

# Establishing Second-Person Forms of Contemplative Education: An Inquiry into Four Conceptions of Intersubjectivity<sup>1</sup>

Olen Gunnlaugson

**Abstract:** Four accounts of intersubjective theory are explored as a means for providing distinctions that support the development of second-person approaches to the emerging field of contemplative education. I examine Martin Buber's conception of the interhuman, Thich Nhat Hahn's interbeing, Christian De Quincey's three modes of intersubjective engagements, in addition to Wilber's five categories of intersubjectivity with consideration for how each will contribute to further outlining second-person dimensions of contemplative education. I then locate intersubjectivity in a broader epistemological terrain and propose the notion of *critical second-person contemplative education* as a type of pedagogy and approach to learning within contemplative education.

**Key words:** consciousness, contemplative, intersubjective, second-person education.

## Introduction

While contemplative practices have been foundational to wisdom traditions throughout recorded history, it is only recently that these practices are being examined in different contexts of learning, particularly in higher education. In the past decade, several academic conferences<sup>2</sup> and a growing educational literature have focused on contemplative approaches to teaching, learning and knowing (Brady, 2007; Duerr et al., 2003; Hart, 2004; Miller, 1994; Seidel, 2006;

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was researched with the financial support of a Doctoral SSRHC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) Canadian Graduate Scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> The following conferences have either exclusively focused on or featured presentations about contemplative education in recent years: *Contemplative Pedagogy in Higher Education* (Amherst College, May 2003), *Contemplative Practices and Education: Making Peace in Ourselves and in the World* (Teachers College, 2005), *Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education* (San Francisco, 2007), *Mindful Learners: The Uses of Contemplative Practice in the Classroom* (CUNY, 2006), *Developmental Issues in Contemplative Education* (Garrison Institute, 2008). Additionally, there is a graduate program in Contemplative Education at Naropa University, Contemplative Studies at Brown University and the University of Michigan as well as the *Rocky Mountain Contemplative Higher Education Network* based out of Colorado for academics interested in contemplative approaches to education. Over the past decade through the *Center for Contemplative Mind* there have been annual contemplative retreats and over 130 individual fellowships for \$10,000 US issued to academics across North American campuses to develop courses that employ contemplative practices. Also, over the past decade there have been annual retreats at Naropa's *Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education*, as well as a special feature journal issue on contemplative education with the *Teacher's College Record* (September, 2006).



Thurman, 2006). Existing theoretical and qualitative research in contemplative education includes the following areas of focus: integration of contemplative practice in academia (Apffel-Marglin & Bush, 2005; Hall & Archibald, 2008; Nelson, 2006; Zajonc, 2006); studies of mindfulness in higher education settings (Holland, 2006; Langer, 1997); presence (O'Reilly, 1998; Seidel, 2006); contemplative learning in holistic education (Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006); teacher development (Brown, 1998; Miller, 1994); prospects for a new field of studies (Duerr et al., 2003; Roth, 2006); survey of K-12 programs using contemplative practices (Garrison Report, 2005); meditation as a vehicle for contemplative education (Brady, 2007; Sarath, 2003; Zajonc, 2008); and contemplation as creativity (Brady, 2007; Sarath, 2006). These and other contributions draw broadly from the perennial world wisdom traditions (i.e., Buddhist, Taoist, Quaker) and recent scientific research (i.e., neuroscience, cognitive science, clinical psychology) in the interests of investigating contemplative practices<sup>3</sup> as a means for enhancing learning and development across a broad array of educational contexts and disciplinary fields.

Naropa University, a leader in contemplative education, defines and outlines their approach:

Contemplative education is learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others, honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines. The rigor of these disciplined practices prepares the mind to process information in new and perhaps unexpected ways. Contemplative practice unlocks the power of deep inward observation, enabling the learner to tap into a wellspring of knowledge about the nature of mind, self and other that has been largely overlooked by traditional, Western-oriented liberal education. This approach to learning captures the spark of East and West working within; it's the meeting of two of the greatest learning philosophies in the history of higher education. (Naropa University, 2008)

Informed by various contemplative wisdom traditions, contemplative education involves the integration of contemplative practices into the curriculum of traditional higher education settings for the purposes of fostering intuitive, non-conceptual and experiential forms of knowing along paths of learning characterized by wholeness, unity and integration.

As a prominent voice within contemplative education, scholar-practitioner Harold Roth (2006) advocates exploring contemplative exercises from critical first-person and third-person perspectives.<sup>4</sup> In the few articles that address epistemological issues (Roth, 2006; Sarath, 2006), sufficient attention has not yet been given to contemplative pedagogy<sup>5</sup> from second-person

---

<sup>3</sup> Traditional contemplative practices include meditation, prayer, chanting, ink brush painting, ritual performance as well as music, dance, storytelling, martial arts, contemplative art, among others.

<sup>4</sup> Roth (2006, p. 1805) points out that first-person approaches to contemplative experience involve exploring contemplation from a subjective position within the individual learner, while third-person approaches aspire to examine contemplative experience from an objective position that is presumed to be outside of us.

<sup>5</sup> I define contemplative pedagogy as any first-, second- or third- person contemplative practice that is utilized for educational purposes. Generally contemplative practices invoke heightened states of consciousness or contemplative awareness, which is "a state of being in which one is fully present and attuned to the world, bracketing thinking, judging, and analyzing, while trying to see clearly (Kesson, 2006, p. 1879). While contemplative pedagogy may draw on contemplative practice, not all

perspectives, with a present gap in the literature concerning intersubjective approaches to pedagogy and learning. Given the absence of a systematic study of the philosophy, psychology and phenomenology of intersubjectivity, as scholar-practitioners, there is a need to further outline how to identify, discern and experience key second-person approaches to contemplative pedagogy and learning in our classrooms.

For the purposes of this article, second-person approaches to contemplative education involve exploring contemplative experience from an intersubjective position that is represented spatially as *between* us, in contrast to *inside* us (subjective position) or *outside* us (objective position). As the four accounts of intersubjectivity in this article attempt to demonstrate, there are different dimensions to shared experience that call upon distinct features of this relational perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Intersubjective theory has surfaced in recent decades from diverse developments in consciousness studies, integral studies, philosophy of mind, transpersonal psychology and feminist critical theory among others. Partly in response to the problematic legacy of Cartesian rationalism that proceeds epistemically by objectifying and depersonalizing one's self and the world (Ferrer, 2001), a number of intersubjective theorists (Bai, 1999, 2004; De Quincey, 2000, 2005, Heshusius, 1994; Thompson, 2001) have made the effort to establish the validity of certain shared processes of knowing born through and inside relationship. In doing this, these contributions have provided an important epistemological rebalancing and movement towards more integrated visions of knowledge and the processes of knowing.

Within educational contexts, intersubjectivity has been applied for improving teaching designs for a community of learners in terms of focusing on the common elements of attention, understanding and communication (Matusov, 2001). Related to this application is the design of a shared pedagogical object for the learning activity (EngestroKm, 1990), which the educator and students explore during the lesson (Wertsch, 1979). Intersubjectivity has also been applied in the context of special consensus-based learning activities (Matusov, 1996). Framed as a move from egocentric to sociocentric thought (Soltis, 1985), intersubjectivity has served the educational purposes of dialogue instruction (Guilar, 2006) focusing on the interrelationships between teachers, student and content.

In the upcoming sections I consider the following accounts of intersubjectivity<sup>7</sup> with an interest<sup>8</sup> in their relevance to contemplative education: Martin Buber's conception of the

---

contemplative practices are suitable within educational contexts. As such, it is advisable that educators explore a particular contemplative practice outside the classroom in order to determine which (if any) elements will be appropriate in serving their teaching objectives and the learning needs of students.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this article, I am focusing primarily on the individual and shared aspects of consciousness in the context of relationality and group discourse. Due to the limitations of space and the specific focus and scope of the article, I have not chosen not to address the myriad personal histories, social, cultural or political voices of students that play an important role in shaping classroom interactions.

<sup>7</sup> I chose to focus on these four intersubjective theorists as their contributions to intersubjectivity theory are rooted in and informed by deeper existential interests in the human condition. Additionally, each proceeds with an underlying sacred orientation to their inquiry and holds a deep-seated commitment to evolving human consciousness with their work. I believe these aspects are particularly relevant to my project insofar as theorizing about the deeper dimensions of intersubjectivity seems to require at the very

interhuman (Buber, 1965, 1966, 1984; Kramer, 2003), Thich Nhat Hahn's interbeing (Bai, 1999, 2004; Nhat Hanh, 2000; Nakagawa, 2000; Rothberg, 1998), Christian De Quincey's three forms of intersubjectivity (2000; 2005; Hargens, 2001) and Ken Wilber's integral dimensions of intersubjectivity (Wilber, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2006; Hargens, 2001). Following this, I recontextualize these intersubjective approaches as contributions from a second-person perspective within both Wilber's (2006) and Edwards' (2005) epistemological maps. I then take up Sarath's (2006) consideration of second-person forms of knowing and learning and introduce the notion of *critical second-person forms of contemplative education* raised in my brief summaries and critical readings of the four above accounts of intersubjectivity as a framework for engaging with contemplative educator's approach to teaching and classroom learning.

## Four Conceptions of Intersubjectivity

### Buber's Conception of the Interhuman

A twentieth century religious existential philosopher, Martin Buber has been a prominent voice in advocating the ideals of sacred consciousness, interpersonal relationship and dialogue in community. Buber's philosophical contribution involves framing human existence as contingent upon interpersonal modes of consciousness, interaction and being through which one engages with other humans, nature, the inanimate world and the sacred. Best known for his distinctions of I-Thou and I-It relationships (1965, 1966, 1984), Buber argues that human life consists of a movement between meeting and mismeeting in these realms, with the I-thou representing a sacred form of relationship (which is central to interhuman relations) and the I-It a more common secular variety (Buber, 1965). In Buber's (1984) monological I-It relationship, others are regarded like an "object" in a world that largely consists of people to be interacted with in order to serve our desires and ends. Buber (1984) elevates the personhood, needs and interests of the other as "subject" in the dialogical I-Thou mode of relationship, basing it on a responsiveness

---

least, an experiential familiarity with the shared potentials of consciousness—a capacity that is exemplified in the work of each of these theorists.

<sup>8</sup> My interest and passions for intersubjectivity and contemplative education arise from a number of sources. As a dialogue educator and facilitator, I have taught post-secondary courses over the past eight years utilizing generative dialogue processes in Sweden, USA and Canada. My research, partly informed by these experiences, has been primarily of a theoretical and philosophical nature with an overarching interest in clarifying and inquiring further into the conditions for students to experience integral forms of transformative education mediated by deeper intersubjective dimensions of teaching and learning. As an eclectic Buddhist practitioner and meditator, I am interested in inquiring further into consciousness-related approaches to learning and related themes. This project is in part motivated by an interest in deepening and broadening the evolution of consciousness discourse in the contemplative education literature as well as improving upon my knowledge and expertise in these areas as a scholar-practitioner. In addition, as a personal coach, my interests in self-actualization have developed a strong interest in learning the skillful means and capacities needed to support the conditions for personal transformation in my students and clients. Finally, my interest in cultivating second-person forms of contemplative education is also motivated by my experiences in various communities of practice that applied presencing and other intersubjective practices to our collective process, where we discovered and co-enacted deeper creative possibilities that I believe have a yet untold significance in classroom life.

to and confirmation of the other, the other's deeper humanity and the existing present-ness of the situation. Wood (1999) elaborates on the I-Thou relation:

For Buber, I-Thou relations are unique, unpredictable, immediate, and involve the whole of oneself 'bound up in reciprocity' with the other. I-It relations are linked to the universal, are predictable, mediated by past experience, and involve only a part of oneself which stands at a distance from the object. I-It relations are third-person relations, so that for 'It' one could substitute also 'He' or 'She' or 'They.' (Wood, 1999, p. 84)

Distinguishing these two very different modes of existence, the I-Thou relation draws upon a second-person basis of connection that emerges through our encounters with others. In adopting the I-Thou attitude or stance towards relationship, there is a turning towards and acknowledgement of a more elemental and existential experience of another.

Throughout Buber's works, he tends to sharply contrast the I-It relationship and I-Thou relationship. At times this leaves little room for more nuanced and paradoxical modes of being and meeting that are not exclusively apart of either archetype. Sidorkin (2000) elaborates:

It is either I-Thou or I-It, all or nothing. There is nothing else and nothing in between. In his later work, Buber tried to enrich this binary model by introducing the notion of *Zwischenmenschliche*, or the interhuman. The interhuman consists of elements of every day life that may lead to a genuine dialogue, or, as Buber describes it, "I-Thou" relation. (Sidorkin, 2000, p. 10)

As a context that is "generated by the immediate presence that binds together a conscious "self" with a conscious "other." (Kramer, 2003, p. 78), the interhuman offers a key dormant dimension of intersubjective experience that learners discover through I-Thou meeting:

When two individuals "happen" to each other, there is an essential remainder that reaches out beyond the special sphere of each-the "sphere of the between." In an essential relation the barriers of individual being are breached and "the other becomes present, not merely in the imagination or feeling, but in the depths of one's substance, so that one experiences the mystery of the other being in the mystery of one's own. (Buber, 1965, p. 170)

The interhuman involves relating to others as partners in a living intersubjective event, bringing about a context where I-Thou relationship may emerge (Buber, 1966). Given that the interhuman offers no smooth continuity, it has been largely ignored (Friedman, 2001). Yet, in aspiring to meet from the interhuman and confirming one another, in spite of whether one is in agreement or not, there is an occasion to stand one's own ground while (in the context of our classrooms) we meet our students on theirs. In a classroom where an educator is exploring a collective form of contemplative pedagogy, learning from the context of the interhuman would be contingent on the educator's quality and capacity for sustaining presence with her students. Additionally, it would depend upon her capacity to confer, share and invite students into fostering I-thou forms of relating *collectively* as an underlying process informing the inquiry. Buber's characterization of the interhuman describes a subtle way of being with others from the condition of presence, where former barriers or boundaries between self and other soften,

offering an *existential* referent in that it enables the self and the other to become more immediate, tangible and real.

Buber locates the interhuman sphere of the between beyond the domain of the conditioned socialized self which typically engages in I-It forms of relationship. For Buber, the interhuman cannot be reduced to an “it” or “thing” and emerges “in the presence of spontaneous mutuality” (Kramer, 2003, p. 104). Expanding upon the modes of mismeeting that typify I-It encounters, and forms of meeting with the I-Thou, Buber posits the “supreme meeting” (2003, p. 47) as indicative of special peak experiences in the deeper realms of the interhuman where it is possible to experience *pure relation*. From these moments of supreme meeting with students, one is initiated as it were into a sacred *relational* experience of second-person knowing through the interhuman realm of intersubjectivity.

Ironically, while Buber advocated for such encounters, he disliked groups as Sidorkin (1995) elaborates:

Buber is right, most of the groups most of the time probably do suppress an individual relation. But a group might become a nurturing community, a special kind of group that is not hostile to, but inviting of the interhuman. As we can see, Buber states that the interhuman encounter happens within the group only as a *secondary* meeting, while the work of the group is the main concern. A nurturing community is the group where this hierarchy is reversed. It is a group where the interhuman is the primary concern, and what the group actually *does* together moves into a subordinated position. (Sidorkin, 1995, p. 5)

In this passage, Sidorkin uncovers a key insight concerning the importance of leading classroom interactions from the intersubjective domain of the interhuman. This becomes quite relevant in the context of second-person forms of contemplative education, as all conversations take place intersubjectively. Yet, contact with and inquiry informed by the deeper ontological domain of the intersubjective that Buber’s interhuman signifies may be subtly eclipsed, inadvertently marginalized or skipped over in the effort to fulfill content objectives in the courses we teach. Reflecting on previous teaching experiences that draw upon collective forms of contemplative pedagogy, I have come to appreciate the importance of aspiring to speak and listen from Buber’s interhuman sphere of the between with students as the primary context for orienting collective contemplative learning processes.

With the interhuman encounter as the primary basis for meeting, it becomes possible for both the educators to recalibrate their teaching stance and the students to in turn recalibrate their learning stance towards a shared I-Thou orientation. Honoring a primary commitment to fostering Buber’s sphere of the between with our students helps bring about a shift in the classroom ethos towards becoming a more nurturing community (Sidorkin, 1995). In this sense, Buber’s work offers a helpful insight into the transformative potential of addressing one another through deeper presence in the intersubjective encounter, which can give rise to an ontological shift in the context of our inquiry and learning within educational settings. By implementing contemplative second-person approaches that are not only aware of the relational and sacred implications of I-thou encounters with our students, but also committed to enacting the interhuman as a primary concern, I believe Buber’s contributions to intersubjectivity can shed

important light on one of the necessary preconditions for collective contemplative methods informed by the deeper ontological realms of the interhuman sphere of the between.

## Nhat Hanh's Interbeing

Drawing from his Vietnamese lineage of Buddhism in the East and life experience in the West, Buddhist monk, scholar, poet, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings of engaged Buddhism speak to a broad cross section of people from various religious, spiritual, and cultural backgrounds. Known for his work with mindfulness in daily life, Nhat Hanh is a passionate exemplar of uniting Buddhist contemplative practice with social action and inter-religious dialogue.

Within Nhat Hanh's teachings, his depiction of interbeing (2000) is informed by the central Buddhist theory of *pratitya-samutpada* (Nakagawa, 2000), which literally means *contingent origination*, but is often translated as *dependent co-arising*. From the perspective of interbeing we radically coexist and are fundamentally interrelated with what is "other" unlike the Cartesian dualistic account of human experience, in which we exist independently in and for ourselves. As a lens to help us experience the ground and fabric of relationality within and beyond the human domain to include all of life, interbeing depicts the self as an active co-participant in a greater shifting matrix of mutual causality and interrelationship. Within the Buddhist tradition, when *pratitya-samutpada* is deeply understood by practitioners, it helps bring liberation from the root of suffering and delusion insofar as the *separate* self-sense is seen through as an impermanent psychological construction, empty of any abiding or independent constitution (Nakagawa, 2000). *Pratitya-samutpada* also offers a classic phenomenal depiction of how we emerge through interdependent relations and how all events are deeply interwoven and mutually conditioned.

Nhat Hanh (2000) builds upon this classic Buddhist insight and goes a step further by emphasizing how the realization of interbeing gives rise to an increased sense of interconnectedness, bringing about a more inclusive and deepened ethic of responsibility for others. As such, his account of interbeing offers an important perspective for engaging with the underlying process-oriented nature of reality. By illustrating how our everyday experience of self and world are deeply interconnected, interdependent and interrelated, interbeing validates the underlying intersubjective ground of being that human experience is ultimately contingent upon.

When viewed within a contemplative educational context, interbeing brings attention to how the students, the classroom subject of inquiry, the process of inquiry and educator shape and co-constitute one another. As a "pedagogy of communion" (Nakagawa, 2000, p. 50), interbeing helps deconstruct our conditioned identification with our *separate* self-identity as an educator and, in turn reconstruct our primary identification with *interconnected* experiences of self and the attendant co-constitutive classroom processes. The practice of interbeing foregrounds the dynamic interrelated elements of the learning process with one's students, which cultivates compassion and an education of heart (Dalai Lama, 1999). Whether through a contemplative reconstruction of our student's points of view or a willingness to feel our student's distress concerning a particular injustice and resulting suffering on a particular issue, interbeing disrupts our traditional sense of agency and western self-sufficient ideals of individuality.

Upon closer inspection, interbeing offers the possibilities of what Wilber describes as “agency-in-communion” (Rothberg et al., 1998, p. 216). That is, an agency that is no longer being motivated by a traditional idealized masculine stance of autonomy that avoids, suppresses or denies communion. From the perspective of interbeing, our individual strength and source of empowerment are fueled by our connection(s) with others within greater fields of interrelatedness, further helping us see through the false Cartesian dualism of personal autonomy versus relationship. Bai (1999) elaborates: “The self dynamically flows into, out of, and with the other, creatively assuming a complex, polymorphous sense of agency. It is not the simple sense of agency wherein the subject (the self) does something to its object (the other)” (p. 4).

Through this *polymorphous sense of agency*, the tensions of individual agency and communion lie in the paradoxical dance of, on the one hand, becoming increasingly attentive to our interrelatedness with others (i.e., our students) without, on the other hand, binding one’s sense of self to them. Such an intersubjective orientation can also help us avoid falling into either extreme of what Wilber (Rothberg et al., 1998, p. 216) frames as *pathological agency* (which avoids or denies communion) or *pathological communion*, where we become overly identified with relationality to the extent that we find ourselves submersed in orienting from the needs of others.<sup>9</sup>

How might interbeing advance the project of developing second-person contemplative pedagogy in higher education settings? Interbeing provides an intersubjective context and process that can be of great use in informing the development of second-person methods. By attending phenomenologically to the distinctive intersubjective space(s) we co-inhabit with our students, the educator learns (with practice) to see through the dualistic tendencies of his or her own consciousness—particularly in terms of how this reinforces different forms of separateness and fragmentation in group contexts of classroom learning. By forging a more distributed basis of connection with our students, the class subject and the processes of contemplative inquiry, seeing with the eyes of interbeing can help facilitate a shift into a deeper second-person intersubjective experience. As these elements coalesce, occasions for engaging with multiple contexts of self and otherness invariably arise. By modeling and encouraging a less rigid identification with our conventional identities, interbeing also offers a more distributed context of inter-relationality, which in turn establishes a broader ground and intersubjective context out of which we can lead the class inquiry. This helps relieve everyone of the individualistic if not narcissistic habit of blocking the intersubjective view by being in the middle of a conversation or steering classroom discourse with one’s private agenda. By valuing and amplifying our shared experience of consciousness, the lens of interbeing brings into focus the more subtle unseen aspects and sinews of interrelatedness with our students, the subject and process of inquiry.<sup>10</sup> This helps us relax the habituated compulsion to know and deliver an authoritative view to our

---

<sup>9</sup> While our culture suffers from both pathological tendencies, Wilber’s integrated notion of agency-in-communion offers a helpful distinction to monitor our ontological orientations for being in the world.

<sup>10</sup> Given that (a) interbeing extends far beyond the context of intersubjectivity and (b) the urgent need for a more comprehensive ethic of responsibility towards others, in certain higher education classroom settings it will be constructive to broaden the scope of the interbeing lens by expanding beyond the students in the class to include greater contexts such as all humans and the more than human world.



students.<sup>11</sup> In the context of classroom inquiry, interbeing can help students and educator regard the classroom as a place for occasions of interconnectedness and the co-constitution of shared meaning.

In addition to the applications of Interbeing discussed above, educators may wish to impart a taste of the experience by introducing a guided visualization informed by Nhat Hanh's (1998) writings:

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are. "Interbeing" is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix "inter-" with the verb "to be," we have a new verb, inter-be. Without a cloud and the sheet of paper inter-are. If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger's father and mother are in it too. When we look in this way, we see that without all of these things, this sheet of paper cannot exist. Looking even more deeply, we can see we are in it too. This is not difficult to see, because when we look at a sheet of paper, the sheet of paper is part of our perception. Your mind is in here and mine is also. So we can say that everything is in here with this sheet of paper. You cannot point out one thing that is not here-time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. That is why I think the word inter-be should be in the dictionary. "To be" is to inter-be. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because everything else is. (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 3)

While such visualization exercises can be helpful in bringing about a shift in our accustomed habits of perception and ways of apprehending and relating to the world, there invariably will be occasions when it can be challenging to experience interbeing with students. Nhat Hanh's depiction of interbeing offers a means for working with the resistances in ourselves to what is "other" in our classrooms, as well as to the elements in our students and ourselves that we may resist and for whatever reasons, cannot or refuse to openly engage with. By identifying and finding a basis to transform the elements in ourselves that prevent us from recognizing our inter-relatedness with our difficult students, we become more prone to experiencing our students and our selfhood as interdependent and thus our processes of inner transformation and our students' transformation as likewise interdependent.

---

<sup>11</sup> This does not suggest that professors are not also balancing content objectives, teaching aims, purposes and other considerations that shape the post-secondary classrooms.

## De Quincey's Three Forms of Intersubjectivity

*Instead of being lone subjects in our own life's drama, we are 'intersubjects' created by the original worldwide web - the web of intersubjectivity woven in the Great Cosmic Drama, in the Great Unfolding of Being. (de Quincey, 2005, p. 182)*

Christian de Quincey is a theorist in the field of consciousness studies and the philosophy of mind. His more recent work focuses on legitimizing second-person forms of knowing and inquiry by arguing for fundamental shifts in our understanding of human experience and consciousness. Like Nhat Hanh and Buber, in *Radical Knowing* De Quincey presents his thesis of intersubjectivity as both the ground and precondition that human consciousness arises out from. Like Buber, he tends to emphasize the interpersonal dimension of relationship given that communication is among his chief concerns. Tracing out the philosophical and spiritual roots of intersubjectivity in his work (2005), he argues overall that it has not been given sufficient attention as a legitimate ground of knowing and path for exploring consciousness.

De Quincey (2000, 2005) distinguishes among three types of intersubjectivity, each offering an important contribution to the project of bringing forth a second-person approach to contemplative education. He derives his first meaning of intersubjectivity from the basic Cartesian worldview where "individual subjectivity ontologically precedes intersubjectivity" (2005, p. 183). Communication in intersubjectivity-1 takes place primarily through sharing language and linguistic signals. Comparable to Buber's I-It relationship, linguistic intersubjectivity is commonly found in academic culture where the prevailing pattern is to develop one's own unique point of view "independently" of others. This can lead to a pedagogical orientation that privileges agency, where as educators we may find ourselves siding with those students who share a similar view to us. Prone to overlooking the entangled matrix of interbeing and corresponding forms of collective intelligence, from intersubjectivity-1 we teach from our established funds of knowledge as the meeting point or center of convergence in the classroom or online learning environment.

The meaning of intersubjectivity-2 refers to the psychological dimension of intersubjectivity, which, according to De Quincey (2005), is explored in the intellectual and feeling realm of relationship through presence. De Quincey remarks that intersubjectivity-2 focuses more on the interpersonal domain of communication, but not the deeper intersubjective context of an interaction. Here, participants' subjectivity is still ontologically prior to intersubjective encounters. For the purposes of contemplative pedagogy, intersubjectivity-2 draws upon felt-relational forms of presence, providing an important intermediate depth of intersubjective experience that is comparatively more engaged than intersubjectivity-1. Given that intersubjectivity-2 relies on personal or interpersonal presence, the educator is focused on shifting the classes' participation into presence, but as a means for affecting their learning of the subject, not transforming their sense of self to "understand the deeper co-arising and engagement of intersubjective subjects or intersubjects" (p. 281), which is the hallmark of the third sense or "intersubjectivity-3" (2005). For De Quincey, intersubjectivity-3 involves the radical shift from separate subjects interacting psychologically to a more profound transpersonal form of

interacting that is also based upon shared presence.<sup>12</sup> However, in this mode of intersubjectivity, our interrelatedness with another is experienced as *primary* to one's ontological constitution. For De Quincey, this deep form of intersubjectivity contains the seeds of co-creative process and "relies on co-creative nonphysical presence, bringing distinct subjects into being out of a prior matrix of relationships" (2000, p. 2).

For the project of developing intersubjective approaches to contemplative education, De Quincey's intersubjectivity-2 and -3 offer important contributions. By drawing attention to the significance of felt-relational presence, intersubjectivity-2 offers an important intermediate context that focuses on the personal dimension of learning with others. In focusing on a shared transpersonal basis of learning with intersubjectivity-3, De Quincey identifies a path to generative interactions through the vehicle of a sacred co-creative relationship where our experiences of self and the world are chiefly mediated by engaging in presence with other centers of experience (i.e., subjects). Both forms involve learning to facilitate interactions beyond De Quincey's first mode of intersubjectivity where educator and students exchange language and inform each other (intersubjectivity-1). While De Quincey locates intersubjectivity-2 interactions as arising from independent subjects, his emphasis on felt-relational presence and incorporating the psychological dimension of learning are essential in creating the conditions for safety, compassionate listening and interpersonally mediated forms of co-creativity. For intersubjectivity-3, the aim is to experience the interhuman sphere of the between as ontologically prior to our individual subjectivities. Expressed in another way, the relational context or interhuman field becomes more prominent in one's awareness than our individual sense of separateness from both one another and this interhuman sphere of the between. By aspiring to learn together as *interdependent* subjects, our very identities become involved with the co-creative processes of conversation. It is not that individual meaning is no longer important. Rather, the emphasis of intersubjectivity-3 shifts to co-creating new *shared* meaning through collective felt presence and what is emerging through the class. My understanding of this intersubjective turn is that it involves listening and speaking from a subtly different self-location that is interwoven with, rather than separate from the interhuman field that envelops the participants. From this collective shift in attention and raising of collective mindfulness, in intersubjectivity-3 students and professor are more able to collectively experience its thinking processes together, rather than (a) simply verbalizing or downloading our thoughts when communicating, which is characteristic of intersubjectivity-1 or (b) overly relying on the interpersonal qualities of intersubjective experience as is characteristic of intersubjectivity-2.

---

<sup>12</sup> Though De Quincey does not elaborate on how to make the shift from psychological to transpersonal modalities of intersubjectivity, my experience is that each form involves a different quality of presence and self-sense of the individuals engaging within these interactions. In other words, from intersubjectivity-2 one is still relating primarily to another as a separate self, whereas in intersubjectivity-3 one is relating to another from an interconnected sense of self that is informed by Bai's (1999) notion of a more polymorphous sense of agency that arises in part from the field of relationship that one experiences one's self co-arising with others from.

De Quincey's philosophical project lies in legitimizing second-person forms of knowing (i.e., particularly intersubjectivity-3).<sup>13</sup> As he points out, "we tend not to notice the second-person perspective because it is right in front of our noses every day. It is the medium in which we most naturally live" (2005, p. 178). However, it is also a medium that is most taken for granted or that we are most unconscious of, too, hence the importance of his three definitions and emphasis on presence, shared meaning, relationality and collective ontology as keys to deepen and refine our practice of second-person forms of knowing and being. As De Quincey's three definitions arc towards an increased degree or levels of intersubjective depth, they mark a progression from separate individuals interacting towards a more unitive and interwoven movement of shared consciousness. The shifts from intersubjectivity-1 to -3 represent not only new possibilities for co-creative manifestation within contemplative classroom settings, but make specific aspects of intersubjectivity (i.e., communion, co-presence, shared meaning) progressively more prominent than the individual agency, presence and personal meaning of learners who are co-participating in the intersubjective event—a change in pedagogical approach that has yet to be accounted for within the existing contemplative education literature.

### Wilber's Five Dimensions of Intersubjectivity

Over the past three decades, American philosopher Ken Wilber has developed a transdisciplinary and transcultural integral philosophy that draws from a wide cross-section of perspectives, methodologies and paradigms across a breadth of fields and traditions. Wilber's recent AQAL approach<sup>14</sup> (2006) serves as a model through which theorists and practitioners can explore an integrally-informed perspective to their work within their respective fields of knowledge. Integral theorist Sean Hargens (2001) has identified at least five types of intersubjectivity throughout Wilber's writings (1996, 1997, 2006). In contrast to De Quincey's three definitions, which address instances of communication and were developed out of his research in academic philosophy and consciousness studies, Hargens' account of Wilber's "types" of intersubjectivity are culled from a comprehensive review of Wilber's writings and are presented in terms that are internal to Wilber's integral paradigm. In this regard, Hargens provides a summary of Wilber's broad research into intersubjectivity by highlighting five distinct forms that intersubjectivity takes within Wilber's integral model.

The first form is "intersubjectivity-as-spirit" (Hargens, 2001, p. 13) with spirit being in this context, the ontologically prior, always present background or non-dual ground of being (Wilber, 2006). This meaning of intersubjectivity adds an important distinction to Nhat Hanh's account of interbeing and De Quincey's intersubjectivity-3. Where interbeing refers to the co-arising constituents and elements of intersubjective experience, intersubjectivity-as-*spirit* identifies the deeper undivided formless source of consciousness that our experience of interbeing arises in

---

<sup>13</sup> De Quincey does not address ways in which first and third-person forms of knowing might support his project of validating second-person forms of knowing. Instead, he tends to downplay third-person perspectives (2005), by claiming we need to set up experiments to induce the illusion of the separation between observer and observed "this stepping-back allows us to notice the third-person in action because it is not "normal"" (p. 178). He also downplays the role of first-person perspectives as being dependent on withdrawing from the world as in the case of meditation.

<sup>14</sup> AQAL is short form for quadrants, levels, lines, states and types—five key features of Wilber's (2006) integral framework.

and out of. Intersubjectivity-as-spirit offers an important transpersonal referent to the realm of the absolute within each intersubjective experience, signaling the non-dual space or root context out of which our experience of interbeing arises. This distinction also becomes significant within De Quincey's intersubjectivity-3 insofar as it draws our attention to a dimension of awareness that is not mediated by second-person forms of knowing and being. While certain educators<sup>15</sup> may aspire to engage with their students in a manner where second-person forms of knowing are informed by non-dual awareness in the classroom, students unacquainted with non-dual experience will require being introduced to it through some form of pointing out instructions.<sup>16</sup>

The second form "intersubjectivity-as-context" (Hargens, 2001, p. 13) refers to the structural elements of intersubjectivity, which for Wilber is located within the lower left of his four quadrants (see Figure 1 below).<sup>17</sup> Hargens (2001, p. 13) identifies the intersubjective matrix of contexts as "physical laws, morphic fields, linguistic, moral, cultural, biological, and aesthetic structures." Hargens does not elaborate on how other structural elements from other zones<sup>18</sup> might influence our understanding of intersubjectivity. Such a consideration would involve taking into account the structural influences of Wilber's account of developmental lines,<sup>19</sup> where personal and interpersonal capacities, skills and intelligences influence the possibilities of specific intersubjective engagements between teacher and students or classroom life.

Intersubjectivity-as-context viewed in this light highlights developmental issues educators would benefit from considering in their work with contemplative education. Further research would need to establish which lines and levels<sup>20</sup> of development or capacities have a bearing on contemplative processes of education (i.e. stages of insight or concentration). Attention would

---

<sup>15</sup> Though such an approach to second-person contemplative education will be unsuitable for many educators in higher education classrooms, it has been my experience that learning to locate the non-dual quality of unconditioned experience firstly in one's own experience as an educator and secondly (where appropriate) within one's classroom interactions will invite a beneficial quality of shared learning and communication.

<sup>16</sup> I realize that educators also unacquainted with the non-dual experience will also require being introduced to it. It is important to note that according to Buddhist traditions, one does not, technically speaking, "have" a non-dual experience, for this would be enacting a subtle dualism. Rather, nonduality is viewed as a radical realization that requires ongoing meditative practice to stabilize as a view in one's everyday consciousness. In spite of non-duality being traditionally conceived as the essential condition of enlightened consciousness, in recent years practitioners have moved towards adapting pointing out instructions to give people a taste of this unconditioned experience through various intersubjective methodologies such as Genpo Roshi's *Big Mind, Big Heart*, Peter Fenner's *Radiant Mind*, Andrew Cohen's *Enlightened Communication* among others.

<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, in the language of his 8 primordial perspectives (2006), intersubjectivity-as-context would be in zone four within the lower left quadrant.

<sup>18</sup> The eight zones refer to the inside and outside of Wilber's four quadrants.

<sup>19</sup> In educational circles, developmental lines are referred to as *intelligences* made known by Howard Gardner (e.g., kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, emotional intelligence, cognitive intelligence, etc.). Picking up where Gardner left off, Wilber (2006) outlined at least two dozen of these lines as a key dimension of his integral AQAL theory.

<sup>20</sup> *Levels* of consciousness are abstract measures that represent fluid yet qualitatively distinct classes of recurrent patterns within Wilber's construct of developmental lines. Some examples of levels include egocentric, ethnocentric and worldcentric (Rentschler, 2006, p. 20).

also need to address the misconceptions around conflating *levels* of development with *states*<sup>21</sup> and *state-stages*<sup>22</sup> (Wilber, 2006) and to determine which contemplative practices are developmentally-contingent<sup>23</sup> and if so, in what ways. Both Hargens (p. 15) and Wilber (2006) point out that these background structures constitute the subject before experience and are therefore not accessible to direct experiential knowing. Given that not all students will be at the same contemplative capacity as their teachers and conversely in certain situations, intersubjectivity-as-context is a helpful consideration in refining our approaches to contemplative pedagogy.

The third type, “intersubjectivity-as-resonance” (2001, p. 14), arises out of mutuality of presence shared between people, reflecting De Quincey’s intersubjectivity-2 and -3. Hargens elaborates upon *worldspaces* and *worldviews* as contexts out of which the resonance takes place. In terms of worldspaces, Hargens (p. 14) introduces the distinction of *ontological* resonance between subjects and for worldviews and *epistemological* resonance between subjects who share a common stage of psychological development. Both of these terms attempt to locate where intersubjective resonance is taking place within Wilber’s AQAL model. However, these distinctions become problematic in practice. For example, epistemological resonance between two subjects does not necessarily presuppose a common level of psychological development. Hargens’ claim that ontological resonance is contingent upon a shared worldspace is helpful in a broad sense and resembles De Quincey’s ontological definition of intersubjectivity. However, once again identifying the specific shared worldspace that resonance is taking place within Wilber’s integral system or any developmentalist’s model is a speculative matter, even when subjects are in broad agreement with the interpretive frameworks being applied. What would be helpful for contemplative educators interested in exploring second-person modalities of contemplative learning is a more nuanced heuristic to differentiate between the different forms of resonance. Such a heuristic would not need to be developmentally contingent, but could rather represent the possible stage-processes that groups go through or the characteristic forms of resonance that distinguish different intersubjective contexts such as De Quincey’s -1, -2 and -3 in classroom settings. Resonance is often a marker of mutual understanding. However, Hargens’ (2001) portrayal of Wilber’s intersubjectivity-as-resonance traces each form of resonance back to Wilber’s AQAL model. Again, I am not convinced this captures the significant intersubjective qualities of resonance that would shed further light into the nature of different encounter(s), particularly within classroom settings where learning is the underlying objective.

---

<sup>21</sup> *States of consciousness* are temporary (from a few minutes to several days) and range considerably from ordinary to peak experiences including meditative states (induced by contemplation and meditation) and altered states (induced by psychedelic substances, demanding physical exercise, athletics, etc.).

<sup>22</sup> Rentschler (2006) defines *state-stages* as “states that unfold in a sequence, usually as the result of training. State-stages generally move from gross experience, to subtle experience, to causal experience, to nondual” (p. 30).

<sup>23</sup> This article will not address developmental considerations in educators, students or classroom life as this might pertain to contemplative education or intersubjective approaches. This is due in part to the sheer complexity of the subject but also the lack of established research in understanding how developmental awareness plays out experientially given the invisibility of these background structures and lack of clarity in understanding to what extent and precisely how successful applications of contemplative education are contingent or helpfully guided by such awareness.

The fourth type of “intersubjectivity-as-relationship” (p. 14) offers a further explication of types of relationship. Hargens offers two important sub-distinctions of *relationship-as-solidarity* (p. 14), where the basis of intersubjective interaction lies in the shared values, ethnicity, gender, interests and so on, as well as *relationship-as-difference* (p. 14), where one relates to another subject and makes the effort to reach across differences in the interest of arriving at a fuller understanding of one another or a given issue. This latter distinction has important ramifications in educational settings, in that the cultivation of this form of intersubjectivity flourishes when collaboration and shared meaning across difference take place, but also perhaps more importantly, enabling both educator and students to recognize one’s self in difference. Relationship-as-difference follows on Nhat Hanh’s account of interbeing, where the point of resistance in whatever we happen to disagree with is connected in some way to the point we are advocating for. While the deeper interwoven pattern that connects these points may not be initially evident to our students or us, this principle highlights the importance of the latent potential of intersubjectivity as a robust container for the transmutation of our understanding of conflicting and contradictory views.

The last category, “intersubjectivity-as-phenomenology,” touches on elements of De Quincey’s intersubjectivity-2 and -3 by focusing on the felt experience of intersubjectivity. Hargens associates the felt-sense with the previous three types of intersubjectivity: *spirit, relationship and resonance*. The felt-sense of spirit has an important implication in terms of deeper shifts in states of consciousness<sup>24</sup> (Wilber, 2006) that become more pronounced within intersubjective-3 engagements. Given the potential for deeper states in providing an ontological window into our deeper motivations and shared meaning (Wilber, 2006), the temporary emergence of transcendent states of consciousness and their potential to evoke deep feelings of sacred connection with life and the cosmos make the felt-sense of spirit a significant dimension of intersubjectivity that merits further exploration, particularly in the context of contemplative educational pedagogies. The felt-sense within intersubjectivity as relationship offers a widely subscribed to moral compass to navigate what educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1984) defines as an ethic of caring, which centralizes love in the particular, reciprocal, and personal forms of classroom relationship.

## **Recontextualizing Intersubjectivity Within Broader Epistemological Horizons**

This article has attempted to convey the importance of second-person contemplative classroom processes, which draw upon the depth of shared relations and quality of intersubjective experience, expanding our scope of contemplative practice to include and build upon key insights of intersubjective theory is a natural next step. With the development of second-person approaches to contemplative pedagogy, as educators our approaches to classroom learning will increasingly ask for more distinct shared mode(s) of participation with our

---

<sup>24</sup> Wilber (2006) outlines five primary states of consciousness in his AQAL framework: gross waking states (everyday); subtle states; causal formless states; witnessing states and non-dual awareness. States of consciousness range considerably from ordinary to supernormal varieties. Similar to meditative states, intersubjectivity-3 engagements, varieties of Buber’s notion of supreme meeting and other sacred intersubjective encounters tend to evoke deeper states of consciousness.

students—including key distinctions that have been outlined and developed throughout this paper.

Rather than proclaim the strengths of intersubjectivity and problematize other ways of knowing,<sup>25</sup> I believe a more fruitful course forward involves *first* establishing the contributions of intersubjectivity theory that could be helpful in developing a second-person contemplative educational approach as I have attempted to convey by highlighting features of each intersubjective theorist's work above. *Second*, as I address in the next section, I believe it is important to contextualize intersubjectivity as a distinct perspective alongside other primary epistemological perspectives—i.e., subjectivity, objectivity and inter-objectivity. However, in doing this it is crucial to acknowledge that intersubjectivity is more than an epistemological perspective with distinct processes and dimensions of knowing.

As I have pointed out in the above sections, intersubjectivity has an ontological dimension (Buber, 1965; Roy, 2006) with both an interpersonal (Nhat Hanh, 2000; De Quincey, 2000; Wilber, 2000) and transpersonal relational significance (Buber; 1965; De Quincey, 2005). Intersubjectivity is also a conversational field of inquiry (De Quincey, 2005) that is contingent upon second-person contextual structures (Hargens, 2001) and interwoven relational elements of self and other (Nhat Hanh, 2000) that influence any given interhuman encounter. Finally, intersubjectivity also has a phenomenological (Wilber, 2006) dimension that is experienced through co-presence (De Quincey, 2005) and resonance (Hargens, 2001) among other characteristics outlined above, as well as beyond these four accounts.<sup>26</sup>

Keeping in mind these and other richly textured facets of intersubjectivity as we locate it heuristically as an epistemological perspective, we will then embark on our *third* step in considering what intersubjectivity might bring to the project of establishing second-person modes of contemplative education. In addition to preparing the theoretical terrain for such work, ongoing experimentation will be needed to gain a more direct understanding of the distinctive qualities, meaning and significance of intersubjectivity as a contemplative form of knowing and learning in classroom settings. Explorations of this nature could help identify a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of second-person contemplative pedagogical approaches, experiences and their relevance for educator and students both inside and outside the classroom.

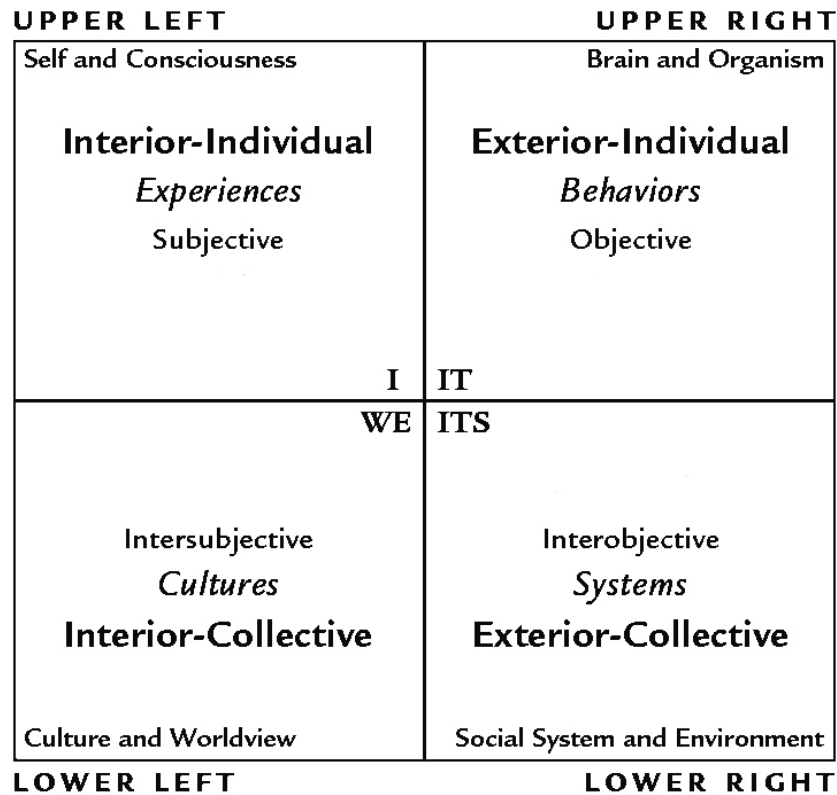
---

<sup>25</sup> As a result of the traditional marginalization or omission of intersubjectivity, problematizing first-person subjective or third-person objective onto-epistemological habits may have been an appropriate stance to take in certain debates. My hope is that we can turn the conversation towards a post-Cartesian inquiry that honors both *limiting* the problematic features and *including* the respective gifts of each perspective and way of knowing. By sufficiently differentiating and untangling these three epistemological forms in the context of our classroom pedagogies, we can then move towards a stronger integration of each, with further consideration for how first-person and third-person contemplative pedagogies might support the development of second-person approaches. Given that the deeper forms of second-person engagement are partly contingent upon first-person contemplative practice, there is value in proceeding with a more integral orientation here.

<sup>26</sup> In introducing the related yet distinct elements, terminology and conceptions of intersubjectivity, this article does not go into depth with either comparing or contrasting each theorist's perspective of the ontological nature of intersubjective forms of communicating, relating, communion, agency or other modalities relevant to teaching across the four accounts. Largely this is due to the limitations of space and scope of this particular project.



Returning to the first objective, to help establish intersubjectivity as a key epistemological perspective within contemporary teaching and learning practices, there is value in consulting with a more encompassing epistemological map that differentiates intersubjectivity from its neighboring perspectives. Wilber (2000) provides us with such a map in his account of the four quadrants in figure 1 below.



**Figure 1. Wilber's (2000) Four Quadrants**

Wilber's quadrants locate four primary perspective-dimensions of reality that co-arise: subjective (i.e., the interior of an individual), intersubjective (i.e., the interior of a collective), objective (i.e., the exterior of an individual) and inter-objective (i.e., the exterior of a collective). The quadrants essentially represent the broad range of interior and exterior perspectives within individuals and collectives. Each specific quadrant is a referent for one of these four primordial perspectives.

Wilber's four quadrants are useful to our purposes in several ways. By distinguishing each epistemological perspective in addition to their validity claims and criteria, we are in a better position to untangle methodological issues that invariably arise in our research. For example, if we are tacitly or unknowingly employing "objective" validity criteria to understand a contested intersubjective experience as a way of inquiring into whether it is true, we are proceeding incoherently. Insofar as the intersubjective experience we are investigating is contingent upon mutual understanding, shared resonance and co-presence, understanding the validity of the experience becomes an *interpretive* exercise, not an empirical one. By conflating the methods and measures of validity across different epistemological perspectives, the language and validity criteria naturally become muddled and academic turf wars ensue—hence Wilber's map helps locate and defend the partial merits of each first-, second-, third- and third-person plural

perspective of knowing and their accompanying methodologies. In this way, Wilber's quadrants help prevent colonization from other perspectives or privileging one form of knowing to the exclusion or diminishment of another.

Given that contemplative education draws from the perennial world wisdom traditions (i.e., whose knowledge horizons are generally located in the left hand quadrants—particularly upper left) and recent scientific research (i.e., that is generally located in the right hand quadrants), contemplative education research in academic settings is attempting to occupy an uncomfortable position or movement between the more objective sciences and the more subjective and intersubjective interpretive social sciences. As a case in point, Wilber's quadrants offer a helpful augmentation of Roth's (2006) binary contemplative framework that differentiates first and third person methods. In turn, the quadrants offer us a more comprehensive epistemological map to distinguish and validate intersubjectivity as one of four broad perspectives of contemplative knowing. Differentiating intersubjectivity from its neighboring perspectives ensures that educational researchers utilize the appropriate truth claims and methods<sup>27</sup> required to coherently work with intersubjective approaches to contemplative education, as each perspective carries with it inherent methods for experiencing and interpreting the world (Wilber, 2006).

Nevertheless, while Wilber's quadrants are helpful in broadly differentiating these perspectives, they have the limiting condition of offering a more "structural approach and interpretation of reality" (Roy, 2006) than a process approach.<sup>28</sup> Roy (2006, p. 119) makes a helpful distinction between "epistemological categories of knowing" which help us apprehend reality and the related yet distinct "ontological ways of understanding" that are gleaned through deeper modes of consciousness and being. In this regard, Wilber's quadrants do not satisfactorily account for the ontological ways of understanding intersubjective reality that this article attempts to convey. Additionally, neither do Wilber's quadrants nor his eight native perspectives (2006) satisfactorily locate the second-person perspective or differentiate singular or plural forms of second-person knowing.<sup>29</sup> Integral theorist Mark Edwards (2005) has advanced a more nuanced account of intersubjectivity in his rendering of the three basic first-, second- and third-person epistemological perspectives.

---

<sup>27</sup> Intersubjective truth claims from the second-person perspective involve knowledge developed by a group of inquirers about some theme, issue or domain of inquiry. This second-person knowledge is concerned with the shared, intersubjective processes which groups of people explore when they meet in the context of discussion, dialogue, presencing and other inquiry formats. Epistemological validity in the intersubjective deals more with interpretivistic methods or procedures for conducting inquiry that are grounded in the second-person world-space of shared experience.

<sup>28</sup> Roy derives her process-model in part from process-theory, which is informed by intersubjective theory to the extent that a process-model is contingent upon a relational understanding of reality as comprised fundamentally of processes rather than things.

<sup>29</sup> Within Wilber's eight native perspectives (2006), he identifies the interior and exterior of the intersubjective by noting first-person and third-person accounts of *second-person reality*. However, he does not distinguish a *second-person perspective* or differentiate between the singular and plural forms of *second-person knowing* in his mapping out of the eight native perspectives.

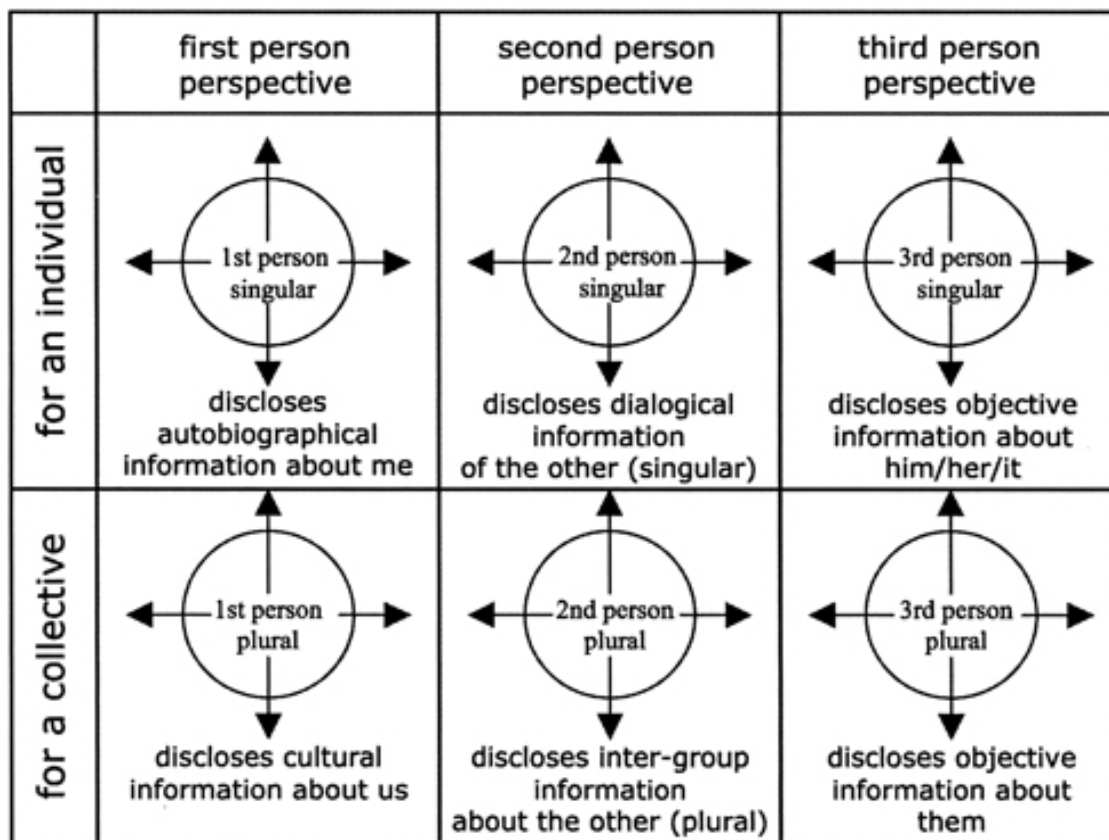


Figure 2. Edwards’ (2005, p. 280) Account of First-, Second- and Third-person Perspectives

By framing Edwards’ epistemological map as an appendage to Wilber’s quadrants,<sup>30</sup> in addition to legitimizing the intersubjective dimension of reality, we can now honor the second-person perspective more fully by distinguishing between second-person singular and plural varieties. In the context of contemplative education, Edwards’ map becomes particularly useful in distinguishing intersubjective reality from the distinct second-person perspectives that co-arise within it. Given that the field of contemplative education is in its formative stages, legitimizing and further differentiating (a) second-person perspective(s), (b) intersubjective reality and (c) the

<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of my project in *legitimizing* and further developing second-person forms of contemplative education, I have drawn on Wilber’s (2000, Figure 1) and Edward’s (2005, Figure 2) frameworks as a way of establishing how intersubjective/second-person approaches to contemplative education are situated, *epistemologically-speaking*. This work is consistent with and in several cases informs the contemplative pedagogy heuristics that Roth (2006) and Sarath (2006; 2009) have developed in framing their approaches to contemplative education. As this article explores, specific shared experiences within the intersubjective/second-person domain of classroom life are *qualitatively distinct* from the modes of knowing and learning that emerge from the private-subjective first-person and public-objective third-person domains, hence the importance of distinguishing them. Some readers may find the technical presentation of Wilber’s and Edward’s frameworks to be incongruous or unsuitable to the above inquiry into the four conceptions of intersubjectivity. However, my intention in utilizing their frameworks is to provide further heuristic and conceptual clarification by locating these four accounts *epistemologically*, not to suggest that Wilber’s or Edward’s frameworks are in any way necessary to experience the different aspects of intersubjectivity explored above.

neighboring first-person and third-person primary perspectives raises important foundational clarifications and questions in terms of how we proceed to develop the field of contemplative education. By differentiating and including single and plural varieties of second-person pedagogies alongside their first- or third-person counterparts, we can begin to more clearly demarcate the epistemological terrain underlying these different pedagogical orientations. As an example, without distinguishing second-person forms of contemplative pedagogy, deeper forms of intersubjective collective knowing may remain dormant, obscured or completely hidden from our awareness as educators. Acknowledging second-person forms of contemplative pedagogy will help locate and map out the respective depths of intersubjective reality, as well as deeper forms of intersubjective knowing than the conventional varieties that prevail at the physical-material and conceptual-mental levels of existence (i.e., intersubjectivity-1). By mapping out the different regions of intersubjective experience, further interpretive validity criteria can be established to determine to what extent if at all we are enacting distinct senses/experiences of intersubjectivity. Additionally, as second-person forms of contemplative education is a broad distinction, there is room for including the intersubjective insights and distinctions of Buber, Hahn, De Quincey, Wilber and others who have shed helpful light onto different contours and dimensions of intersubjectivity.

## **Establishing Critical Second-Person Forms of Contemplative Education**

In the September 2006 contemplative education issue of the *Teachers College Record*, alongside Roth's (2006) call for developing pedagogies that support students' investigation of contemplative states of consciousness through first- and third-person approaches, Sarath (2006) briefly comments on second-person approaches of contemplative practices as a "movement from education's conventional focus on third-person knowledge toward a more inclusive approach that also includes second- and first-person approaches to knowledge" (p. 1817). He locates second-person educational approaches along an integrated continuum of first-person and third-person knowing and inquiry and points out that any subject can be studied through each perspective. Sarath describes his experiences with second-person approaches to contemplative education:

I move into the intersubjective domain with exercises done in small groups that invite students to share and connect deeply with others. Common examples are exercises in which students reflect on, identify, and discuss inner feelings, behavior patterns, frustrations, and sources of fulfillment. Community based learning is another example of intersubjective learning that can both thrive within and feedback to strengthen a creativity and consciousness framework. (Sarath, 2006, p. 1836)

On the whole, Sarath offers brief third-person descriptions of the content of second-person interactions in the classroom, however he does not comment further on the process of second-person approaches to education other than it is "more process-oriented" (p. 1817) than first-person or third-person forms. Roth, on the other hand, advocates for *critical* first-person and third-person approaches to contemplative education.

By critical, we mean that students would be encouraged to engage directly with these techniques without prior commitment to their efficacy. They would then step back and appraise their experiences to gain a deeper appreciation of their meaning and significance. Students will learn to identify contemplative states of consciousness both as objects and subjects of study. (Roth, 2006, p. 1788)

Roth does not address second-person approaches to contemplative education in this article<sup>31</sup> or in any of his published work to date. Given the academic heritage of valuing third-person forms of learning at the expense of other forms, one of Roth's key points of focus in this paper is to advocate for critical first-person methods of contemplative education.

Building from where Sarath and Roth left off, I am advocating for developing second-person methods of contemplative education that take into account the above perspectives on intersubjectivity. The interhuman encounter, the interbeing of students and educator, the shared presence of intersubjectivity-2 and -3 and the intersubjectivity-as-spirit and -resonance in the class field among other intersubjective distinctions further explicate the contemplative dimensions of this broader project. To the extent that not all forms of second-person education are oriented towards the depths of learning and co-creativity that the application of the work of the above theorists entails, there is a need for distinguishing critical second-person forms of contemplative education and pedagogy as a means for establishing a new theoretical domain of inquiry within the field. Additionally, such an initiative will also help students and faculty identify a broader spectrum<sup>32</sup> of contemplative pedagogy than if they had been primarily exploring first- and third-person approaches as advocated by Roth's (2006) framework.

Consider the following description of an intersubjective experience, which exemplifies a second-person contemplative encounter:

There's nothing like the joy, freedom, and deep intimacy of intersubjective space ... our shared and passionate attention to what wants to come into being didn't diminish, but rather it enhanced our senses, receptivity, deep intuition, as well as the faculties of thinking together, building on each other's ideas and inspirations, and profoundly appreciating the value of everyone's perspective. They became notes in a larger harmony that has a message that we can receive only when the chatter of the conditioned mind stops, and we share with one another what is perceived in that precious state. (Por, 2004, n.p.)

I believe Por's brief description conveys key aspects of intersubjective space that arise when the conditions for second-person education are present in that it draws attention to a distinct quality of feelings and attention, mode of shared thinking, a state of consciousness and way of being together with others in conversation. How might our current approaches to contemplative education facilitate intersubjective experience(s) for learners along these lines in a manner that serve the course's pedagogical and content goals?

---

<sup>31</sup> I will speculate that this omission is because second-person forms of inquiry are not an important focus of the proposed contemplative studies concentration at Brown University—the subject of Roth's (2006) article.

<sup>32</sup> A broader spectrum would not leave out second-person approaches, but include an array of first-, second- and third-person forms of contemplative study.

As an educator, my urgent felt-sense of the call for developing intersubjective methods of contemplative education arises in response to having witnessed and endured countless hours of classroom life shaped by “the most minimal sense of we” possible” (Balder, 2007):

It is a functional “we” designed to serve the interests of private selves. There are, of course, advantages to our modern self-centered “public sphere,” allowing for freedoms that were not possible in the mythic membership societies of the past, but these freedoms come at a cost. The self, in winning and maintaining its independence, is cut off from the whole in fundamental ways, which are frequently difficult to identify. (Balder, 2007, p. 1)

As a basis for fostering an *optimal* “we,” critical second-person contemplative educational approaches work with varied processes of collective contemplation and inquiry into the class subject that are shaped by subtle and emergent dimensions of intersubjective experiences. What discoveries await a graduate seminar or cohort group where conversations are oriented from a collective investment in speaking and listening that is attentive to what is emerging from the intersubjective worldspace of the class field of learning? By experimenting with second-person approaches to contemplative education that engage students in intersubjective forms of learning, thinking and being together introduced from the distinctions brought forth in this paper, as educators we bring long awaited attention to the deeper intersubjective spaces that await us and our students in daily classroom life.

## Closing Remarks

To briefly summarize, Buber offers a helpful compass to orient second-person contemplative interactions with his distinction of the primacy of intersubjective learning processes unfolding from the interhuman sphere of the between, which establishes a transpersonal context and process from which to orient classroom inquiry. Nhat Hanh’s description of interbeing conveys rich insight into the ground and fabric of intersubjective relationality, helping foster an inclusive and deepened ethic of responsibility for the intersubjective encounter with “other”, whether our students, a differing opinion, perspective or some element of the cosmos one has neglected to include in our picture of inquiry and communication. De Quincey’s three modes of intersubjectivity, particularly intersubjectivity-2 and -3, build on his epistemology of presence, relationship and collective co-creativity. Signifying different depths of intersubjective knowing, intersubjectivity -2 and -3 offer helpful markers of the respective levels of epistemology and reality that second-person experiences of contemplative education uncover. Wilber’s intersubjectivity-as-spirit provides a referent to the deeper source of our human experience, which re-situates second-person modes of engagement within a greater emergent cosmology. Intersubjectivity-as-resonance in the context of our modes of knowing and being as well as intersubjectivity-as-relationship (i.e., relationship as similarity and difference) and the felt-sense in intersubjectivity-as-phenomenology also offer key distinctions to further explore in our critical contemplative classroom experiments with second-person education.

Alongside critical first-person and third-person contemplative methods, the related yet varied assortment of intersubjective accounts culled from the literature on intersubjective theory outline key aspects of the epistemological territory for developing second-person forms of contemplative learning and knowing together in the classroom. The purpose of this article is not so much to

show how these distinctions improve upon existing second-person contemplative pedagogical methods, as there are presently few to draw from, but more to illustrate the need for a subfield of inquiry to establish and inspire the future development of second-person pedagogical approaches to contemplative education.

In framing these interpersonal methods pedagogically as “inter-subjects” of study from critical second-person perspectives that arise with post-Cartesian first- and third-person perspectives, my intent has been to cast new light on collective contemplative practice by recontextualizing this body of work within a more comprehensive epistemological framework and domain of inquiry within the emerging field of contemplative education. By presenting key elements from these four accounts of intersubjectivity, then introducing Wilber and Edwards’ epistemological maps to reinforce and advocate for the inclusion of these accounts within a broader critical framework of second-person education, my hope is this contribution will provide scholar-practitioners with useful distinctions to further differentiate and build upon second-person approaches to contemplative education.

## References

- Apffel-Marglin, F. & Bush, M. (2005). Healing the breach of faith toward everything that is: Integration in academia. Retrieved on January 02, 2009, from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/summer05/reading.html>
- Bai, H. (1999). Decentering the ego-self and releasing of the care-consciousness. *Paideusis*, 12(2), 5-18.
- Bai, H. (2004). The three I’s for ethics as an everyday activity: Integration, intrinsic valuing, and intersubjectivity. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 9, 51-64.
- Balder (2007). TSK and the public self. *Gaia Community blog* Retrieved on December 17, 2008, from <http://pods.gaia.com/tsk/discussions/view/148428>
- Brady, R. (2007). Learning to stop, stopping to learn: Discovering the contemplative dimension in education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5(4), 372-394.
- Brown, R. (1998). The teacher as contemplative observer *Educational Leadership*, 4(56), 70-73.
- Buber, M. (1965). *Between man and man*. (R. G. Smith, Trans., with an introduction by Maurice Friedman.) New York: Macmillan.
- Buber, M. (1966). *The knowledge of man: A philosophy of the interhuman*. New York: Harper Torch Books.
- Buber, M. (1984). *I and thou*. (R. G. Smith, Trans.). New York: Scribner.
- Dalai Lama. (1999). *Ethics for a new millennium*. New York: Berkeley Publishing Company.
- De Quincey, C. (2000). Intersubjectivity: Exploring consciousness from the second person perspective. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(2), 135-155.
- De Quincey, C. (2005). *Radical knowing: Understanding consciousness through relationship*. South Paris, ME: Park Street Press.
- Duerr, M., Zajonc, A., & Dana, D. (2003). Survey of transformative and spiritual dimensions of higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(3), 177-211.
- Edwards, M. G. (2005). The integral holon: A holonomic approach to organizational change and transformation. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(3), 269-288.
- EngestroKm, Y. (1990). *Learning, working, and imaging*. Helsinki, Finland: Orienta-Konsultit Oy.

- Ferrer, J. 2001. *Revisioning transpersonal theory*. State University of New York Press: Albany, NY.
- Friedman, M., (2001). The Interhuman and what is common to all: Martin Buber and Sociology. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, (29)4, 403-417.
- Grossenbacher, P. & Parkin, S. (2006). Joining hearts and minds: A contemplative approach to holistic education in psychology. *Journal of College & Character*, 7(6), 1-11.
- Guilar, J. (2006). Intersubjectivity and distance learning. *Radical Pedagogy*, 8(1). [http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue8\\_1/guilar.html](http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue8_1/guilar.html)
- Hall, M; Archibald, O. (2008). Investigating contemplative practice in creative writing and education classes: A play (of practice and theory) in three acts. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 1-18.
- Hargens, S. (2001). Intersubjective musings: A response to Christian de Quincey's 'the promise of integralism.' *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(12), 35-78.
- Hart, T. (2004). Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2(1), 28-46.
- Heshusius, L. (1994). Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning toward a Participatory Mode of Consciousness *Educational Researcher*, 23(3), 15-22.
- Holland, D. (2006). Contemplative education in unexpected places: Teaching mindfulness in Arkansas and Austria. *Teachers College Record*, 108(9), 1842-1861.
- Langer, E. (1997). *The art of mindful learning*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Matsuov, E. (2001). Intersubjectivity as a way of informing teaching design for a community of learners classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 383-402.
- Miller, J. (1994). Contemplative practice in higher education. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 34, 53-69.
- Nhat Hanh, T. (2000). *The path of emancipation*. Berkeley CA: Parallax Press.
- Nhat Hanh, T. (1998). *The heart of understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita heart sutra*. New York: Riverhead.
- Nakagawa, Y. (2000). *Education for awakening: An eastern approach to holistic education*. Brandon, VT: Foundation for Educational Renewal.
- Naropa University (2008). *Contemplative education at Naropa* (n.d.). Retrieved November 27, 2008, from <http://www.naropa.edu/conted>
- Nelson, M. (2006). The fruit of silence. *The Teachers College Record*, 108(9), 1733-1741.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kramer, K. (2003). *Martin Buber's I and thou: Practicing living dialogue*. Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press.
- O'Reilly, M. (1998). *Radical presence: Teaching as contemplative practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Por, G. (2004). *From intersubjectivity to collective objectivity: A socioeconomic imperative*. Retrieved Dec 17, 2008, from: [www.community-intelligence.com/blogs/public/2004/06/from\\_intersubjectivity\\_to\\_coll.html](http://www.community-intelligence.com/blogs/public/2004/06/from_intersubjectivity_to_coll.html)
- Rentschler, M. (2006). AQAL Glossary. *AQAL*, 1(3): 1-40.
- Rommetveit, R. (1998). Intersubjective attunement and linguistically mediated meaning in discourse. In S. Braten (Ed.), *Intersubjective communication and emotion in early ontogeny* (pp. 354- 371). New York: Cambridge University Press.



- Rothenberg, D. (1998). *Ken Wilber in dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Roth, H. (2006). Contemplative studies: Prospects for a new field. *Teachers College Record*, 108(9), 1787-1815.
- Roy, B. (2006). A process model of integral theory. *Integral Review*, 3, 118-152. <http://integral-review.org>.
- Sarath, E. (2003). Meditation in higher education: The next wave? *Innovative Higher Education*, 27(4), 215-234.
- Sarath, E. (2006). Meditation, creativity, and consciousness: Charting future terrain within higher education. *Teachers College Record*. 108(9), 1816-1841.
- Sarath, E. (2009). Jazz, creativity, and consciousness: Blueprint for integral education. In Press.
- Seidel, J. (2006). Some thoughts on teaching as contemplative practice. *Teacher's College Record*, 108(9), 1901-1914.
- Sidorkin, A. (2000). Toward a Pedagogy of Relation. *Philosophical Studies in Education*, (32), 9-14.
- Sidorkin, A. (1995). The pedagogy of the interhuman. *Philosophy of Education Society Annual Meeting*. San Francisco.
- Soltis, J. (1985). The intersubjective world and education: A response to C. A. Bowers. *American Journal of Education*, 93(4), 504-510.
- Thompson, E. (2001). Empathy and consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8(5-7), 1-32.
- Thurman, R. (2006). Meditation and education: India, Tibet and Modern America. *Teachers College Record*, 108(9), 1765-1774.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1979). From social interaction to higher psychological processes: A clarification and application of Vygotsky's theory. *Human Development*, 22(1), 1-22.
- Wilber, K. (1996). *Eye to eye: The quest for the new paradigm*. 3rd Ed. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (1997). *The eye of spirit, an integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wood, R. E. (1999). The dialogical principle and the mystery of being – The enduring relevance of Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 45(2), 83-97.
- Zajonc, A. (2006) Love and knowledge: Recovering the heart of learning through contemplation. *Teacher's College Record*, 108(9), 1742-1759.
- Zajonc, A. (2008). *Meditation as contemplative inquiry: When knowing becomes love*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books.

**Olen Gunnlaugson** worked as program coordinator, lecturer and integral coach at Holma College of Integral Studies (Sweden), playing a central role in helping the college make the transition from holistic to integral studies. His graduate research, which focuses on applying and building upon Scharmer's four fields of conversation within transformative, contemplative and integral education contexts, has been fully funded by both Masters and Doctorate Canadian Graduate Scholarships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Olen is in the final stages of completing his PhD at the University of British Columbia

---

*(Vancouver) where he is exploring presencing as a conversational practice for fostering second-person forms of contemplative learning in higher education classroom settings. Olen teaches courses in Dialogue Processes as part time faculty at Langara College (Vancouver) and the University of Massachusetts (Boston) with the Critical and Creative Thinking Masters program. His scholarship in integral theory, presencing and dialogue education has been presented at numerous international conferences and appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Transformative Education, the Journal of Adult and Continuing Education (Scotland), the Journal of Further and Higher Education (UK) and Integral Review. He is presently co-editing a book on Integral Education (Suny Press) with Jonathan Reams and Sean-Esbjorn Hargens.*

Email: [gunnlaugson@hotmail.com](mailto:gunnlaugson@hotmail.com)