highly personal moments with objective questions and analysis. In the

end I decided to leave some holes in the final reporting rather than risk intrusion into our most private lives.

To aid my own sorting of responses, after each participant had been given a pseudonym and pertinent identifying details had been omitted, I asked a critical reader to assist me by reading through the data and placing responses in the 'circles' she thought most appropriate. The woman I asked to be my critical reader has been a friend of mine for several years. She is a social-worker and women's counselor who has often spoken of her own struggles to appropriately integrate her spirituality and her work. Having someone to talk over my research with was a wonderful experience, however, there were some unexpected problems in the process. While searching together for common threads in the data, it became apparent how much communication is lost when only a written transcript is examined. Gestures, such as the reaching out of a hand in empathy, a smile, a grimace, a shrug of the shoulders, even a silent nodding of the head in agreement, were all part of our group communication. None of these could be seen in the transcript. However, as a participant in the original conversations, I could remember not only *what* each woman said, but *how* she said it. Therefore, numerous times I found myself explaining specific unspoken communications between group members which altered the nuances of the transcript and thereby effected the placement of data. At one point I tried to clarify understanding by playing the original tape, but I quickly realized that allowing someone else to listen to voices would break confidentiality as each woman could then be identified. Finally, I came to understand that it did not really matter whether our separate understanding and sorting of the data was different. Quite possibly one activity could fit into two or more categories and this duality of placement would only serve to show that

these women experienced their spirituality in different but connected ways. For example, loosely sorting according to personal or social activities, I placed several comments in the category of "personal" while my friend placed them under "social" as they indicated some involvement with others. My lesson learned through the sorting process was to understand that the categories needed to be intertwined rather than separate. With this new vision, I began the part of analysis which Patton (1990) calls "Creative synthesis ... the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships" (p. 410).

An heuristic inquiry is, by definition, one in which the researcher is intimately connected to the questions raised and to the research done. Patton (1990), noting that it is a "highly personal process" (p.409), describes five very distinct steps in the heuristic process of inquiry: [immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis]

> Immersion is the stage of steeping oneself in all that is ... the researcher's total life and being is centered in the experience. He or she becomes totally involved in the world of the experience, questioning, meditating, dialoguing, daydreaming, and indwelling. (p. 409)

The description fits the months and years leading up to this study, during which I questioned my own motives and actions while finding others to talk to. It became an all-consuming quest to discover what other teachers' experiences with spirituality in the classroom were and how they compared to mine.

> Incubation is a time of "quiet contemplation" where the researcher waits, allowing space for awareness, intuitive or tacit insights, and understanding.

> In the incubation stage the researcher deliberately withdraws, permitting meaning and awareness to awaken in their own time ... (p.409)

Reading through the literature, listening to conversations, watching my students; all these allowed me the time to re-formulate what the questions really were and to decide how to proceed with my research.

> Illumination, (the phase when) expanding awareness and deepening meaning bring new clarity of knowing. Critical textures and structures are revealed so that the experience is known in all of its essential parameters. The experience takes on a vividness, and understanding grows. Themes and patterns emerge, forming clusters and parallels. New life and new visions appear along with new discoveries. (p. 410)

Our meetings and conversations began to take on a life of their own and were for me the phase of illumination as I began to understand more of my own experience by listening to others and being an active participant in the discussion. This very involvement, while guaranteeing an element of passion about the topic at hand, created a subset of analytical problems for me as I tried to discern and unravel the relevant themes from our conversations together. Knowing the speakers often made analysis of the speech uncomfortably subjective, and I worried about inadvertently imposing personal interpretation upon the recorded conversations.

> Explication ... involves a full unfolding of the experience. Through focusing, self-dialogue, and reflection, the experience is depicted and further delineated ... the heuristic analyst refines emergent patterns and discovered relationships. (p. 410)

As I sat with the data I spent hours reflecting quietly on the whole experience. New relationships formed with the participants; new questions asked of myself; some not so comfortable memories aroused; I watched and listened as the patterns of conversation flowed through the tape-recorder on to the word processor and finally out on the dining-room table.

> Creative synthesis is the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged as a total experience, showing patterns and relationships. This phase points the way for new perspectives and meanings, a new vision of the experience. The fundamental richness of the experience and the experiencing participants is captured and communicated in a personal and creative way. In heuristic analysis, the insights and experiences of the analyst are primary. (p. 410)

My first intention, while organizing the data with my critical reader, was to use Noddings' (1992) circles of caring and 'fit' our discussions of spirituality into that model, but no matter how efficiently colour-coded the transcription sheets became, they remained square pegs in circular holes. A perfect illustration of my dilemma happened one day as I was working with the data. My kitchen window, accidentally hit with a screwdriver, cracked and splintered into a million tiny, oddly shaped pieces. As the western sun streamed through, each piece created a prism of colour on the opposite wall and my kitchen danced with light. The comparison was inescapable: every piece of data I had collected was beautiful and shed its own light on the topic of spirituality in the classroom, but together they did not form a perfectly fitting 'window.' Rather than trying to fit these pieces into any prescribed format, I had to look within them and find original designs and

themes. Having sat with the data and taken the conversations to heart for so long, several of these designs and themes became apparent when I stopped attempting to fit the data into an exterior structure.

Emergent Themes

The most apparent connection made by the women in this group was that between spirituality and their sexuality. In many of the intimate conversations, the two words became almost interchangeable as we talked of cycles and awareness of creation. This connection surfaced as we discussed specific classroom events as exchanges with students as well.

Re-creation and re-creative ritual were identified by the women as being integral to their experiences of the spiritual, both inside, but most particularly outside, the classroom. Emphasis on the necessity of ritual in order to establish a spiritual base, the carving out of time in a busy schedule for small 'times apart,' was clearly evident in the conversations.

Related but not synonymous was the need expressed by several women for physical activity in order to stay in touch with their spiritual selves. Some related the experience of being 'lost' within their bodies while running or swimming and taking great inner satisfaction from exercised muscles and well-functioning bodily systems. These teachers often shared this experience with students in team sports and felt a deep connection to the players they coached.

Professional development also contributed to an experience of the spiritual within the teaching profession. At its best, academic learning was seen as stretching the mind and forcing the understanding of new concepts, which then increased an awareness of "a big

world." This experience, while not shared by all participants, was passionately endorsed by those who delighted in the whole experience of learning for learning's sake. Their perception of struggling with new material was that of a long distance runner who takes great satisfaction in finishing the course and knowing that she is capable of endurance and accomplishment beyond her expectation. This 'high' was described as being a totally spiritual experience and one, which was exciting to see students experience within the classroom.

The final theme, which emerged from the data was that of personal relationships. Surprising to me, but perhaps connected to the individual lives of these particular women, was the fairly small part which familial relationships were reported to play within their spiritual development. Husbands, partners and significant others; children and extended family, were not mentioned as often as peer relationships and teacher/student connections in discussions focusing on spiritual growth and support.

Spirituality/Sexuality, Re-creative Rituals, Physical Activity, New Learning and Personal Relationships are the five major themes which surfaced as I sat with the data and it is within these headings that I have chosen to analyze what seems to relate significantly to these women teachers' experience of spirituality in their classrooms and within their professional lives. There is a strong resemblance between these headings and Noddings' (1992) circles of caring. Many of Noddings' circles fit, especially the primary circle of caring for self, but these headings are unique to the data collected in this research group and surfaced specifically from the conversations we had together. Reporting the exact conversation is difficult for all the reasons cited as I sat down with my critical reader. Conversation in a group has a natural ebb and flow which the printed word does not pick

up. Transcripts such as Appendix B are uni-dimensional in their account of what was said and lose the richness of non-verbal communication. Therefore, I have chosen to begin each theme section with a written quote taken from journal entries of the participants. The quoted dialogue within each section should be understood to explain only one level of communication within the group.

Spirituality and Sexuality

> I am aware as I answer the question on inner work that what is really concerning me right now is knowing I am getting older. There are things I can no longer do which used to be easy. Energy, for example. I have nowhere near the energy even in the classroom that I used to have. Sometimes I lay awake at night and wonder how I can get through the rest of the week when it is only Tuesday and I am tired. Sometimes I force myself to create one more new lesson and it feels like as hard a struggle as giving birth! For me there is no escaping the fact that I have to deal with a body which is getting older. I have hot flashes in the staff room! I remember when it was not like this but then I had other problems to worry about and work on. I have reached a level of comfort with teaching just when my body seems to be saying "enough!." My inner work is to understand the changing relationship between my body and the rest of me. In a strange way this feels like a very spiritual time for me. I am becoming an older (elder?) woman whether I want to be or not. (Jo-Anne)

From the time we first met together, the topic of sexuality surfaced often in our conversations. Sometimes sexuality was mentioned in humourous form, as when we commiserated about having to leave the classroom while having a hot flash. At other times the topic of our shared sexuality was very serious as we discussed the meaning of cycle within our lives. But always, our common gender and common experiences provided a basis for bonding, which was often unspoken but clearly understood.

We all knew what it was like to arrive at school on the first day of our menstrual period and realize we had forgotten to bring any supplies; we had all experienced the embarrassment of 'first bras' and 'first shaved legs'; we could all giggle at the remembrance of itchy bikini lines growing in and we all knew the fear that a lump might be discovered during breast self-examination. It is probably not surprising that during our first meeting many of these topics came up as we began to get to know each other better. Consciously or unconsciously looking for common ground, the conversation quickly centered on those experiences we knew were shared, and hilarious laughter erupted as we recognized again our 'gender empathy,' as Lisa termed it. To consolidate our bond, which included the 'us' and 'them' syndrome, we laughed at and exaggerated the differences between men and women when it came to sexual privacy. JoAnne's quote from Gloria Steinam, that she remembered as something like: "If men used tampons they would stick them behind their ears and brag about having to use two at a time!" was greeted with gales of laughter, even though some of us are married to men who have never given any indication that they would behave in such a manner.

Talking about sexual experiences became a tool to cement our bond as women and the entry point through which we could begin to discuss the serious aspects of our

spirituality. The freedom to discuss 'private' issues extended to our ability to become vulnerable and talk about our spiritual selves, often through the haze of humour. Often, in our initial conversations, laughter was used to deflect some of the seriousness of what we were discussing, as when Lisa spoke of the joy she experienced with her new lover and Catherine joked about first experiences of physical relationships. Similarly, as spirituality was discussed as being at the 'very core' of all we do, I reported to the group a conversation with a man I once knew who told me seriously that "I will know I have become like Christ when I can shout 'Hallelujah' after having sex with my wife!" Both comments had the effect of lightening the conversation sufficiently that a comfort level in reporting very personal events and thoughts was reached quickly. Within two meetings we were sharing intimate details of our lives and trusting the others in the group to value and understand us. In this way we became almost unaware that the purpose of meeting was for my research and a special bond formed between us, which allowed for honest reaction and reflection on the subjects introduced. I think that this bond would have taken a lot more time to form if we had not been able to share our initial experiences of being sexual women with common experiences. Our sexuality enabled the forming of a spiritual connection as the ties between our relationships grew.

Sexuality was also discussed as a very real issue within the classroom: one which could lead to increased student awareness of their spiritual selves as well as being a meeting point for us with our students. Catherine, whose subject area is drama, had two relevant insights into the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in younger students. When discussing whether women (females) were more attuned to cycles than young male students she observed, "I do this exercise every year with my class where they

have to do a dance involving ritual and cycle repetition. Never, not once, have I heard the girls talk about menstrual cycles . . . I hear them talk about every other cycle but not that one. Is this because they are too embarrassed? They are usually just within a group of girls. . . .. or perhaps they do not see this as a cycle, just something which comes." Commenting on another exercise she says, " Two of the kids did their presentations. They had to choose a Canadian play, they had to talk about the play . . . one of the girls chose the play, *If We Are Women* and I left her with the question, 'Why is it Called *If We Are Women*?' I asked the one boy 'What would have happened if it had been called *If We Are Men*?' and the girl commented on the fact that sex was part of it for women but not in the same way as it would have been for men. One thing that really threw this girl was that they [the characters] talked about their periods and cycles and using Kotex and tampons. I asked the boy "Now, what would they [men] talk about?" and there was silence because there was nothing . . . nothing that was not a joke . . . to share."

Both the above examples and our own experience with bonding as women through talk of our sexuality are significant because they demonstrate an almost automatic level of sharing that can go beyond teacher to teacher and teacher to student boundaries. What Catherine observed in the girls' ritual dances was obvious to her, perhaps because she is a woman and the menstrual cycle is part of her experience. Similarly, it is likely that the girl who felt comfortable discussing with Catherine her reaction to the characters in *If We Are Women* and their preoccupation with sexual functions was able to do so because she knew instinctively that Catherine would understand and be open to the topic. As the other women teachers listened to Catherine's report of these two episodes there was a common nodding of heads and a general acknowledgment that each one had experienced some

form of interchange with a female student regarding sex and/or our menstrual cycles. Interestingly, we also acknowledged that in our own high school experience we had no memory of ever relating to a female teacher this way except, perhaps, in an emergency, the guidance teacher. We knew that our female teachers must have had their periods and gone through menopause etc., but we could not imagine any of them discussing such subjects even with senior students. We agreed that the willingness to be more open about intimate subjects in the classroom was probably a result of a whole change in societal views rather than a reflection that our own teachers were not spiritual women. In fact, we felt very fortunate that some things were now more easily discussed as we had the luxury of being able to form bonds more easily. As I commented at the discussion, "When you know that all your students have seen the most intimate advertising on television every night, it makes some classroom comments regarding sexually related functions quite tame."

At the same time as acknowledging the positive effect of being able to share gender experiences with students, we spent some time discussing how imperative it is that we always present these experiences as the natural and wonderful experiences that they are. In fact, several times our conversations related how this topic of conversation can lead automatically into a very spiritual realm. There is plenty of opportunity in the classroom to dispel myths about sexuality and to focus students' attention on the good, the positive and the beautiful. Does this contradict my comments about laughter being a tool to provide comfort? No, I do not think so, as we accepted that there were definitely two types of humour to be recognized: humour which displayed a shared sense of the sometimes absurd, and humour which attacked and degraded. We accepted that, as women, we have to be very careful in the classroom not to give the impression of

degrading or belittling male students and that we have to know what is appropriate in what setting. Joking about sexuality can bond but it can also wound and we know that extreme caution needs to be exercised with this topic.

Individually, sexuality and spirituality were related by several of the women to their own day–to-day classroom activities. After joking that, "in the English office you always know who is 'on'," Jo-Anne went on to explain that as she enters menopause she has changed her outlook on teaching. "I know I am mellower now and that may be a reflection of my inner knowledge that things are slowing down. Every semester I have a hard time at the beginning knowing whether I have the energy again to do this. . . and this has increased as I have started menopause. I am not willing to struggle quite as hard and I have to set priorities now for my energy." When she made this statement I felt myself groaning inside as the truth of it settled within me. I, too, have started menopause and I know that my energy level has diminished. I have a sense of wanting to teach just what is important and I often feel that I am now more able than ever to make that distinction. Sadly, the things I value as being the most important for me to pass on to my students are exactly those areas of curriculum which the current government in Ontario would cut back. A pall of sadness settled over the group as we all reflected upon some of the changes that had been made and Sheila wondered aloud how much "quality of spirit" can be reached by relating to a computer. "How does a girl tell a screen that she is scared she is pregnant when the guidance room has been relegated to a career search?" asked Ruth. "How do I let my overweight, overdeveloped general level Grade 10 girl know that she will one day find her own beauty when I cannot get time to read short stories which are not on the prescribed curriculum?" was my question, while Catherine's was much more

poignant: "How can I relate to any student when Drama is being cancelled or drastically cut and it is all I know well how to teach?"

Another aspect of sexuality, which was discussed in relation to our spirituality, was the need some of us had to know at the end of a long day that we were still sexually attractive to our partners. Lisa, who had not had a relationship for many years, emphasized how wonderful it was for her to go to school in the morning after having been with her new lover. "I know I feel good about myself and I know that has made a difference in how I am with the kids." Three of us who are in long-term relationships agreed that there are mornings when we come to school remembering "good sex" and the memories of intimate time spent with a "significant other" which impacted upon our spiritual selves. We laughed again as we thought back to our high school teachers and wondered if any of them had ever envisioned good sex and if they thought about those times while they were trying to teach us Mathematics! I wish I could re-visit some of the women I remember and ask some of these very questions because I wonder how they managed to create bonds with any of us and whether they wished a closer relationship could have been established.

Recreation and Re-creative Ritual

> Sabbath for me means any time that I can take to get away from routine and think. It is not just Sundays. It is time at the cottage playing Scrabble or time in the office doing a crossword puzzle. Sometimes Sabbath involves work such as preparing a good meal when I can do it my way.

> Sometimes it is just sitting by the water. I have my favourite things I like to do by myself. (Ruth)

The questions from Fox (1994) dealing with keeping Sabbath and a discussion of the actual rituals we engaged in provoked some interesting discussion among the women. We all discovered that we have personal rituals, some of which had gone unnamed until this point in conversation. Ruth answered that she was surprised to think back and realize that every weekend she and her husband play an ongoing game of Scrabble, usually at the cottage, and that time is suspended during those two days. She had not hitherto identified this activity as a ritual but could see, upon reflection, the regenerative effect such a timeless zone had upon her soul when all week long she was governed by bells and structured appointments. Sometimes this couple goes for long countryside drives and, again, timelessness is the greatest re-creative function Ruth could identify.

Lisa spoke of long early evening soaks in a warm, candlelit bathtub "preferably with someone to wash my back," while Jo-Anne knew that her extended walks with her dog and her daily grooming of her horse were the rituals she needed to stay balanced. Similarly, the act of 'balancing' imposed structure by individual ritual was a major component of Sheila's response: " I am a ritual cleaner! I clean my house and feel that I have done this for me . . . you may not understand how that happens but it gives me great pleasure to be in control of how things get done". Control surfaced as an issue with rituals for several women and we agreed that, as educational philosophy appeared to be getting more and more out of our control, it becomes more and more important that some things remained the same and we could predict what would happen. Jo-Anne spoke of returning to a mainline church for worship because of the familiarity of the service and the loveliness

of tradition. For me, while formal worship is a significant part of some weekends, I find balance in the ritual of gardening and other farm-related chores. Saturday mornings follow a specific routine and I am uneasy when that routine is interrupted. All week I look forward to my Saturday activities in the barn and once they are accomplished I feel I have touched base with myself again. I began to understand through the conversation that part of the appeal of this activity is that I am alone and able to work while my mind travels many places. Like Sheila's cleaning, I think there is a sense of purging the dust of the week while I sweep out a chicken coop or weed in the garden. While I clean physical evidence of litter, I also sort the important events and thoughts of the week through my mind and I am satisfied to have accomplished something when the morning is over.

Relating these rituals to our student interactions was easy as we came to see how ritual could symbolize our 'other' life, that which we did outside the classroom. Knowing ourselves to have an 'other' self allowed us readily to see our students as having 'other' selves which did not depend on whether they could paraphrase Shakespeare or solve an algebraic equation. Not only do our rituals bring us satisfaction and an element of peace, but they also provide another facet of who we are which can be shared with students as a touchstone to some of their interests. Cleaning is probably not one of these shared interests, but the need to have some control over environment and some predictability is common. Again, as with humour, the extent to which we choose to share our personal lives with students is a mature judgment and one fraught with complications. However, we acknowledged that the pay-off in deepened relationship was often worth the risk. Two of us who regularly have the experience of worshipping in the same faith community as some of our students expressed our delight on the occasions when we have been able to share a

spiritual insight with those younger than we are. The exchange in these cases reminded us that students have much to teach us and that spiritual growth does not have to mimic physical age. Jo-Anne spoke of an OAC class doing individual presentations of their personal reflections after reading the novel *Frankenstein*. Their responses to the question of the responsibility of the creator towards the created and their views on parental and societal responsibility had a profound impact upon her. "They were amazing and I was humbled as they taught me." Her comment reminded me of a wonderful line from a poem quoted by Eisner, "I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance" (Eisner, 1985, p. 101).

We had a brief discussion about how to create Sabbath time within the classroom even under the adverse conditions of time restraints we now work within. For the English teachers a period of silent reading at the beginning of every class provided a 'time apart' when everyone in the room was able to take a breath of relaxation and rest. Sheila emphasized the importance of the teacher also taking that time to read rather than mark papers. "I used to catch up on all I had not done but now I am smarter . . . now I read while they read and we share that moment." Catherine mentioned a brief time of silence she tried to keep in the studio when students first entered. "In drama we call it 'focus' but it achieves the same end . . . it is a time for personal quiet and the kids normally respond."

Even lunchtime can provide an opportunity for ritual and/or rest. I make myself go down to the staffroom for a minimum of 15 minutes every lunch hour in order to have some small conversation with other staff members about a topic other than schoolwork. We also accepted the importance of pictures on our desks of family and/or mementos of our 'other' lives, which were vital in maintaining our connection to our balance. After this

session I took note of the exact placement of my desk photos and discovered that I had completely surrounded my workspace with pictures of my children and grandchildren. Wherever I look there is a face smiling at me and I cannot be beyond their presence. Then, in the center of my shelf, the focal point of view from the chair, is a pottery piece Brian gave me which immediately takes my mind back to a certain Christmas. I understand, after answering this question, why I so dislike the cleaners coming in and turning my photos face down. Every Monday my first task is to set the circle up again and retrieve my sacred space.

Physical Activity

> Balance is my downfall. I strive not to be a workaholic but it is easy to fall into the trap especially since I am alone. I have tried to fill up my life and I struggle not to work constantly. With all the recent paperwork that is hard because I always seem to be behind somewhere. Last week I realized I had still not collected all the forms and that I had handed out texts to the wrong students. I went to the gym and worked out instead of staying at work fretting. (Sheila)
>
> The amount of organization I require lately with all the paperwork gets me down. I have to go outside and walk and remember through that time that it is teaching which is important. (Jo-Anne)

Reflective perhaps more of our average age than of our interest in exercise, the area of physical activity as related to spirituality was a major component only for Sheila. While the rest of the women expressed needs to walk and garden and ride in moderation,

she was the only one for whom physical activity provided spiritual and physical release. Jogging, working out in a gym, playing tennis weekly and roller-blading regularly were identified by Sheila as necessary outlets for her pent-up frustrations which would otherwise have significantly interfered with her experience of the spiritual. During one conversation she admitted that this might be connected to her desire to enter into a meaningful sexual relationship and her sadness at not having a committed partner at present. Sheila is a woman whose body is in top shape and who takes great, and justifiable, pride in her appearance. Her hair and face are striking and she wears coordinated outfits, which complement her unusual colouring; this does not go unnoticed by her students who comment on her excellent taste in clothes. Sheila also coaches girls' sports teams regularly and is an example to her female students of a successful female athlete without being "jock-ish." Does this give her an avenue to explore spiritual subjects with her classes? She says, "I try to encourage students to believe in themselves . . . to develop an understanding of themselves and to appreciate their skills. . . I try to push them to try something difficult and measure their success against personal progress." Sheila understands that sometimes her motives and methods are misunderstood as students feel she pushes too hard but we agreed as a group that she does not push any student as hard as she pushes herself, both academically and physically. Sheila has had to be tougher than she would have liked to be in order to raise a child alone and survive as a 'motherless daughter' since her mother's death when she was quite young. When the opportunity is open for her to share her story with younger people, the effect is stunning as they see and hear that perseverance and inner strength can allow for survival under the most difficult circumstances. The most common place for Sheila to be able to share her story is with the

team players she coaches and with whom she develops a closeness on long bus trips and after hard practices.

New Learning

> Joy comes for me when I know I am still creating new lessons and learning new things. I hate to feel like I am stagnating. I need to take courses even if it is only in jewelry making. This week we made brooches and I felt as tough I had accomplished something. (Catherine)
>
> I find when I teach I bring to the lesson whatever I am learning. For example, I have used *The Man Who Listens to Horses* for several sight passages and personal responses. It is great to see the kids respond to something which is special to me. (Jo-Anne)
>
> Looking back on the week I know I have learned some joy from the students in the Resource room. I am glad I took Special Ed. Courses to understand these kids even though sometimes I get frustrated. (Lisa)

The need to feel current within the teaching profession was expressed by every participant in the study. It was generally admitted that curriculum has changed many times since we became certified teachers and that educational philosophy has also often been altered. These changes have produced some frustration as we recollected having to adapt to the many switches, but there was an expressed realization that what actually takes place between teacher and student has not changed so much as a function of curriculum development as of societal attitudes and norms. The women expressed a common concern that professional development needs to extend beyond learning new teaching strategies

and into every day personal development. We could not effectively separate our personal and professional lives and say "This is what I learned professionally while this is what I learned about living." This acknowledgment alone gave rise to interesting conversation. "I have no interest in or time for courses which will only make me a better drone," commented Ruth and the others agreed. "I have to see a point to the courses I take now, or I will not enroll" was a general attitude as we agreed that professional advancement (i.e., Principalship) was not a sufficient reason for us, at our ages, to sign up for a new course. "I took the Special Education Specialist course because I wanted to know how to deal with difficult behaviours, not because I want to be a Special Education Head . . . I need to know how to teach Grade 9 students how to read," I said, and Jo-Anne agreed. Perhaps this lack of ambition towards becoming administrators was purely reflective of our ages or perhaps we do not aspire to be part of the current dilemmas faced by school administrators in this province. Either way, this group of women teachers stated that they were happy within the classroom and would not take any professional development which did not add to their personal and professional lives.

The use of our minds, however, in new and different ways, was seen as regenerative and very useful. "I continue to be inspired by my students to learn," said Lisa. Catherine echoed her thoughts by saying, "It is so important that we remember we still have things to learn." "Before I die I will teach one Math course well" was my ambition, while Jo-Anne spoke of her newly acquired equine skills and the impact of learning first-hand from workshops with horse whisperers. Her enthusiasm for the watching techniques learned in the horse ring spilled over into her class projects as she used passages from the manual as bases for personal response writing. The spiritual aspect of 'listening and

whispering' were so real to Jo-Anne that she could not contain her excitement and we spent some time listening to her description of the workshops.

The experience of learning with excitement is one which we hoped to convey to all our students but knew that we could not if we had lost our own sense of awe in the world. "I need to learn new things in order to keep remembering how wonderful this world can be" was a comment which received general acceptance from the group. "I don't want the kids' learning to be ho-hum and this can only happen if I am excited to learn," said Catherine, after trying to explain why she took courses like jewelry-making.

We agreed that if our opinion was ever asked regarding professional development we would explain how vital the connection between personal and professional lives is for us. Indeed, since the end of our formal sessions together, two women have become members of a curriculum committee for exactly that purpose.

Personal Relationships

Lying here in bed, my tiny granddaughter cradled in my arms
I listen to the pounding of a hard winter rain upon the roof.
Her milky breath bubbles as she stretches.
Twenty odd years ago ... in another bed ...
Is it really that long? Where was this baby then?
Less than five miles away in a narrow bed,
Oblivious to the falling rain,
Lies my father, in that strange space between reality and the past
Which he inhabits now.

Does he remember the child he held? (Jennifer)

As stated earlier, I was surprised how few times personal relationships were cited by this group of women as the source of spiritual growth and/or awareness. Spouses and immediate family members were frequently mentioned in our informal conversations but once we started answering specific questions only incidental reference to family was usually made as in "I couldn't stay for the rehearsal because I had to pick up _____" or "I tried to finish reading this paper but _____ wanted to go to sleep." Students' and colleagues' names appeared in the transcripts far more often than the names of partners and children when moments of specific spiritual awareness were described. At first glance I struggled with the meaning of this imbalance, as it seemed to indicate that we experienced our spirituality more intensely away from our homes and hearths than in and beside them. A possible explanation surfaced in conversation with Jo-Anne. After listening to my surprise, she offered the observation that we probably had not talked about our inner relationships with ourselves much, either, and this would like indicate that these ties and understandings were so close, so much a part of the fabric of who we were that we did not think to verbalize their centrality to our spiritual experience. The moment of epiphany came as I realized that, because, as women, we define our spirituality so closely with our sexuality, the intimate relationships in our lives, including our relationships with ourselves, are implicit in any discussion of our spirituality. I, for example, am mother, wife, daughter, lover, daughter-in-law, friend, etc., and all these relationships are carried within me and permeate *all* of who I am. To attempt to extricate small threads and define where relationship ends and my spirituality begins is to try to unravel a huge weaving or to separate the quadrants of the circle of life I initially took to be the symbol of the

integration of self. From this perspective, the fact that intimate relationships are spoken about by the women less frequently than those which are more peripheral can be interpreted as being the times when we communicated the obvious: that our most intimate connections, both with ourselves and with those others who are most significant to us, are the basis for our spiritual development and experience. The examination of those connections also provides the lens through which we can view our own spiritual growth.

But when did we speak of our personal relationships? Interestingly, the question which elicited the most discussion about personal ties, was the one that dealt with recreation and ritual, including formal worship. These responses to that topic show clearly the necessity of sharing with a closely connected other:

> I talk to my horse at the end of every day, and then, on the weekends, Dale and I go out for breakfast, just the two of us, alone together . . . now I have a puppy, but often when I get really lonely I go to visit Penny at University and we talk . . . Saturday morning when [my boyfriend] and I can lie in bed together and talk about the week and drink coffee . . . not necessarily doing anything else, just being together . . . it's nice

As I write this I remember the times I have called home during a busy day just to hear my granddaughter's voice on the phone and to spend a few minutes building connection to her in order to set the stress at work in perspective. I know my classroom interactions deepen when I am aware that I am communicating not only curriculum, but also values to students who are other people's grandchildren and I remember how precious they are to another woman somewhere who has infinite hopes for their futures and endless dreams for their development, just as I do for my two grandchildren. I had not

completely understood how that worked until the conversation with Jo-Anne, which allowed me to see that my own relationships impact on those I have in the classroom by enabling me to see my students in a multi-dimensional perspective. This expression of my spirituality through relationship becomes apparent as the level of trust between me and my students rises and I believe it is this which the women in the group were silently identifying when it appeared that student relationships were more intrinsic to our spiritual experience than those which are intimate and personal.

The other most obvious time when our personal relationships were discussed was at the very beginning of our work together as we struggled to come to a definition of spirituality and discovered that the connection between our sexuality and our spirituality was inescapable. The unspoken revelation again in this conversation was that to know ourselves positively as sexual beings required being in relationship with ourselves, our partner or partners, our children and other women. While we laughed and joked about our common feminine physical benchmarks, the underlying understanding was that most frequently it was through relationships that we had come to know ourselves and our bodies and thus to experience ourselves as sexual and spiritual beings. Again, this is communicated in the classroom to the degree to which we are comfortable with those aspects of our womanhood. This is illustrated beautifully in Lisa's story:

> I had a beautiful sister who could always do everything. My parents did not mean to compare us but they did. I was fat, lazy, ugly and stupid and she was beautiful, full of fun and school focused . . . I know I can make magic happen in the classroom because I have learned to forgive myself for being bigger and not being as beautiful as she is . . . I am very good with kids

> who cannot 'make it' the normal way and I tell them in part who I am. I make no apology for myself now and I have come to terms with who I am. I can communicate this.

Lisa is experiencing herself now as an attractive desirable woman who is in a fulfilling relationship with a partner who values her gifts, but she remembers what it was like to be in a marriage where the converse was true and she speaks of that time as being a time when it was hard to see herself as growing spiritually. Other women spoke about hard times as being exactly the occasions when their spiritual awareness flourished. They stated that at the depths of the depressing darkness of relationships which had gone wrong, they had discovered a strength within themselves that surprised and regenerated them. Sheila, in a brief statement about the death of her mother when Sheila was 21, said, " . . . no-one helped me through that but me . . . I learned that I could do that and I never forgot ." Whichever way the women saw relationships, broken or whole, as influencing their spiritual development, it is clear from the discussions that those relationships, rather than being alien to spirituality, are integral in both the growth and expression of our spiritual selves.

Apart from analysis of the actual discussion groups, I also tabulated the results of yes/no answers on the Canadian Living magazine's *Work Enjoyment Survey,* which we filled in for fun at an early meeting. This survey, initiated by the monthly magazine, was acknowledged to be more appropriate for answers from business and industry as some of the questions did not apply to teaching at all, i.e. "The products and services we sell are friendly to people and the planet." We did, however, adapt some of the unrelated questions to our situation and I was surprised to discover that our answers to the question

"Do I enjoy my work?" were close to 50 per cent negative when calculated to the prescribed formula. We uniformly answered, "No" to the questions "I trust everyone with whom I work," "I am encouraged to use all my creative potential" and "My physical environment is inspiring and healthful."

As we explored the possible reasons for our unhappiness, the issue of the changing face of education in our province arose again and again. We tried to ascertain whether enjoyment equaled spiritual fulfillment and were unable to establish a conclusive answer but we agreed that the changes in education in Ontario have hindered the expression of spirituality both in our school as a whole and in the classroom. The job action of 1997 was cited as planting seeds of mistrust as the whole school community was divided over political action and the sense of community partnership was severely tested. The changes to curriculum, which have eroded the funding for Music, Art and Drama courses while emphasizing the measurable competencies of Mathematics, Science and English, have curbed creativity as we struggle to attain mandatory standards.

Our physical setting has also suffered as support staff have been laid off and maintenance programs have been cut back to meet budget constraints. In answering these questions we realized how these measures must be affecting our students as well and it became even more imperative to us that we provide some degree of spiritual education and outlet for our students. It seemed ironic that those students who smoke, and therefore are forced to go outside school property several times a day, may be the only ones who have any appreciation for the changing seasons, nature or wildlife as the non-smokers stay in the artificially cleaned air and draped windows of a building which has been renovated for low maintenance and upkeep. In our English area we are asked not to open any

windows in winter as the fresh air causes the furnace to start-up and this increases the fuel bill. In the summer we cannot open windows as this interrupts the air conditioning and, again, results in higher maintenance costs. We are also encouraged to keep the drapes closed in order not to change the inside temperature. Couple these instructions with a diminished custodial staff and the building quickly assumes a dark, dilapidated appearance, which is less than conducive to any learning, spiritual or otherwise. The image of roses growing in cracks of concrete came to mind as we considered the degree to which we perceived the educational landscape to be growing bleaker and bleaker with each new Ministry dictum.

Light only came into our musings when we realized that we were underestimating the power of our combined human spirits to combat adverse conditions. In fact, in that particular conversation, we agreed that it was all the more necessary for those teachers who are aware of their own spirituality to exercise and demonstrate as much of their spirit in the classroom as possible because our students would otherwise find few spiritual outlets in the place where they spend six to eight hours a day. As the literature has emphasized, youth will find their own outlets for their need for spiritual experiences and development. Drugs, music, physical relationships and alcohol may all become inappropriate tools to provide ecstatic moments when all other avenues are closed. As cited in the literature, history has shown that in areas where classic spiritual outlets have been denied, the youth culture has turned to more destructive methods of experiencing the spiritual aspect of their growing selves. Fox's (1994) concern for the New York school system as the Arts programs are cut back and Hill's (1997) warning of the results of

spiritual bankruptcy in school curricula were motivating factors in our determination to increase the figurative light in our own classrooms.

The experience of analyzing the data collected was in itself a spiritual exercise for me. As the patterns emerged in our conversations my own sense of connection with other women deepened and I found myself revelling in the knowledge that I was not alone in my attempts to integrate my spirituality and my work. During the course of our time together I passed the anniversary when I was the exact age as my mother was when she died of cancer 41 years ago. This date had not previously been significant to me but as it approached I became aware that after that time I would have no pattern to follow for my own womanhood. One night the sense of loneliness was almost overwhelming and for the first time in many years I was consciously aware of being very angry at any Divine force that would take away from me one so special and so necessary for my knowledge of myself. As the hours passed and my dark feelings grew, fragments of our conversations drifted into my mind and I began to see that even though a huge part of my female development had been hindered by not having a mother, I was still connected in some mystical way to all women, especially those within my own family but also those whose experiences were identical to mine. This binding thread was very strengthening and led to a further insight: my female students will feel that connectedness to me in some way which defies logical explanation. I do not have to manufacture this connection, it is there by nature; I only have to allow it to surface.

CHAPTER FIVE

Implications

In March of 1999 I was at a conference on Eco-Justice where the keynote speaker, Michael Peers, Primate of the Anglican Church in Canada, spoke powerfully about what he called "the spider web" theory: the paradigm in which all the world is intricately connected and any action anywhere around the "web" influences and affects both known and unknown others. His main point was that we can only be aware of a very limited area of influence from where we stand, but that the overall picture shows threads vibrating in every direction from our actions. Thinking about that illustration while considering the implications of this study has been exciting for me.

The implications can be generally divided into the following overlapping categories. Most obviously there have been personal and professional implications for me and for the five women who participated. We will carry this experience with us for the rest of our lives, revisiting it from time to time. There are implications for those students and staff we work with now and those with whom we will work in the future, both in our immediate interactions and in any curriculum development this study might influence. There are also implications for school boards and for Ministries of Education as they work on different levels to develop curriculum relevant to students in the twenty-first century. Finally, there are implications for the unknown others who may either intentionally or accidentally become aware of this study and may connect with the issues we discussed and the answers we shared.

Personal and Professional Implications

During the many months since our formal meetings together, the members of our study group have had many informal conversations about what happened and what was said. Several times we have revisited parts of conversations and more than once we have decided that we want to meet again because we miss each other. This is interesting and terribly important to me because the emotions aroused through some of our discussions were not always comfortable. In retrospect it seems that we valued a time set apart to talk with each other at a deep level of disclosure even though some of the personal revelations made members uneasy at the time. Selfishly, as I evaluate my own membership in the group, I am struck by my own desire to be part of such a discussion group where I am not responsible to collect or analyze anything said or done and can thus be fully free to participate without any need to be particularly organized or to plan. Despite that comment, there have been profound personal implications of this study.

We began as a group of women who knew each other superficially as peers but did not generally share our more intimate selves. Without formally setting out to follow what the literature suggests are traditional women's practices, we began to answer the questions posed by telling our stories. As several writers have noted, however, our way of relating to each other as women came most naturally when we unfolded our life experiences and shared parts of our personal histories with each other. We laughed and empathized and on at least one occasion we became frustrated and somewhat angry, but we always shared. We invited the others into our lives by using language and events which all the group could understand to illustrate our points. We spoke without any prompting

of our sexual/spiritual selves and we explained in many ways how prominently our bodies feature in our knowledge of our spirit.

I am struck by the obviousness of the conclusions I came to: that women teachers, as women everywhere, experience their spirituality in the classroom most often through their bodies and that this is right and good; that we need re-creation and ritual to sustain our spiritual health; that we need connection to other people and nature as well as a sense of growth within our profession as expressions of our spirituality and that we need some sense of regular self-reflection to evaluate all parts of our being. The knowledge that my body is integrated with my spirit can translate into the confidence that I am becoming a wise woman now, one who has lived through many experiences: my body says so. I have something of value to share in my profession, both with students and with peers which is intimately connected with what I have learned from living inside this physical frame. The process of accepting that validation of the physical is a transition stage which Belenky et al. (1986) write about, " During the transition into a new way of knowing, there is an impetus to allow the self back into the process of knowing, to confront the pieces of self that may have been experienced as fragmented and contradictory" (p. 136). The process has been contradictory for many teachers as we have been trained to " weed out the self, which our academic institutions so often teach" (p. 136). Far from being something to ignore, my body becomes an avenue through which I become aware of my connectedness with my self and my students. A simple illustration of this point would be the tension in my neck which alerts me to the fact that I have been sitting down too long and leads me to realize that the whole class probably needs a change of position, and thus, perspective. The stress I feel when I have been marking too heavily reminds me that they, too, have

probably been subjected to many deadlines and are feeling weighed down. The depressing effect of being inside on a glorious autumn day can be translated into a fresh appreciation of a lesson among the leaves. All these small examples, if acted upon without fear of disclosing vulnerability, can lead to innovative and personal connections with students as well as allowing me to experience my own spiritual connections openly in my classroom setting. By revealing myself as a human being, I give voice to the Spirit within me and allow the essential process of integration to take place both for myself and for others. "In women there is an impetus to try to deal with life, internal and external, in all its complexity. And they want to develop a voice of their own to communicate to others their understanding of life's complexity." (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 137)

Formal and informal affirmation by others is also needed for my spirit to remain strong. In the early days of my teaching career I heard a lot about how wrong it was to expect any form of affirmation or praise from our students. Because, at the time, praise from supervisors was limited to the twice-yearly numerical assessment of teaching skills and classroom management, the teaching profession was seen by most as an almost completely internally motivated profession. How long and dry some of those days seemed to be, and how guilty I felt when I experienced any pleasure from a student appearing to enjoy my classes! Now I purposely build into my teaching hours time for us all to experience that type of affirmation. Just recently in my Grade Twelve Advanced English class I told a story about my granddaughter who has latched on to the word "amazing". She will come up and stand before any one of us and proclaim, "Grammie! I am amazing!!". It struck me forcibly one day how healthy this proclamation was and so I took it to school. Having told the story about Aiden, I asked them how long it had been since

they had stood before anyone, even a mirror, and proclaimed "I am amazing!" The silence was profound. Speaking to one student who has been with me for three consecutive semesters, I said "Laura, you are amazing!" and a huge grin broke out on her face. I tried it with another, and then another and soon the whole class was laughing and telling each other how "amazing" they were. Within seconds someone said, "Mrs. Davis, you are amazing!" and I felt my eyes sting and my breath catch as I realized how powerful the very words sounded. The end of that story is that at 3:15 the same afternoon, as I was retrieving mail from my box, the music teacher stopped me and asked, "What happened in your class this morning? I had a dozen of them come into the studio and tell me how amazing my music program was ... How amazing I was!" We now use that word with each other on a regular basis and it has come to symbolize for a whole class a time when we experienced each other's blessing. No church ritual has ever had a more powerful effect on me than when one or another student from that class passes me in the hall, smiles, and mouths, "You are amazing!" Sacred space is created in an instant as we both become aware that we are standing on the holy ground of relationship.

I started this thesis by stating that for much of my professional life I had not wanted to be simply a "curriculum deliverer" and that that desire was the motivation behind my search for others who were like-minded. Through the effects of this study I have become, in fact, more fascinated with curriculum than ever before, as I have looked for ways in which the parts can be connected to a universal whole. I am fascinated by a comment in Belenky et al's (1986) book that "science is a moral art, dictated by the human heart and human mind. It was subjective and is subjective. Science is a creative evaluation of facts, of demonstrable happenings" (p. 138). As an English teacher I had

long assumed that the teaching of values and the connection with Noddings' circles was most likely taught through study of the great philosophers and writers and by discussion of the same. I had assumed that great literary works were the most readily available vehicles through which students could experience an appreciation of an inner spirit. Having spent time with the research group I have a much greater understanding of how imperative it is that all aspects of the curriculum become integrated if students are to make the necessary connections between the parts and the whole. I can no longer teach English in isolation from Science and this has specifically altered how I plan lessons. In the middle of a Grade Eleven study of Shelley's *Frankenstein,* I assigned a new independent exercise asking each student to research some recent scientific development which dealt with the altering of genetics (plant, animal or human). They were to evaluate their chosen area using criteria established by the Canadian Council on Ethics in Bio-technology and present their findings to the class. The results were incredible as lively discussions arose over topics ranging from the use of synthetically altered DNA to cure disease, to the importing of treated seed from the United States. According to a chemistry teacher, several of my students had asked for extra texts to use as research material and one father phoned me to ask why I assigned homework which kept his son working until past midnight trying to communicate with some obscure institute via the Internet. Given the chance, these students completely immersed themselves in a Science project assigned by an English teacher and then delivered passionate speeches based on their findings. Not many years ago I would have had neither the understanding, nor the courage, to assign such a project outside of my own area.

When I share some of these thoughts with the women in the group I find that they, too, are more aware now of their ability to effect spiritual change in their classrooms. We all acknowledge the power which comes from knowing that others are doing the same thing and that we are not alone in our struggle to touch the Divine in common things and to communicate that touch to our students. We also know that it is necessary, as Noddings (1992) says, "to offer each other solid friendship" (p. 177). To accomplish this we have met for coffee or dessert and taken time to inquire as to each other's well-being. I and one other participant have arranged numerous theatre trips for senior students which we both chaperone and thereby create time and space to catch up with our busy lives. We commandeer the front seat of the coach and talk all the way to Stratford or Toronto without ever once feeling guilty over this use of a day. We know that the students we are bringing will have a rich cultural experience and we know that as teachers and friends we will have spent full hours gaining perspective and renewing relationship. The side benefit of this experience is the often-heard student comment "Gee! You really like each other, don't you?" as we inadvertently become a model for fun and caring. I find it sad that students would see our relationship as unusual between their teachers, rather than the norm. If the staff in a school does not model caring for each other and having fun together, it becomes a significant question as to how the student body might learn those skills.

Of course, there are also the times in my classroom when the opportunity is presented to discuss body image and/or physical changes, particularly with female students. These occasions present times of unique sharing and teaching when I can share firsthand my belief in the wonders of ourselves as creations of the Divine. To affirm an

18-year-old who is shy and uncomfortable with her size, or to strengthen the confidence of a young athlete who is unsure of how her muscled legs will look in a prom dress, is to teach the inner circle of caring for self at its most vulnerable. Sometimes, to facilitate these conversations, I can suggest specific books, which deal with these themes and at those times I rejoice to be an English teacher with those resources at hand. My science teacher counterparts tell me that they have "ways and means" also which help them explain to students what an absolute wonder of creation each individual is.

This section cannot be finished without the admission that these changes for me and for the other women in how we approach our teaching may well have negative implications. It is likely that we will receive criticism from some of our peers about getting too involved with students and not maintaining professional distance. We may also be seen as weird and not quite as efficient with curriculum delivery as those whose lessons follow a predictable daily format. There is a cost to any change, and while some of these criticisms will bother me at times, I must decide whether to follow Polonius' advice and "to [my] own self be true" or to be regulated by the opinions of dissenting others. I am blessed with working under an administration that encourages professional growth and initiative and so at this point in my career I do not have to worry. However, with the current educational climate in Ontario I am concerned that a time may come when curriculum becomes so regimented that there is no room for other experiences; when all avenues for self-expression such as art, music and drama are cut from budgets and schooling becomes utterly focused on technical applications. In that scenario there will be an even greater need for committed teachers to bring a spark of the Divine into classrooms. We will just have to become ever more creative in how we deliver our lessons

and rely ever more heavily on the relationship aspect of our student-teacher connections. The result could be an "amazing" resurgence of the human spirits of students amidst technical wizardry.

Implications for Students and other Staff

The old adage about the "proof of the pudding ..." applies specifically here when I think and write about the implications of this study for my students and peers. I could simply state that since completion of this research and the resultant changes in my own teaching, my students have become more focused, more enquiring and more 'alive', but I cannot provide statistics to prove any of that. I know that because of all the implications for me, personally and professionally, my students are benefiting daily from more integrated lesson material. The focus of many class discussions has changed from a content-oriented check-up to a wide-ranging exploration of themes and concepts. Because I am no longer afraid to approach abstract areas, we have touched on many subjects which seem to be outside of a regular English stream. For example three of my students have been asked to attend a workshop on bio-engineering in Toronto as a result of the ethics project they completed during the study of *Frankenstein.* The exciting outcome has been that essays have, in fact, improved over the semesters since change, and classes have initiated such exercises as formal debates and presentations. While judging from pure pedagogical criteria, marks have risen and the failure rate in most of my classes has fallen. The latter, I believe, is largely due to increased regular attendance as students have become interested in what will happen in class on any given day.

As I am able to present myself as learner and guide, rather than the only receptacle of all wisdom and knowledge, students have been freed to suggest their own areas of interest. Noddings (1992) advises anyone who wants to begin to change the focus of education to "Relax the impulse to control ... encourage teachers to explore with students. We don't have to know everything to teach well" (p. 174). The resulting empowerment for students is, indeed, amazing. While insisting on academic excellence, I have developed in my senior classroom a process for the submission of assignments which relies heavily on consensus within the class. We discuss together the calendars they are working with and we design due dates around time management programs. Rather than encouraging a lax attitude, this process has resulted in more work being submitted either on time or early than I can ever remember in my teaching career. As students take responsibility for their own investigations a flow begins to take place, which carries them along with far less effort than previous learning experiences. By talking to each other in relationship and with caring, we become aware of the particular stresses each one experiences and the classroom develops into a caring community. Recognizing that I have stresses in my life which sometimes keep me from marking on a one-day-turn-around schedule and that they have similar stresses which may prevent a particular day submission schedule, we have worked out a system of mutual allowances. There is benefit for all in that relationship as we learn to connect with each other.

In the area of curriculum there are a multitude of student benefits as teachers integrate subjects. To find and understand the connection between eighteenth century literature and twentieth century science is to begin to sense the continuity of human existence and the marvel of the human mind. When students begin to seek out for

themselves the threads of the spider's web which both bind them to the universe and relate them to all other creatures, they are well on their way to forming an appreciation of the spiritual nature of our world. That this can happen while sitting at a regular desk in a normal classroom amazes me, but I do not believe it should be confined to a particular space. Students, when allowed to explore, can uncover mystical connections which will awe them and produce a desire to know more. Allowing this to happen outside the confines of a structured classroom may result in a lifetime of curiosity and discovery. For example, I have discovered that one of my highest achieving senior students cannot read while sitting at his desk. His back and shoulders become so uncomfortable that he can no longer concentrate on the printed word and becomes completely consumed by his desire to change position. One day, having become more aware of my own stiffness with sitting and, thus, of his, I asked him why he didn't lie on the floor to read and prop himself up against a wall to write. He responded that he thought it was good discipline to learn to suffer in a chair and desk, as he would have to do that when he worked for a company. "So, what are you planning to do after school?" I asked. "Be a journalist or write for some magazine," he responded. Together we concluded that there were probably going to be lots of opportunities for him when it would be okay to alter his sitting position, and that he really did not have to suffer through all of high school in order to train himself for the future. Small as that incident was, I think for that particular student it represented a real moment of freedom to be able to acknowledge his own needs. Perhaps it is more than coincidence that his written work has become much more interesting since he has spent most classes propped up against the back wall and has learned to care for himself in this small way. I have other students who need to walk now and again or who need to sit near

windows and doors to establish a connection with the outside. By encouraging them to act upon all these personal needs, I am encouraging them to recognize their own physical and mental signals and to be kind to themselves. Caring for the inner self is the central focus of Noddings' circles and it is only through that exercise that my students can then extend their caring to the rest of creation. "Spirit and body are joined, and the quest for grace is an attempt to integrate the self" (Noddings, (1992), p. 82).

The implications are not only for the students we teach, but also for the staff that surround us. I heard Nelson Mandela's presidential inaugural speech on the radio and one line from that speech has always stayed with me. He said that when we give ourselves permission to shine, we also give that permission to all those around us. I believe that there are many teachers who long for a more integrated life for themselves and more integrated learning for their students. There are few teachers who do not want in some way to have an impact upon students' lives, but there are many who are scared to break away from the curriculum delivery model. Being able to validate their concerns and offer a creative way of relating with students is giving them permission to shine. It also encourages them to explore their own spirituality and allow themselves to integrate that part of their being into the rest of their lives. By being true to the answers we found in our research group, we can model a different kind of professionalism which allows for teachers' lives to be open and connected, not compartmentalized and mysterious. We can facilitate the exploration of inter-connection by demonstrating that this need not be scary and/or unprofessional. We can encourage our peers to experience for themselves the integration of home and work and family and classroom, about which Bateson (1989) has written.

Implications for School Boards and Ministries of Education

The literature stresses that cutbacks to areas of the curriculum which foster spiritual growth and development result in social problems and poor school environments. In this age of technology, when every school has global connections through the Internet, there is ample opportunity for students to become integrally aware of their relationships to all of the world around them. However, in an attempt to bolster reportedly flagging economies and balance fiscal budgets, school boards and Ministries of Education often choose to enhance the technical curriculum at the expense of Art, Drama, and Music. This is a mistake, and those who design curricula could benefit from hearing the voices of the women in my research group as we struggled to find places in our courses of study to allow for spiritual exploration.

The architects and designers of classrooms could also benefit from the same voices. We spoke often of the need for students to experience their connectedness, yet the very set up of a computer lab prohibits interaction with any other person: each student sits alone in a carrel, surrounded on three sides by two-foot partitions. More and more teachers are being asked to integrate computer technology into all subject areas. When complete, this could mean that students will spend the greater part of their day isolated from each other in an artificially lit room staring at a computer monitor. In instances where instruction is also computerized, it is not impossible to expect that a student could attend several periods at school without relating to any other human being. This situation will not foster spiritual development as Noddings (1992) or Spretnak (1992) or Fox (1994) define it. It is not a situation in which either student or teacher will be able to experience his or her own spirituality in relation to others or the environment at large.

Implications for Other Readers

According to the literature read in preparation for this study, many voices have been raised over the years declaring the need for balanced, holistic education, which includes teaching of a spiritual nature. These writings date back as far as the early Celts and come from places as diverse as India, Britain, the United States and many places in between. Authors from various cultures have written of the necessity to integrate all aspects of caring for creation into curriculum in order for learners to develop into whole, well functioning human beings. This study adds in a small way to that body of knowledge. The truths that we developed in this research group are not new, for they are reiterations of traditional knowledge. One possible difference is that we are experiencing those truths now, in our own time. This difference may speak to colleagues and others who read about this study and identify their own searching with some of ours. The body of knowledge which we developed might allow someone else to pursue this topic further and to become more intentionally involved in creating curriculum and classrooms where learners find themselves nourished spiritually. Believing in the mystical moving of the spirit in all wisdom, I can only assume that those who will be affected by this study will be those drawn to read it. Each little bit of knowledge that is added will serve as one more element of proof in the argument for holistic learning and teaching.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

By signing below, I agree to take part in Jennifer Davis' study. I understand my privacy and confidentiality will be protected, and that interviews and group sessions may be recorded (unless I or another participant ask Jennifer not to record some part of same), that I will be asked to keep a journal and/or other form of reflection and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I understand that Jennifer Davis' research will be published as her Master of Education thesis, and may be used in other related publications.

If I have, now or later, any questions or concerns about the research, I understand that I am free to discuss them with Jennifer Davis, with her thesis supervisor, Dr. Rena Upitis (613 – 545 – 6000 x 7238) or with Dr. John Kirby, Co-coordinator of Graduate Studies and Research (613 – 545 – 6000 x7231).

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Witness

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcribed Discussions of the Research Group
Session Four

L. Well, I've just heard a little bit of what M said, and I don't know where it came from, but.... you know, the bit about not wanting to share with.....

C. Yeah, I mean, I will share with.... well almost with anyone, but essentially what you were saying, ... I won't share comfortably when I'm forced, I react to that, and yet, I'm open to share my feelings and thoughts with anyone I come in contact with and yet, and yet, if I'm told ..... and I don't feel there's a valid reason for it, I balk at that....

L. One of the things I've written down is that I'm not comfortable talking about my spirituality with people who don't know me or people I don't know.....

C. Because it's very private .....

L. It's a very personal thing and it's not something ..... perhaps it's from our day and age where people think about spirituality. I could share with M. because she's known me for ten years..... but I could not share with people whom I did not know or people who I did not care about .....

J. So is it really fragile?

L. No..... It's not fragile but it is VERY private..... and I think that's what it is.

Je. That is so true, that people don't talk about their spirituality, but, I wonder, do you talk about things that have to do with it without naming it ..... like when we talk about care of the environment or care of the earth, is that part of talking about spirituality without naming it?

L. Sure it is..... K. and I , we never even talk about religion..... we never spoke about it and it's only recently that I've gone back to Church ..... I know that's different from spirituality but, you know, the two are connected .....

Je. No, that's fine ..... sure they are .....

L. And it was something that ..... I know he's agnostic, I know his beliefs and whatever..... I don't have a problem respecting other people's differences .....

Je. Being agnostic doesn't mean he's not spiritual .....

L. Exactly.....he is, yeah

Je. What did you say, S? What do you think of when you think of spirituality?

S. What did I say? Well, ... I think some of my beliefs come from my background which is different..... my grandmother was Old Order Mennonite and she was ostracized when she married my grandfather...that background plays a great part in how I feel ..... I started to write and I wrote "Something beyond ....." Those things are basic ..... it's something more than that.....it's not just something beyond..... it's beyond but it's eternal ..... and internal..... so I wrote "A security from within, from knowing an inner strength or an inner force, guides you, supports you, is not judgmental" but the basic thing is that no matter what you do or where you go or what form of ..... form you take to practice it, it's something that is always there .....

J. That's sort of what I said, too ..... (reading) "It's something that I can't explain but believe .....

L. That's just it, it's not explainable ..... it's impossible to define .....

J. Yeah, I can't do the Kellogg's back of the Corn Flake box, 25 words or less definition ..... that's impossible for me because it's ..... but I KNOW that it's real for me, I believe it .....

Je. It's amazing how all the words we use are the same because I have "The Unknown" and it's not named ..... has no name. Sam Keene wrote a book called "Hymns to an Unknown God" and that's how it is ..... I know but I cannot define .....Women have traditionally taught spirituality in their families but have not named it

L. I refer to it as nurturing IT!

J. We're supposed to think about school, right, and in our subject area (English) it is very easy to do

S. Not just easy .....

J. It's almost impossible not to ..... sure..... [laughter, talk about a parent]..... he said "You know what I feel about that course, it's a bird course..... " [Parent was speaking about English] Oh, I had an interview with parents, and as I said when I came into the English office, if I were this young man I'd kill my father..... oh he was so mean-spirited!.....

Je. There's that word .....

J. He really was mean and cold ..... the son even warned me that this was a very hard man..... he was cold and mean and ugly, everything negative to me. He had destroyed or attempted to destroy the spirit inside of that boy ..... and what he said to me about the Peer Tutoring course was that it just didn't count, didn't stand up to the academic

courses, and, fair enough, I mean I don't equate myself with the English/Math courses or anything else but some people see it as a valuable experience

C. Isn't that something that we feel we should do ..... equate them. That we don't see them as addressing different students. We put them all, all on the same level and then automatically once you're there.....

J. But what Math, English and Science do for a student, the peer tutoring does quite differently, I mean it addresses some other stuff

L. It's all part of being well-balanced .....

J. That's right, the whole person .....

Je. That's interesting..... you called him 'mean-spirited' and if you walked into the staff room and said that everyone would know what you meant ..... the word gets into our vocabulary .....

L. That's right, it does.....

S. But spirituality, caring..... for yourself and for others..... and when that's lacking..... certainly, I taught the same student last year and if you watch him..... his eyes..... it's totally lacking..... and it's the spirit, we say, the spirit, that's being killed, being hampered, being tied up.....

L. Wasn't it Dobson who put a book out about breaking the will but not the spirit and I remember thinking that it was ..... It was Dare to Discipline ..... and discipline being a loving as opposed to being a punishment

S. Cold-hearted.....

Je. I want to hear what you said about spirituality .....

C. First of all when I hear spirit and I hear spirituality, I don't equate the two ..... I see one within a big context and one within a single body. I said it's your essence, it's your.....if you look at the body, it's the fluid.....it's that which sees the world and it touches all the senses..... it's..... this is in terms of what we were just talking about..... this is how I see a rich or a healthy spirit..... it's multidimensional..... it's my connector

J. I would be able to say "Yes" to all of that!! (Laughter)

L. I said "To be in tune with my spirituality was my feeling of inner peace"

General agreement

J. It's the harmony in your life .....

S. I like those connections!

Je. Men might have trouble expressing some of this..... is this their feminine side?

L. Yes, But I'm not sure why!

Je. Do you think that spirituality is connected with the feminine?

L. Yes, it is

J. I think that we're more attuned to it as women than men are .....

L. I think women are more in tune with their bodies .....

Je. I believe that but I don't know why .....

L. I think women have to be in tune with their bodies because they're a force for us ..... It doesn't matter whether we don't want to think about it or not, we have to ....

C. Interesting!Two of the kids did their presentations. They had to choose s Canadian play, they had to talk about the play ..... one of the girls chose the play "If we Are Women" and I left her with the question, Why is it called "If we Are Women"? And I asked the only boy there, "What if it had been called 'If We Are Men'" ..... and she had commented on the fact that sex was part of it .....there are four generations of women., all related in this play..... and I said, "OK if you had four generations of men, would you talk about sex?"....."Well, yeah, " and we talked about sex as being the common denominator. But one of the things that really through this girl was they talked about their periods and cycles and using Kotex and tampons ..... and I said to [the boy] "Now, what would they [men] talk about?" and there was just silence because there was nothing..... NOTHING..... I mean there was no rhythm to share.....

S. I'm not all that certain that that's true..... I just think they're totally unaware of it.....

L.Yeah, I think so .....

J. But where's the rhythm? I think we have an advantage over men in a lot of ways....

C. There may be a rhythm there, but it's not as obvious as our's .....

S. Oh no, no! It's more the moon than the tides ..... I mean we have an ebb and a flow and I see that in the context of menstruation etc. etc. I mean, it's all there, but with men, I think it is much more subtle ..... and I think with spirituality, it's not that they don't have it .....

C. ..... but that they're not aware of it.....

S..... I think that they deny it

L. Also..... that's exactly what I think, that they deny it..... as the more feminine side of themselves.....

J. But it's a lot of work, too!!!!

L. But church means something to some men.....

C. I have had no trouble talking about "Church" with [partner] as long as I don't talk about spirituality.....

J. The irony is that they're the ones that dominate.....

L. That's the way my father was also, and I think this is where my privacy comes in .....my father is very, very spiritual but he is also incredibly private....

C. Could it be that when they are in a church setting it is acceptable ..... When I was reading some of the stuff and I came across the Native cultures, I thought "Yeah" spirit just goes with.....we never question it whereas within our culture, we think, "wait a minute! How does this fit in?" We're thinking twice about it.....and yet perhaps it's the definition within our culture..... I can never forget my father going hunting and telling me that he really enjoyed just being there..... the walks.

L. Right! But I think that's where they're comfortable.....when I grew up..... my bedroom was at the back and the farm was on the left..... and I could always hear my father whistling or singing as he went to work. And he always got up early, like 5 or 6,.....and that contentedness within that realm was where he would show his spirituality.....he wouldn't say..... but he would talk about the woods or whatever....

J. So where they would find their spirituality is perhaps in a different space than where we would find it.....

S. I don't know .....

J. I find a great deal of peace by being outside, by being in the woods.....

.....*General agreement*.....

L. I am just saying that they are more comfortable.....

Je. You were talking about rhythms and it just reminded me of going to a conference for women writers..... and when we were being divided up to go into supper the woman asked "How many women here are having their period?" And it was so hard to put your hand up! I don't know why!

S. Most days in the English office no-one would have to ask!!!

Je..... but even knowing that you got to go into dinner early, didn't make it easier to acknowledge .....it was sort of your 'private' thing!!.....

General laughter and acknowledgmen t.....
L. But that's in Gloria Steinem isn't it where if men had tampons it would be "God. look at the size of mine!";....."You mean, you only use ONE???".....
That's that macho thing!!!!

S. Does this have something to do with spirituality?

C. Laughter is spiritual!

S. I want to react to that comment..... I mean I think that is changing. I recently visited my daughter in Montreal. She shares an apartment with two boys and another girl, shared bathroom, one bathroom and there..... up on the shelf, in the bathroom ..... never, ever in my bathroom would you ever have found this, a huge box of Tampax! And like, they talk about it and they do talk about it ..... They talk about it as though it's a natural and everyday..... and, and I made a comment about it and she said "well E. said he likes to read the box while he's going to the ..... bathroom!" ..... what I mean is that girls are talking about these things much more now than we did..... do.

C. Listen, A's best friend has started her period and I have often said to A. about celebration and stuff..... and part of me is going 'what a load of crock!'.....so what happens on the day that her friend gets her period? I look into her room and find that she has taken ginger ale and raspberry and poured it into glasses and the two of them are having a celebration..... I was just..... this was when her best friend started and she wanted to make it special.

L. But there she's learning spirituality! She's learning about her body.

C. I honestly don't remember starting ..... I remember where but I don't remember when.

S. But we don't .....

C. ..... And that's why, I have to back up..... when we talk about our spirituality, the natural rhythm and stuff..... I have read about it but never really have I thought about

my spirituality being tied into my menses.....I'm thinking Yeah!Yeah!Yeah! but I know I have never really thought about menstruation being spiritual.

Je. But perhaps you tie it in other ways.....like just knowing that there is a cycle.....that things will come around again.....

J. Now that I'm approaching menopause I do!! (Laughter)

C. OK, maybe this is a bizarre comparison..... in movement class..... I do this every year with my class..... they have to do a dance involving ritual and cycles ..... never, not once have I ever heard them, even the girls, talk about menstrual cycles..... I hear them talk about every other sort of cycle but not that one ..... I don't think we ever think of it a a cycle..... it's something that comes along.....

S. It's called the curse..... that's what our young women learn .....

J. We don't think of it as rhythmic..... we think of it as something that just comes or doesn't come and we go "Ahh-h-h-h-h-h!".....

L. I think that its a different way ..... I think there were a lot of women in our era ..... we thought it was a really good year if we weren't pregnant.... because they had no control..... you know, we now have a fair bit of control over having children..... but I've always been very aware of .....

S. ..... cycles.....

L..... yes, and feeling OK about it .....

C..... but you see, for me, having been on the pill except for two very short time periods, the cycle was gone in the little round circle of pills..... it's like an unreal cycle .....

S. Sure, it is in many ways a false body rhythm ..... I started exactly the same time, always,..... but now, I know far better as there is a rhythm.....

C. Did you have the idea of cycles?

L. But you cannot get away from spirituality!..... giving birth..... women and men feel differently about that.....

S. But I've been reading about menopause and talking to friends who are a little older than me ..... and one friend of mine who was in her late forties when she had cancer, and the chemotherapy threw her into menopause .....and she said that the one thing she has experienced in the last four or five years is that she feels she is no longer a slave to her

body..... and she said that as a younger woman, part of that cycle thing was sexual and that is very different.....

L. It is another stage but I'm not sure it is not without it's passing of grief .....

J. Oh sure! I mean it's different.....

S. Should it not be another celebration?????

J. Oh yeah! I like that part of it ..... 3 or 4 months with no period ..... and there is a spiritual side of it to be sure..... a reflective side..... a time to think, well, if I can't have a baby, what am I for?..... what kind of babies can I still have?

Je. Nel Noddings talks about circles of things..... cycles..... circles ..... it is symbolic of who we are ..... women think in straight lines and talk in straight lines

S. Yeah, taking their skates off in locker rooms! .....

L. We talk and think in circles ..... witches..... around a fire

J. No wonder men are only comfortable in pews in church! .....

Je. How does this relate at all to our classrooms? ..... You talked about how they never spoke of menstruation in class .....

L. Only in slang terms they are comfortable with .....

C..... Yeah, very crude terms.....

S. But they say that that is how people come to terms with talking about anything serious..... it is a reflection of the spiritual because it reflects a discomfort with the spiritual.....

C. But even talking about spiritual..... in our society it is not acceptable..... our softer side.....

J. You know, in terms of our spirituality, the woman's movement has not changed a thing! It is still uncomfortable to be spiritual and talk about it!

C. Yeah! One of the most upsetting workshops I ever went to was on a PD day, and we were supposed to be finding out what kind of learner we were..... all I remember is that the end result was, I had gone to a workshop not knowing..... the whole idea was how to speak in such a way so that men could understand ..... men still call the shots and how should we speak so they could understand..... our spirituality was so compromised.....

Je. But what happens when men are spiritual ..... even in classrooms.....

J. But last year I wrote the "Rights of Passage" unit with R. [a male teacher] and that was great..... I mean, he was right there and it was wonderful..... we used excellent movies and it was a very spiritual experience .....

L. You know, last year I had some of those 'jock' type male teachers to come into my parenting class and talk about raising children and it was amazing to hear them talk about children.....their children ..... I saw an entirely different side of them. I have heard women teachers talk about their children in class and been moved by it, but never until I asked them to come in have I heard men talk like that in class .....

S. But so many of them pretend that this is not important..... but watch a movie with them like Jerry Maguire..... which is definitely a woman's movie..... but they watched it..... and they use it even in their classes.....

L. Do we know what spirituality is, yet???? [Lots of laughter]

C. No, but we know it has lots to do with our bodies ..... we haven't said anything about spirituality being mental or emotional..... isn't that interesting!