

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE  
CARINGLY WITH A CHILD?**

**WENDY L. THURSTON**

B. Ed., University of Lethbridge, 1977  
D.P.E., University of Lethbridge, 1985

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## INTRODUCTION

In my attempts to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of pedagogy I find myself continually "returning to" the lived world. By "returning to" I mean I find a great need to put down the philosophy texts, curriculum writings and educational journals and focus on the lived world of relationships. That is to say, that I find a great need to come back to the everyday world of relationships where I am an active participant. For it is this venture into the daily living with others that in a deep, and perhaps more authentic sense, restores my fascination, exhilaration, passion, disgust, prejudices, confusion, suffering, healing, and understanding of my humanness. At the same time, this venture continually leaves me with more questions, more self--doubt and a craving of how I should be and act in this world with others. In other words, by "returning to" and focusing on the lived world of relationships I face the ethical questions involved in being human.

My entry into the world of motherhood a few years ago heightened my awareness of the ethical questions involved in being human, in being an adult sharing a world with children. And it is only recently, now as both a teacher and parent, that I have come to a very simple, but for me, important realization: that is, that I am not alone in a relationship

with a child. In a particular child's life I share a deeply rooted connectiveness with other adults whether they be parents, teachers or friends. Within this connection lies an opportunity to find deeper meaning to what it is that draws an adult to become responsive and responsibly involved in the life of a child.

In the world of formal schooling parents and teachers are often brought together by a common bond - a particular child. This is what brought Marie<sup>1</sup> and I together. But, for some reason our working "together" became more than just scheduled meetings. Our coming together began with two people interested in each other and this interest lead to our learning about one another. Our coming together called us to appreciate the perspectives of each other, to learn to share our thoughts and ways with one another, and to learn how to learn from one another. Our coming together has called for the "creation of new possibilities for consciousness" (Novak, 1978, p. 55). For me, it seems that Marie and I have a relationship that has gone beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary. As Madeline Grumet (1988) writes:

It is not enough to know other people's children.

We must know, share a world with, the other people

who love that child, wildly or tentatively, des-

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<sup>1</sup> Marie is a pseudonym for the woman who shares a unique parent/teacher relationship with me. Her name, and those of her children and any information that may lead to her identification has been altered to ensure her and her family's anonymity.

perately, ambivalently, or tenderly....If we understand ourselves as being in relation to [our children] then their relations to others support and sustain their capacity to receive and respond to our love. (pp. 179-180)

#### MARIE AND I: OUR CONNECTION

To be very honest, I do not recall my first meeting with Marie, although I do know it was approximately seven years ago. I was a special education teacher. The position, even by its very title places one outside of the mainstream. It places the teacher, the children and the parents of those children in the margins. And yet, there is something questionable, something lacking in the term "special education" and all the other various words used in educational discourse that place people in the margins. Why? Because it is children with profound differences that are in a very real sense the transparent mirror of all humanity. By this I mean that through **the other** we sense the possibilities of the self. The children of whom I speak are a reminder to all of the uncertainties, the unpredictableness, the harshness, the ambiguities inherent in life itself. It is interesting that in naming certain individuals as "special" and others as perhaps "regular" the whole notion of unique can be delegated to a small portion of society.

Marie, is one of the parents in the margins. She is an immigrant mother with three children, each with "special

needs." The term "special needs" is one used here to describe children whose uniquenesses call for different ways of teaching. By this I mean that alternative ways of teaching are needed for her three children so the world can be opened up in order to "amplify and challenge the narrowness of personal experience and the limits of a singular perspective" (Boys, 1984, p. 272).

Marie and I came together because I taught her eldest child in my learning assistance program. Yet, somewhere and somehow over the course of the years as I have continued to work with her children and she has volunteered in my classroom, our relationship has blossomed. In the past few years I have spent many hours in conversation with Marie, both in and out of the school setting. She and I have become friends. In listening to Marie's stories and in sharing my stories with her, I find myself constantly being challenged. I am constantly moving from standpoint to standpoint, I am constantly questioning (Novak, 1978). This constant questioning, rethinking and thoughtful reflection is indeed an unsettling, yet powerful acknowledgement of the meaning of living. But it is through my relationship with Marie that I am in the process of opening more and more windows into the world of pedagogy. Our conversations have lead me to question and reflect on the ways I experience the world, ways I can become more fully part of the world, ways to understand that which is fundamental to being (van Manen, 1984). As a result

of our relationship, I have found myself deeply interested in the nature of pedagogy. Together (without formal acknowledgement) Marie and I have been exploring the meaning of living with children in a truly pedagogical manner.

It should be kept in mind that we are, in a very real sense, two people in the margins. Marie and I are marginalized by the fact that we are both advocates of children with significant differences. At first glance, one might wonder what two women who are out of the mainstream could offer to a discourse on pedagogy. It is Ted Aoki (1983) who brings credence to such an undertaking when he describes the hope in marginality. He writes:

This kind of opportunity for probing does not come easily to a person flowing in the mainstream. It comes more readily to one who lives at the margin - to one who lives in a tension situation. It is, I believe, a condition that makes possible deeper understanding of human acts that can transform both self and world, not in an instrumental way, but in a human way. (p. 325)

#### CONVERSATION: A WAY OF COMING TOGETHER

It is with the conscious acceptance of our marginality that Marie and I initially entered into conversation regarding her experience as an immigrant mother of children with special needs. She has lived a life of daily tensionality, that is, a life of conflicts, a conflict of two cultures, various

languages, and images of what might have been. It is this tensionality that for me has made Marie's seemingly ordinary life, extraordinary. It is the everyday tensionality of living with children that sparked many of our conversations.

One might wonder why conversation as a mode of inquiry? Language itself allows us to share our common humanity with each other. It is through language that humans can draw close and interact. When engaged in a conversation, the participants give and take, speak and listen. The resulting experience of a conversation is not linear in nature, but rather full of nuances, flavors of life in the actual process of living. Conversation gives voice to the human condition and to human silence. Conversation is women's greatest and first art.

Our foremothers talked while they worked. Gathering and talking - the two words come from the same proto-Indo-European root. The Gathering women worked with roots, the roots of words and of plants: they learned to select out lovingly just the ones they wanted. The plants became agriculture; the words became literature. (Hollingsworth, 1985, p. 106)

But, the art of conversation also lies in the saying, as well as what is said. "In saying something to you, I not only present a text, but I expose, discover, present, and offer myself to you, who happens to hear me" (Peperzak, 1989, p.



15). Within the saying, the said and the reception of meaning lies a responsibility to the other. It is this responsibility that gives conversation the characteristic of movement, of a circularity of form. "A good conversation is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another" (Martin, 1985, p. 10). This is the way Marie and I came together. We came together in conversation not as adversaries but rather as two women involved in the lives of particular children, with the intent of learning from one another, in the hopes of understanding how to live with children in a more significant way. Our conversations were in a sense a personal commitment and reflection on how we each should be in our lives with children. In a sense, we were involved in a moral discourse (Carson, 1986).

#### INTERPRETATION: A WAY OF DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

Hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpretation, allows for dialogue with, and interpretation of, a text, whether that text be action, or the written or spoken word. It gives rise to the opportunity to try and make sense of the world.

Gadamer (1970) sees this process of making sense, the process of understanding as occupying a fundamentally vital role in daily life. He writes:

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its

full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself...from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he [sic] encounters society...to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection. (p. 18)

Hermeneutic interpretation does not begin with a problem as such but rather asks "What is the question to which this text is the answer?" This process is "inherently conversational in that the participants in the conversation seek to deepen their understanding of the topic of conversation itself" (Carson, 1986. p. 76). The very nature of a conversation calls each participant to become involved personally. Gadamer (1975) describes a hermeneutic conversation this way.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning...to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the solidity of

opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. (p.330)

It is the openness to the question that makes conversational research a significant way to open ourselves to the ways and thoughts of others. The openness of conversation (when understood as a hermeneutic endeavor) makes possible a deeper consciousness of the realities of our situatedness (Carson, 1986).

Hermeneutic inquiry provides an opportunity to make sense of our world, as that world is presented to us in texts (Chambers, 1990). The text for this interpretation is made up of the transcript of my conversations with Marie as well as reflections in a personal journal. As interpreter, I venture into the space of the text with the hermeneutic question "To what questions is this text an answer?"

As interpreter, I venture into the text not to exploit or dominate, nor is it to view Marie, her children or myself as objects devoid of reflective engagement. Rather, the purpose is to uncover or discern the meaning of pedagogy in terms of mothering and teaching as it has and continues to unfold in both Marie's and my life. It is this discernment that will allow for a deeper orientation to how the text speaks to me as a woman, mother and teacher (Chambers, 1990).

Where do I stand in this interpretation? I am part of the text. I am one of the educators of whom Marie speaks. I am part of the text in the sense that my reflections have been

incorporated to make up the total text and yet I am not part of the text. Perhaps I am dwelling "between" (Aoki, 1986) two lived worlds, Marie's lived experience of which I have been and am a part of and my lived experience as teacher and mother and my reflections. Perhaps I am dwelling in a place that is in a sense a very rare and almost "sanctified clearing" (Aoki, 1986) where a teacher and a parent, two adults connected by particular children gather to cry, to laugh, to converse: a place filled with the hopefulness of deeper understanding of what it means to be responsibly and responsively involved in the lives of children. From this place, I will now share my interpretation of the text with you.

#### CARING: A HUMAN WAY OF BEING

a tiny child needs not only food and shelter  
   but something more...much more...  
 a feeling of love  
 that someone cares for him [sic]  
   ready to die for him  
 that he is really loved  
 that he is important...precious  
   and so he begins to live  
   begins to sense the value of being

and so it is that life rises in him  
   and he grows in confidence  
   in himself  
   and in his possibilities of life  
   and of  
   creation  
   (Vanier, 1970, p. 84)

Jean Vanier's words are words that capture the wonder of humanity as a child is born and nurtured in a very authentic

and caring manner. These words are words that may be interpreted by a parent as the intimate relationship that parents extend to their own children. These words are words that also capture the hope of a universal nurturance, a universal vision grounded in both responsibilities and care. Perhaps Jean Vanier never gave much thought to the fact that his words were words that resonated with that which is central to many women's own moral thinking, feeling, and concerns. They are words that resonate with emphasis on care, human connections, responsibility, nurturance and hope (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Grumet, 1988; Martin, 1985). And in a similar, perhaps somewhat less poetic sense, Marie's stories, my stories, our conversations and reflections - these texts, disclose to me the question of "What does it mean to live caringly with a child, as a mother, a teacher, as a woman?"

In an attempt to come to an understanding of the notion of care I first turned to the work of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, particularly his writing Being and Time. According to Heidegger (1962), an individual's essential relation to the world is really one of care. Heidegger interprets reality as care. That is to say, that different ways of being-in-the-world are different ways, different interpretations of caring. For Heidegger, "care is the basic constitutive phenomenon of human existence. Care is primordial, the source of action, not reducible to specific

actions" (Roach, 1984, p. 7). In other words, care can be thought of as the source of one's morality, "the source of one's conscience" (p. 7).

Nel Noddings (1984) in her work Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education speaks about this kind of morality, this kind of moral thinking. She understands that the nature of being for us as humans is to be in relation. Noddings writes "relation will be taken as ontologically basic" (p. 3). She also points out time and again the humans are "not naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance...My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality" (p. 51). Noddings continues to move from a relational ontology to a relational ethic. Being-in-relation is not only something quite natural, but also very morally desirable. It is by responsibly participating in caring relationships that we become more aware ethically.

Noddings' book in one sense calls for us to focus "on how we can best meet each other...[as caring individuals] and how we can create and enhance caring relationships" (Diller, 1988, p. 330). It seems to me that Noddings calls for a celebration of women's ways of being. The text which I am interpreting also speaks to this way of caring, not in a direct sense but more in a lived sense. This way of caring seems to be expressed in various ways at specific moments.

That is to say, the text discloses stories of the lived world which illustrate what caring entails. The text points to the meaning of trying to live caringly in the life of a child.

#### Caring as Compassion: A Quality of Presence

Nel Noddings (1986) in Caring speaks of a quality of presence, of connection within a caring relationship. She says the one who cares "is present in her acts of caring. Even in physical absence, acts at a distance bear the signs of presence: engrossment in the other, regard, desire for the other's wellbeing" (p. 19).

In our conversations, Marie describes her feelings as to her eldest child's lack of friends. She says "It almost eat me up! Because I don't want him to hurt so, he's so very soft, he is hurting so much. He feels so alone. I feel his pain. I feel his sadness."<sup>2</sup> In these words Marie demonstrates her deep sensitivity to the pain her eldest child is feeling. In a deep sense Marie is expressing a quality of presence that brings her to share with and make room for her child. Her compassion is very evident in the few short sentences. This invites us to consider the notion of compassion as a manner of living caringly with children.

Compassion comes from the Latin *pati-cum* meaning to suffer with. "Compassion asks us to go where it hurts"

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<sup>2</sup> The words of our conversations have been altered only to ensure the anonymity of the people involved. Please note that English is not Marie's first language.

(McNeill, Morrison, & Nouwen, 1982, p. 4). Therefore compassion calls us to share, to enter into the pain, the fear, the anguish another feels. It is what draws one to cry with those in sorrow and be joyful with those that are exhilarated. "Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human" (p. 4). In other words, compassion is a relationship with another's human condition which is based on solidarity and involves an honest, unpretentious presence to the one being cared-for (Roach, 1984).

The question arises whether compassion is something that one can acquire, or a skill that can be mastered? I think not, compassion is something unteachable in terms of a skill or technique, yet learned as one experiences being cared-for, as one is on the receiving end of compassion. As Marie's eldest child experiences his mother's compassion so he too will learn about compassion. And in a similar way I would venture to say that in the absence of compassion from others, one is unable to participate in the experience of another. Therefore, perhaps compassion is dependent on relationships. If nurtured, it can be fostered and brought to life within a relationship where it becomes a responsibility of being human. If ignored and left unnurtured it will remain hidden and not be experienced as the wondrous gift it can be.

Marie's words of compassion for her child demonstrates for me that compassion is a human response that in a deep sense tries to uncover that which has been covered. It is that



which allows us to go beyond the visible, to the place where we all share the difficulties of being human. It is where I meet the other in his or her vulnerability or weakness. Compassion challenges us to leave behind rivalries, competition and personal comparisons. It challenges us to give of ourselves, not in some noble sense of self-sacrifice but rather in genuine response to another. It asks us to heed the call of the other and become engrossed by that call. Compassion allows us to experience the "undeniable presence of loving responsibility" (van Manen, 1984, p. 160). Compassion is that which allows us to find a community, to find that which links in a passionate way all humans. It is that "through which our humanity grows into its fullness" (McNeill, Morrison, & Nouwen, 1982, p. 7).

And yet, in pedagogical discourse we hear so few words on compassion. Matthew Fox (1979) claims that:

compassion has been exiled in the West. Part of the flight from compassion has been an ignorance of it that at times borders on forgetfulness, at times repression, and at times in a conscious effort to distort it, control it and keep it down. (p. 1)

Fox (1979) understands compassion as a celebration of that which seeks to know and understand that which connects all human beings, all life. Compassion is not altruism but rather self-love and other love at one (Roach, 1984). It can be seen

then, that compassion, that ability to be present to another can only be developed in relationships. These relationships are never static, but ever moving events that can only be with the presence of the other.

#### Listening: A Mode of Receptivity

The quality of presence, calls for an individual to be receptive, to be open, to heed the calls of the other. The notion of receptiveness is one that speaks of the need to "give ear to." Noddings (1984) speaks of this receptivity in these words:

Caring is largely reactive and responsive. Perhaps it is even better characterized as receptive. The one caring is sufficiently engrossed in the other to listen to him [sic] and to take pleasure or pain in what he recounts. Whatever she [sic] does for the cared-for is embedded in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment and in an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for.

(p. 19)

Marie shares two stories that invite us to consider the meaning of listening as a quality of presence.

Marie relates an incident where I did not listen to her concerns that one of her children was being mistreated in the school. She says;

He [the teacher] always hit Robert. You don't know that? ... You should know that! Everybody,

all the kids told me that...OHHH! He [the teacher] hit Robert very, very badly. He treat him very, very poorly...I told you! I told you Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ has a very bad temper. I thought you know that... I thought you know that...everybody tell me he hit Robert...I told you! You should know that!

[silence]

As I reflected on this specific story I could not recall Marie talking to me of the concerns she had for her son's well-being. I could not recall hearing Marie's pleas for assistance. My deafness and my forgetfulness invites me to consider the nature of listening. What does it mean to truly listen? What does it mean to truly hear what another human being is saying? What is necessary for authentic legitimate discourse to take place? Is it simply a matter of choice, a conscious decision? Or does it demand that quality of presence where the people involved in dialogue have a mutual openness and interest for what the other is sharing?

Listening requires much more than just allowing sound to enter the ear. "Good listening is an alive process demanding alert and active participation" (Barbara, 1958, p. 1). This participation beckons one to listen with an active mind and entails giving the other, the speaker, a chance to say what they need to say, then interpret and clarify with the end result being a shared meaning, a shared understanding. Yet, listening is still much more than this. Marie points to this

"more-ness" as she speaks of her failure to hear her child's voice. She speaks of a recent incident with tears and great emotion.

I did not listen to Kevin. All this time his behavior...his bad behavior at school was him trying to tell me something. He cannot express in words to me what is wrong, so he show me something wrong. But I don't listen. I don't hear.

It is in these words that Marie points to the deeper meaning of listening. She in her own way is telling us that pedagogic listening is truly not something confined to just the ears. Pedagogic listening is something beyond the sound and the ear, listening is something you hear in your heart, in your soul, in your very being. Participation in pedagogic listening demands much more than an active mind and a careful ear, it is in a sense "a practice of compassion... our capacity...to be aware of, and responsive to, the interrelatedness and commonality of all sonorous beings" (Levin, 1989, p. 47).

David Levin (1989) in his work The Listening Self presents an account of personal growth and personal fulfillment based on our capacity to listen, on our participation in life as listeners. He argues that this participation in life demands that we fully develop ourselves as auditory beings for it is such a personal development that will assist and foster our character development of social and moral

being.

Marie's stories on listening point to the two deepest stages in Levin's argument those being the stage of "skillfully developed listening" and of "harkening - listening as recollection". Skillfully developed listening is the need for existential maturation of the Self. That is to say, a recognition of the development of the Self rather than the ego, processes that bring forth a deeper awareness that is necessary for the emergence of ethical and moral understandings. As Marie attempted to have me hear of her child's abusive situation, I was for some reason deaf to her words. The consequences of my momentary deafness was indeed significant for both her and her child. I wonder now, upon reflection, if my not hearing was a matter of hearing the voice of traditional educational dogma, that of a particular theory and method louder than hearing the voice of the individual. In my temporary deafness I could only hear what I thought should be as opposed to what actually was. And yet, in opening our ears and permitting ourselves to become involved in the world as it actually is, not as we have been told it should be, our true reflections as human beings come into light insofar as we have the courage to face ourselves. That is to say we can distinguish between the ego and the Self. Levin (1989) speaks to just this notion as becoming responsible for our hearing, that is the skillfull hearing that humans are capable of developing beyond which day-to-day

living requires. This kind of existential maturation requires the "recognition of the difference between (the being of) the ego and (the being of) the Self..." (p. 47). Levin describes the ego as a "defensively adaptive structure identified with an essentially fixed, socially conforming content" (p. 47). The development of Self as Levin contends can be enhanced through "the development of hearing as an organ of compassion (p. 48)." In my momentary deafness to Marie's words, my ears were not used as an organ of compassion. They were not attuned to the pure tones of the other.

This situation asks us to imagine what it must mean to be a mother, the advocate of a child, and not have concerns heard much less acted upon. In a sense, this situation brings into question the moral and ethical responsibility adults have to children and to each other. It is in the spirit of cooperation and the action of genuine listening that teachers and parents can establish a discourse that is reciprocal in nature. That is to say, neither person dominates the other in terms of being judgmental or condescending. It is in the very act of such a reciprocal discourse that lies the possibility of a greater understanding of what it means to live a life caringly with a child, what it means to be present in the life of another, what it means to find the Self within.

Is that all there is to listening? I think not, for if listening is truly an art (Barbara, 1958) there must be

something more, something deeper, something about listening that takes it away from the ordinary into the realm of extraordinary. Perhaps, Marie's acknowledgement of not hearing Kevin's message is a beacon that directs us to the deepest level, the core, the essence of listening, which I will call authentic listening. Levin (1989) calls this level the "Harkening" stage; where "letting-go and letting-be" (p. 48) are valued as a way of listening. At this level there is an openness to different ways of being and being-in-the-world. It seems to me that when Marie lamented about her lack of attunement to her son's way of speaking, she was questioning her lack of awareness to the meaning and significance of her son's behavior. Marie questioned the way she interpreted her son's calls. It is precisely through her reflexive questioning that Marie entered the realm of pedagogical thoughtfulness and demonstrated her desire for a deeper more authentic way of listening, a way that in some sense has a spiritual component. That is to say, Marie recognizes that listening means much more than listening to sounds. It means listening to the silence, to what is both said and unsaid. It means listening to experiences. It means listening to the rhythms of life. And listening cannot just occur with the ears; authentic listening is something that occurs when we listen with our entire body, with our feelings, our intuitions, all our senses. Authentic listening, that receptiveness to the other, "is a mode of perceptiveness that

we can only achieve by cultivating our capacity for feeling and restoring the connection between feeling and listening" (Levin, 1989, p. 219).

Perhaps I could never have understood the form of listening Marie points to and which Levin (1989) refers had I not experienced it as a mother. At times I am beckoned to my daughter's side as she sleeps. It is as if she calls to me. It is not a call that resonates with sound, but rather one that resonates through silence. It is a call that is unheard by others. As only a fine musician can hear every note of every instrument in an orchestra, I am able at times to hear the unsaid of my child. I am beckoned in the midst of my thoughts or dreams to listen, to heed my daughter's call. These calls do not reach my ears, but rather my heart, my soul, my spirit, my very being. Somehow I know, I sense from somewhere deep within the need to come to her. There are many times when preoccupations have resulted in my deafness to her calls. But when I do hear the calls what is it I hear? I hear in the silence something that compels me to listen. I hear an immediacy in the call. I hear the nurturing calls from within that compels a sensitive reception.

I would have to agree with Levin (1989) that our hearing is always a gathering. That is a coming together of sound that resonate not only with sound waves, but with feelings, with perceptions, and of course with silence. Listening is that which allows for one to gather with another and in this



gathering lies the opportunity to not only learn more about life, but also about the mysteries of life. But, our listening can always become more compassionate and similarly the more compassionate we are, the more receptive we become to the other.

Jean Vanier in Tears of Silence captures the notion of compassion as a gathering, a response to the echoes of lived voices which are truly essential for living the ethic of care. He writes:

com-  
 passion  
 is a meaningful word.....  
 sharing the same passion  
 the same suffering  
 the same agony  
 accepting in my heart  
 the misery in yours, o, my brother [sic]  
 and you accepting me

o yes there is fear  
 but even more deeply  
 there is the insistent cry from the entrails of  
 the suffering one

that calls me forth.....

some faint feeling  
 of confidence  
 that my smile.....my presence  
 has value and can give  
 life

thus deep friendship is born  
 mutual presence  
 humble and forgiving  
 engendering

quiet joy  
 fidelity (p. 40)

### Caring as Commitment

Jean Vanier (1970) also writes about the needs of a child. He says:

...and so to evolve  
                   the child  
                   needs  
 the look  
 the hands  
                                   of his [sic] mother (p. 68)

It seems to me that in these few words Vanier is expressing the need for more than gestures of care rooted in mere obligation. He is expressing the need for commitment, that is an investment of self; a coming together of both obligations and desires. A child's nurturance is dependent on the parental desire to want to act and be in a certain way as well as the obligations that are inherent in parenting.

Commitment can then be valued as a kind of "convergence between what I want to do and what I am supposed to do" (Roach, 1984, p. 25). In her own way, I feel that Marie's actions with her children speaks of this notion of commitment. Marie recollects an incident when one of her children was placed in what she felt was an inappropriate program. A program she felt would neither challenge him nor assist him. She says;

I had to find someone to help me prove they not  
 right...I very persistent. I ask everybody for

some opinions...I went to go see [a medical specialist]. I go see other parents. I go see [different administrators]...I just grind teeth and fight...I do everything to get what I believe best for [my child].

For me, this illustrates the deep connection between commitment and care. Marie demonstrated a commitment to her child and to the task of finding a responsive community. There was a coming together of Marie's sense of obligation and desires for her child. The act of searching for a responsive community was not a burden but rather something she wanted, something she chose to do. This commitment drew her to a conscious, willing and positive course of action. In other words, Marie took responsibility for searching for alternate ways of viewing her child's educational placement. She made a commitment to act. She responded to the call of caring by making a commitment.

Noddings (1984) contends that this notion of commitment is very important to understanding what happens when one cares. She writes:

When I care...there is more than feeling; there is also a motivational shift. My motive energy flows toward the other and perhaps, although not necessarily, toward his [sic] ends. I do not relinquish myself; I cannot excuse myself for what I do. But I allow my motive energy to be shared;

I put it at the service of the other. (p. 33)

This "putting at the service of the other" is something that may or may not be sustained, only a commitment to act and a continual renewal of that commitment will nourish a caring relationship (Diller, 1988). Noddings (1984) explains that caring "requires me to respond to the initial impulse with an act of commitment: I commit myself either to overt action on behalf of the cared-for...or I commit myself to thinking about what I might do" (p. 81).

Many stories Marie shared echoed with her voice of persistence. For example in the following words Marie explains her continuous efforts to gain approval for a rehabilitation aide to accompany her youngest child in a regular classroom.

I keep pressuring [the administrator] to please give Kevin an aide...I keep going back to her. I very persistent. I go to the teacher...I keep pressuring them...I keep emphasizing how much [Kevin] will grow. I go back. I go back again and again.

This story invites us to consider persistence as a lived manifestation of commitment. Marie's persistence was a response to her commitment to her child. It was a response grounded in intentionality<sup>3</sup> and that which really mattered to

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<sup>3</sup> Peperzak (1989) explains that intentionality is the basic concept of Husserlian phenomenology. Intentionality is the characteristic of consciousness whereby it is consciousness "of" or "about" something.

her. It was a response that was a giving of herself. It involved self-donation and was her way of beckoning others to listen.

Persistence, however, is not always a manifestation of commitment. As a teacher, I recall my persistence in helping a child come to recognize the various Canadian coins. At first my persistence took the form of repeated exposure to the various coins. But this initial persistence was a response to what I should do: it was a response to my obligation to teach a certain curriculum. It was not a response to a strong personal desire for the child to learn the various coins. It was only with the realization of the value such knowledge could have in the student's life that my persistence became a response to both my obligation and my desire. It became a response to my commitment to a child. It was only then that creativity took over and a number of alternative ways to assist such learning were opened for me.

It was the commitment to the student in the forementioned situation that led to, or guided me to the what Max van Manen (1988) calls "pedagogical understanding" of the child within the situation. It was only when there was an overlap of what I was supposed to do and what I wanted to do that I invested myself in the child and in the task. It was only then, after the commitment (unconscious at the time) had been made that I became more sensitive to the situation and shades of "pedagogical thoughtfulness" which led to action which was

"pedagogically tactful" (van Manen, 1984) emerged.

Commitment can therefore be seen as an individual's renewed promise to act as one-caring; a promise to act in a way that the one-caring will contribute toward the good of the other. So commitment is beyond mere obligation, it must include the desire to act in a manner that is sensitive to a particular person at a particular time.

#### **Commitment Cultivated by Confidence and Conscience**

Marie's commitment to her children also points to the power of the will, the power of determination. Marie speaks of where she gathers her strength, her will to continue to be persistent.

I know God had purpose for me to have my  
children...I think I'm thankful to have them  
...because now I know I can walk with Him more  
closely everyday, because I need His strength,  
I need his wisdom...I need to know if what I do  
is best for my family. But I know I had to [be]  
very, very careful to live day by day.

In these words it seems that Marie draws much of her energy from her spirituality. And it seems that this spirituality may also be that which provides her direction and gives her confidence to act, confidence to enter the realm of commitment. Her confidence cultivates a commitment to caring which she reveals, confirms and reaffirms in her lived world. Marie draws strength from her spirituality and "while

strength of any kind is good in itself, it does not become a moral good until it is enlisted in the service of care" (DeMarco, 1974, p. 78). Perhaps Marie's direction and confidence in one sense have become part of her moral awareness - a compass that directs her behavior. But moral awareness, or in other words conscience, must also come out of, or perhaps is reaffirmed through, one's experience with others. According to Heidegger (1962) conscience is the "call of care and manifests itself as care" (p. 319). Moral awareness comes out of a process of valuing self (not to be confused with ego) and the other, a process that allows one to deepen the commitment to the other.

But, according to Cohen (1989) an ethical responsibility, an "ethical debt" (p. 40) to the other exists from the first and prior to all making of meaning, prior to all interactions.

All meanings are already subject to the other person, are already for-the-other, and thus are subjected to a meaningfulness greater, of greater significance of more importance - in the ethical sense - than any and all meanings constituted or fulfilled. (p. 42)

In other words, the other person - the one I am involved with makes demands of me that cannot be "shirked without moral fault" (p. 43). The mere presence of another's face is an invitation to face the alterity of the other. This invitation "plunges an exceptional hold or vigilance so deep

into the self, endlessly, that the self is better than the ego, is more alert, more ready for the other, before thinking of or for itself" (p. 43). It is this 'hold' that orients one person to another. It is this 'hold' that gives and individual to go beyond the egoism to the self. "The self finds its inexhaustible resources when and only when it is without reserve in the service of the other" (p. 43). Therefore moral awareness can be that which motivates, that which provides both direction and pleasure. It is the memories, the feelings, the way one is with another that reaffirms one's ethical responsibility. But, moral awareness is not something that requires one to be judgmental of another. On the contrary, it requires being in the world and being for others in a manner that nurtures freedom (Roach, 1984). That is to say, moral awareness provides us with the question: How can I meet the other in a caring way?

Marie shared two stories that seem to be moments that capture or provide a sense of this moral obligation for another. Marie speaks of her youngest child's integrated swimming lessons.

My son has a right to be there, but so do the other children. My son does not have the right to cause other people not to learn, to be too much trouble for them.

In a second story Marie describes her middle child's way of dealing with anger. She says:



Sometimes he is very mad. He shout at you, but after a few minutes he'll come and tell you, 'I'm sorry.' He make me feel, he make me see that he is more mature than I am.

These two stories draw attention to the notion of respect and reverence for the other, for the child. Marie opens up the notion that a pedagogic relationship is not one of dominance but rather a relationship that allows for a child's "emancipatory growth into adulthood" (van Manen, 1982, p. 293) and challenges an adult "to see their own lives as a potentiality, that is, as an oriented being and becoming" (p. 293). A pedagogical relationship can therefore be viewed as a reciprocal relationship. That is to say, as the child learns and grows, so does the adult.

In her words, "My son has a right to be there, but so do the other children", Marie pays special heed to the other. She calls for a reverence of one's place, one's ways, one's beliefs and the place, way and beliefs of others. This reverence does not become a question of believing what others believe or living as others do, rather, it becomes a question of acceptance of differences as vital to all our human existence. In a sense Marie words lead us back to Levin's (1989) notion of letting-go and letting-be. She demonstrates her receptivity of the other and in doing so acknowledges the value of differences. For it is the differences combined with our sameness that allows us to share and come to a fuller

understanding of what it means to be human. In her commitment to act for her children, Marie reminds us of the moral obligations we have to others, particularly those we have in our care.

#### THE DIFFICULTY OF CARE

"For him [sic] that is joined to all the living there is hope" (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

To not speak to the difficulty of trying to live caringly with others would be a very obvious oversight. As I have read and reread the texts for this interpretation, at times the stories are drowned out by the sounds of silent pauses and heartfelt sobs. The silence and the tears point to the tensionality that exists when there are attempts to be responsive and responsible for children in a caring manner. In many of my conversations with Marie, sadness, frustration, confusion and desperation were often expressed in tears and touching rather than words. The attempts to live a caring life with a child is an attempt to live with the difficulty which is care. The tearful moments are moments that speak to the struggles of daily living as well as the realization that "our ultimate hopes for our children's world forms an empty horizon..since we cannot really know what the future will be like" (Smits, 1989, p. 8). The silences and tears Marie and I shared spoke to our struggles to understand, our struggle to make sense of our lives, and the situations in which our lives are situated. The silences and tears spoke to our fears

of the unknown, to our fears of not living up to our own expectations, to our fears of not heeding the pedagogical call, to our fears of not dealing with others in an ethical way, to the fears of living our lives in an uncaring manner. There was an acknowledgement of our shortcomings and the realization of our humanness.

The difficulty of care becomes most evident to me as I recall the frustrations of teaching children who lack the caring, nurturing support of another. The in-dwelling between two curriculums, the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1986) always results in a tensionality that sometimes for pragmatic reasons leads to detachment and indifference on my part to many of the needs of students. As a teacher of many I cannot heed every call of caring. I cannot take every child home with me to feed, clothe, nurture and love, therefore I become more selective to what I hear.

What is it that allows me to extend care to my own daughter yet at times deny it to those I am teaching everyday? Madeline Grumet (1988) reminds us that ethic of care "is rooted in space, requiring proximity and encounter, and time requiring response and duration" (p. 178). At the same time this does not mean that I abandon my efforts to live caringly with my students. What it does mean is that I face my student within the caring interval with openness, completely and nonselectively (Noddings, 1984) but, I always fall short of this ideal and herein lies the difficulty of care. What I can

do though is to accept my humanness and all the imperfections and ambiguities inherent in my humanness. This means that there needs to be an acknowledgement and an acceptance of the difficulty of care. This however does not mean that as a teacher I abandon my responsibility for the enhancement of the ethic of care. Rather, that I renew my commitment to my continual receptivity to my students.

In living with the difficulty of care there is a tensionality between what is and what could have been. There is a constant questioning of self and actions. There is a recognition of the "uncertainty and indeterminacy that is part of our life projects" (Smits, 1989, p. 12). There is an attempt "to learn from and make sense of the present" (p. 8).

To live amidst the difficulty of care there must be an acceptance of the difficulty of life. To accept difficulty is to accept our human-ness, to accept that "outcomes are necessarily more emergent and tentative than well-defined and certain" (p. 14). To live amidst the difficulty of care there is the need to reaffirm the commitment to care. There is a need to resurrect the commitment through hope.

Living within the difficulty of care and reaffirming a commitment to care requires the promise of new beginnings, it requires hope. This is expressed very candidly by Marie when she says "I want [my children] to be independent in the future that's what I am hoping for." Hope, as I see it, is that which gives Marie and all of us the awareness of potentiality.



### "RETURNING TO" THE LIVED WORLD OF RELATIONS

In Being and Time, Heidegger (1962) recounts an ancient Roman myth that speaks to the link between caring and being human. It speaks to the very notion that caring is indeed a human mode of being. The story goes like this.

Once when 'Care' was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took up a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. 'Care' asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this, and demanded that it be given his name instead. While 'Care' and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her own name be conferred on the creature, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: "Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since 'Care' first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called 'homo', for it is made out

of humus (earth)." (p. 242)

According to this myth, while humans live on earth their truest name is care. Care is that which constitutes humanness as being. In other words, "when one ceases to care, one ceases to be human" (Roach, 1984, p. 9). This is not to say that "care itself is a way or method for knowing, but it is...foundational for all knowing of human existence" (van Manen, 1984, p. 160). Caring is not something that can be categorized nor is it something that can be ever fully described, precisely because it is a way of being. And a way of being is something one cannot rationalize rather it is something that can only be experienced while in relation to something or someone else. Therefore the notion of care is something that can only be pointed to.

I have attempted to share moments that do just that. Moments particularized in concrete situations that point to the possible meaning of living a life caringly with a child. I have taken the moments and have attempted to express those moments as compassion, commitment, conscience and difficulty; each of which exist prior to or as a result of our being in relation with others. At the heart of all of this lies the question Nel Noddings (1984) asks and that is "how to meet the other morally?" (p. 95).

As I have explored the notion of care, there is the realization that so many questions are yet to be asked, so much is yet to be uncovered. Therefore, this is not a conclusion.

On the contrary, this is the point at which I must now put down my pen and "return to" the lived world of relations. I hopefully "return to" that everyday world with a deeper understanding of what it means to dwell in the tensionality between my ideals and what I say and do in my life with others. It is my "returning to" this everyday world that will allow me to meet the other and face the ethical questions involved in being human.



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