

TURNING POISON INTO MEDICINE: EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE  
POWER OF SOKA EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY THROUGH  
NARRATIVE INQUIRY

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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August 2019

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

The three articles that comprise this dissertation use narrative inquiry as a method to explore how Soka, or “value-creating” education, which originated in Japan in the 1930s, has been applied to show the transformative power of this educational philosophy—centering on the heart and attitude of teachers. The first article is an auto-ethnographic piece that maps my life experiences that lead me to embrace Soka educational philosophy and apply it to my life as a mother and teacher. The second article consists of a collaborative auto-ethnographic article that highlights how I engaged with 4 undergraduate students and how we worked together to create a process that allowed us to excavate ways racism influenced our identities. The second article simultaneously serves as a model of the narrative term of “teachers as curriculum makers” and also, “Soka education in action” in a liminal space at our university. The third article explores how self-identified Soka educators in Brazil who work at the Brazil Soka School and as volunteers who conduct professional development on activities tied to Soka education in local public schools make meaning of what the essential qualities are of Soka educators.

Woven within and throughout this dissertation is the way Soka education is used in liminal spaces--as a tool of transformation—within the hearts of educators and students alike. These articles use narratives to show how an educational philosophy can be a transformative educational process in which negative/poisonous experiences can become positive/medicines to support positive growth for individuals and groups.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the lights of my life, my loved ones—especially my daughters, Sara, Aileen, and Cristina and grandsons, Amari and Anuel—who have been great sources of support and inspiration on this journey. I also dedicate this dissertation to all of my ancestors, but particularly to my beloved parents, Joan and Murray Gefen, who loved, cared for me and supported me in innumerable ways. This dissertation is also dedicated to my beloved deceased husband, Tesfaie Mokuria, who taught me much, loved and encouraged me, and helped me grow and become stronger through his life and death. I dedicate this work to my sisters and their families, too, with gratitude.

For all of my Brazilian friends and “family” who contributed to my research, especially the educators who so graciously and warmly opened up their lives and hearts to me and from whom I learned so much, I dedicate this dissertation to you.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda for their years of encouragement to me through their writings and also, for their efforts to create the Soka educational system, which is providing a foundational platform to create a more peaceful and just world through education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and express my deep appreciation to the many people who have supported me on this doctoral journey. First, I would like to thank my committee members for your guidance and support. To Dr. Cheryl J. Craig, my advisor, I am extremely grateful to you for the many ways you have shared your knowledge, expertise, and experiences with me—especially about narrative inquiry, along with being someone who has provided me with tremendous freedom and support to conduct my research. To Dr. Patricia Goodson, I thank you for many wonderful writing tips and encouragement at times when it all seemed so difficult; I also thank you for your efforts to work with me so that I could conduct research in Brazil. To Dr. Monica Neshyba, I thank you for introducing me to Gloria Anzaldúa and other Latina feminist writers, as well as always welcoming me and encouraging me on this journey—especially with your most joyful laughter. To Dr. Marlon James, thank you for opening the door to this journey for me and believing in me to do this work; I also thank you for all you’ve taught me about African American education in our country and the opportunities to support USTAR. I also thank Dr. Norvella Carter for her support.

To my academic “besties,” Diana Wandix-White, Willie “CJ” and Flora Harmon, I thank you for your support and camaraderie—especially to Diana, for being such a good friend and collaborator on this journey, filled with lots of talks and laughs! I want to acknowledge Dr. Beverly Irby, Dr. Rafael Lara, Donna Druery, Elsa Villareal, Nariman Eljaouhari, and Laura Cajiao-Wingenbach for allowing me to work in the summers.

To the many professors, university officials and staff members, especially Andrea Caldwell Williams, I am grateful to you. This gratitude extends to everyone who works for IT and the library; I could not have completed this work without so many resources. I also want to acknowledge the IRB staff for their hard work and patience.

I want to acknowledge and thank all of the students I have taught because they often were the ones who kept me most grounded and focused on doing this important work. I especially want to thank the students who comprised the research team for article #2, especially Bailey Morris, Allison Lino, and Caitlin TramAnh “Tommy” Vu.

Words cannot truly convey my gratitude to my family—Sara, Amari, Aileen, Cristina, Anuel, along with my sisters Ellen and Beth and their families. My deep appreciation extends to the many others who are like family— Dr. Njoki McElroy, Cleo Vascurado, Eve Goh, Gaye Tearnan, Christina Massey, the Eilands, the Bells, the Miskir Family, Jodi Govenar, Barbara Hoffman, the McClures, the Greens, Somkid Clark, Alankrita Chikkara, Ambassador and Mrs. Chowdhury, Jessica Bridges and my many beloved friends who have supported and encouraged me in my SGI-USA “family.”

To the professors, “Soka six” and staff at Soka University of America, thank you for the incredible foundation you gave me for my master’s degree. I also want to acknowledge Luci and Amilca Goshima, Mafe Hernnandez, and Sônia Kato for your tremendous support while I was in Brazil. In closing, I feel very grateful to so many people, and if I did not acknowledge someone by name, please forgive me. I am very appreciative to each and every person who has touched my life in any way, for you have helped me become the person I am. I owe my heartfelt gratitude to you also.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### **Contributors**

Graduate study was supported by funding from my work as a Graduate Assistant and Teaching Assistant at Texas A&M University and supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Cheryl J. Craig [advisor], Drs. Monica Neshyba and Marlon James of the Department of Teaching Learning and Culture, and Dr. Patricia Goodson of the Department of Health and Kinesiology.

All work conducted for the dissertation was completed by the student independently.

### **Funding Sources**

Support to conduct my research was also provided to me in the form of an Education Fellowship by the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which was particularly helpful in funding travel to Brazil to conduct research for article #3.

## NOMENCLATURE

BSS	Brazil Soka School
CRT	Critical Race Theories
ESL	English as a Second Language
IB	International Baccalaureate
JEA	Jewish Educational Alliance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Soka Education in Action
SUA	Soka University of American
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

What brings me to this work? This first chapter is deeply personal and reveals through stories and memories those stepping stones that brought me to this work, based on my truth from my lived experiences. My passion for education has built gradually throughout my life, and this dissertation is the blooming flower of years of commitment to a field I have grown to love and respect. However, my love for education intertwines with philosophical doubts and questions about education and its role in our lives. Those uncertainties propelled me to this point in life when I am working on a doctoral dissertation that I hope will deepen and broaden my own and our collective approach on how to understand education's ultimate meaning and purpose so that we can re-imagine education in general, and teacher education, specifically--focusing on Soka educational philosophy and its potential to heal and transform educators, students, and the world. Sometimes the very substances which can be poisonous simultaneously have medicinal powers to heal us. This principle also holds true in the realm of education.

This chapter begins as a narrative kaleidoscope of images and memories of some of the incidents or people who impacted me the most as I came to be a self-identified "Soka" educator. While I explicate the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Soka education in the literature review in great detail, in simplest terms, "*soka*" means "value creating." Soka education is an educational philosophy based on principles of Buddhist humanism that emphasizes the life-long happiness of children within a school ecology of care that includes focusing on peace education, environmental education,

human rights education, and development education (Ikeka, 2010). In essence, this research seeks to explore, reveal and illuminate an onto-epistemological process of taking on an identity as an educator as a change agent, in spite of, and possibly because of, personal struggles.

### **1.1. A troubled childhood in the racist deep South**

My early childhood left me with visceral, ontological angst left over from deeply-felt injustices and powerlessness at a young age—all of which frightened, confused and infuriated me. I was an extremely curious, loving and angry child and upon reflection, I do not believe my parents knew how to handle me and my passions very well. I lacked the vocabulary to express the deep internal fury surging through me. From my earliest memories, I saw how hard women and men of color worked all around us, and I saw how spoiled and indulged we were. It is embarrassing to admit it now, and part of my pain was that I knew it was not just my family.

Every other Jewish family had the same story--more or less. As a family, we benefitted from the hard labor and low wages that were common in the upkeep of White middle-class people and their homes in the deep South in the late 1950s and 1960s. Floors were kept polished and waxed; dust never settled on any shelves; carpeted areas were vacuumed; dishes were always done; clothes, bed linens, and table cloths were ironed; silver was polished; food was cooked; children were watched over. These amazingly strong, proud and hard-working African American women who helped raise me, my sisters, and all the other children I knew were treated as servants who were required to do whatever was asked of them; I imagine the daily to-do lists were long

every day. In my memory, the women who worked for my family or the other families wore neatly-ironed uniforms every day. They were very much part of our lives, but they were in subservient roles when doing the long list of domestic chores expected of them.

For me, this goes back to Pinar's (2008) point that racism distorts and impacts all of us, regardless where we are at in the complex tapestry of our collective existence. Inspired by the writings of Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin, Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (2008) write that it is impossible to "understand the identity of one without appreciating how it is implied by the other. So it is that European-Americans cannot hope to understand themselves unless they are knowledgeable and knowing of those they have constructed as 'different,' and 'other'" (p. 330). The issue for me now is that these ever-present and barely understood relationships have remained unexamined for so long and I am just beginning to make sense of it all and what it means to me.

### **1.2. Seeds of doubt based on disquieting early experiences**

Without a doubt, I feel that witnessing racial injustices at an early age contributed to why I left the faith of my ancestors and family and sought refuge in Buddhist philosophy later on in life. I was deeply unsettled in my bones by the injustices I saw, which hurt my soul. When I think of other injustices that impacted me in my childhood, a young woman named Nan who battled cerebral palsy always bubbles back up into my consciousness. It was so very confusing and disturbing to me as a young child and it made me angry that the all-powerful God I had learned to both love and fear would (in my young mind) punish a child and her family in this way. Still when I think about it now, I am moved as to how much I learned from Nan's very existence in this

world. We never had a conversation; Nan was blind, deaf, and mute. Yet, it is a form of relational knowledge that surprises me still. I can be in relation with someone, who may or may not be alive anymore and who will never know the extent to which they impacted my life. We never “did” anything together; we never shared a laugh or a meal.

However, in a mysterious way, she contributed to my coming to this work of education.

As a young child, whenever I asked questions about certain topics, the words “Blacks and Jews” were said in the same breath; so, from childhood I viewed Blacks and Jews in similarly hated positions within our world. As White supremacist ideology is again resurfacing with a vengeance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I must be honest with myself and acknowledge that when I was a young child in the deep South, White supremacist ideas were normalized. I both benefitted from this sick world view and also suffered from it.

And this is where it got complicated for me as a Jewish person. We were seen as White when it came to housing and using restrooms or water fountains or for education and the many taken-for-granted privileges that are lived realities that come with White privilege. This may be because I was born in the era shortly after WWII and there was a lot of sympathy for Jews at that time because of the Holocaust. And yet, those who wielded power in my childhood, the WASP men, made sure Jews were excluded from ever gaining significant power, at least at that time. Growing up in this historically convoluted vortex documented by many impacted me personally and brought me to this work 6 decades later.

But, when further considering what brings me to this work, a distinct incident comes up when I think back on my childhood and it is only now—when I have entered

my sixth decade in life—that I am considering that possibly this incident was connected to my being Jewish and contributed to my feisty spirit to challenge injustices, especially racial ones. The incident involved a boy in my class.

When I went in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the administrators decided to combine 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. Again, upon reflection—and I am sure because I overheard it—they put the “fast” 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in a class with the “slow” 4<sup>th</sup> graders. I can imagine the 4<sup>th</sup> graders in that class were not so happy with us 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in there. Mike was physically fast and strong; I remember that from recess. I had a little crush on him because I thought he was kind of cute. In those days, we rode our bikes all over the neighborhood even in the alleys. One day, I was riding my bike in the alley behind his house. Did I wave at him? Did I call out his name? I do not remember. But what I do remember is that he saw me on my bike and he started chasing me. I rode my bike as fast as I could, but he caught up with me and he grabbed the metal part of the basket on the back of my bike. I fell off and then he started beating me up. He hit me, punched me, and he slapped me. What did I do? I remember that I screamed and tried to fend him off. It is all very vague and it happened so long ago. But I do remember fighting back, getting back on my bike as fast as I could and riding home, overcome with fear.

I now believe that my being Jewish could have been connected to his extreme anger or hatred for me. Yes, it could have been that it angered him that I did well in school and he struggled; that may have been part of it. But I now believe that the way that he so viciously made sure to beat me up was also connected to my Jewishness. Did I cry? What did I do? I know for sure I turned to books and spent a lot of time reading

as a child. It was my only refuge and safe place where I could enter other worlds and other dimensions, which, scholars now recognize as the potentially healing aspect of bibliotherapy (Schweickart, 2017). And no one hurt me or judged me or criticized me or made fun of me. Books became my friends; books provided me with a much-needed safe liminal space and they gave me entrée into worlds I would have never otherwise known or encountered. That childhood bullying event was absorbed into my body's memory, and I tried hard to forget it, but I now realize that on some level, it contributed to bringing me to this work at this stage in my life.

Other key markers, in addition to my childhood challenges, that ushered in this work included seeing others' suffering. I grew up in a segregated city and as previously mentioned, through my young eyes, I saw the many disparities in wealth and comfort linked to race that existed in my young world. I was horrified when I saw television programs where policemen set vicious German shepherds and loosed fire hoses on African Americans protesting in the neighboring state of Alabama. I remember the grainy black and white television images of the Kennedy assassination and when Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. It was an unsettling childhood.

Ultimately, my childhood left me utterly confused, angry, and alone to navigate a complex web of feelings. This only compounded my deeply rooted insecurities about not being pretty "enough" or quiet "enough" or anything "enough." I was not enough: that was the conclusion I had come to at a very young age, and it was highly disturbing to me as a little girl who was full of questions and curiosity and a love for life, in spite of great efforts to "straighten me out" every way possible.

### **1.3. Turbulent teen years**

As I matured, I loved nature and found peace and comfort when I was in nature. This was because people hurt me. Books and nature became my sources of acceptance, peace, and solace. From a young age, I had distorted and deformed feet of which I was painfully ashamed; I had early onset puberty, and I was always worried that others would discover that secret hidden underneath my clothes. I always felt on guard about being made fun of because I was sensitive and an easy target. It was fun for others to tease me because I took them at their word and got hurt or angry or upset.

So, yes, I was deeply wounded, angry, confused, and bewildered by this thing called life. I do not remember guides in my life at a young age. My mom tried so hard. She put me in ballet. She gave me piano lessons. She took me to podiatrists to try to fix my feet. She took me to beauty parlors to straighten my hair. She took me to a cigarette-smoking orthodontist who stuck his stinky hands inside my mouth in the days before dentists wore latex gloves. I do not doubt for a minute that my mom only wanted what was best for me. But the hurt, anger and confusion brought on by all of those actions created deep painful wounds. As a young teenager, a bold rebelliousness that earlier began as a seed gradually grew stronger and stronger. I felt a lot of pressure from my family to get a nose job. The message accompanying this demand was that I could never be pretty enough the way I was born. What I heard was that I was ugly. The message I heard was that I was deeply flawed in a lot of ways around a lot of things—most of them physical.

After high school, I attended college only because I saw it as my final obligation of childhood that I owed my parents. I graduated from college completely clueless about a career. I loved literature and sociology. I wanted to drift around and live like a hippie or bohemian; that truly was my plan. During college, I concocted stories for my parents and I hitchhiked from NYC through the US, Texas and Mexico—down the Pan-American Highway to Panama and over to Colombia, thinking we could make it to Brazil, but we did not. I was crazy—with my college sweetheart. During that time, I only wanted to be completely free from all restrictions, requirements, rules. It was a huge adventure and I hope to one day recreate it in my mind. But when it was all done, I went back to my parent's home and had a nose job. That baffles me now when I think about it. I totally caved; I gave in. I had a boyfriend whom I loved and who loved me. In the end, when left with myself, I was not at all happy with myself. Getting a nose job did not change that. The work to be done, I later learned, was all inner work.

#### **1.4. Embracing Buddhism**

When I first read Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, I was introduced to ideas that deeply resonated with me: the notion that human beings had within themselves the capacity to be at peace. More than anything in the world, that was what I wanted. Around the same time, I was introduced to ideas that spoke of a different way of understanding God, life and the universe by seeking peace from within and from communion with nature. These events converged within me, as I gradually rejected the notion that as a Jewish child, I was one of God's chosen people, which along with being American made me keenly aware of a system and society that favored some over others

and stacked the cards against those most vulnerable members of our society. Gradually, then, in the course of the first 20 or so years of my life, I grew to reject the religion I was born into and sought out other faiths, such as Sufism, the Kabbalah, yoga, and various meditation practices.

When I was 25, I was formally introduced to Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism by a neighbor in Dallas, and at that time, my life was ripe and open to begin studying and practicing Buddhist philosophy. This happened one year after my oldest daughter was born, when my husband, Tesfaie, and I were in the midst of severe financial struggles. I was just beginning to recognize and admit that the beautiful and gentle man with whom I had fallen in love and with whom I had our child, also battled addiction issues. I learned that the Buddhism I started practicing, while originally linked to the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni, became a lay organization founded by an educator named Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who resisted the Japanese military government during WWII. Finding a spiritual practice that brought together educational ideas and social resistance was a perfect fit for me.

My spiritual journey helped me to re-consider some previously-held views about life, myself, and the universe; I embarked on a journey of learning to love myself, as well as taking on the challenge to assume responsibility for my life and my happiness. This was a dramatic internal shift for me. As I learned more about Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism, I learned about an educational philosophy, Soka education, that was based on principles of humanistic education that I had been drawn to in college through

learning about the ideas of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers while getting my teacher certification.

My journey as a young mother and wife, who had been cut off from my family (I quit calling for many months after my mom asked, “Why would a White woman lower herself and be with a Black man?”), as well as a new teacher began in a very muddled consciousness and state of life. My hope came in the version of the Buddhist metaphor of a lotus blossom, which maintains its beauty and purity only because it comes from the muddiest of swamps. My life and hope were revived.

### **1.5. Finding my passion in teaching**

I LOVE teaching and I LOVED being a high school teacher. I find great joy in working with young people and supporting them in their growth and in their efforts to achieve their goals and dreams. Though my parents were clearly disappointed with my career choice, hoping I would instead have become a lawyer or ambassador, I nonetheless chose to enter the teaching profession.

When I look back on my years teaching, I see years and years of young people struggling with all kinds of unspeakable challenges, while I worked hard to provide a safe space for them to BE in the world—my classroom. That is always what I wanted—for them to feel a kind of refuge in my classroom—where we could learn and grow and be free and more than anything, be ourselves and learn to love ourselves and each other. That is how I see my mission in life: to be with students on that most important journey together with them--as a guide.

## **1.6. Liminality and this research**

One goal of my dissertation is to make visible the hidden struggles and challenges of my inner world as a teacher who had grown to embrace a view/philosophy of education based on the Buddhist principles to honor, respect and find ways to bring out each child's greatest potential. What has it meant for me to seek to actualize ideas about education that I had studied and believed could support every child's growth and development? These ideas about education, Soka educational philosophy, align with all the world's religions and humanistic views on life, and it is an approach to education that resonated with how I grew to see the world and believe about how children/students learn and grow. Much of this journey is about my onto-epistemological journey that I seek to articulate so that others in the future can consider this approach to education. This is a dynamic process, and I recognize that as I continue on this path, which is relational and spiritually challenging. There is no "plateau" or "arrival" point; rather, it is a continuous process of growth, self-reflection, making mistakes, humbling of the spirit, boldness in trying new approaches, forbearance to continue on the path, forgiveness of self and others for shortcomings and missteps, honesty about flaws and ignorance, perseverance in the midst of obstacles, optimism around growth and transformation, and gentleness with one's self and others.

This work seeks to make visible a potent and hidden power we all possess. It is that power of those spaces in our lives—internal and external—that allow for movement and growth. When I had cancer at age 48, I learned about the healing power of sleep of which I had never known before. Our bodies use that precious time to heal itself, so we

must truly honor, protect and appreciate that time in our lives. This potent and invisible space named by van Gennep to describe the spaces “in-between,” the liminal spaces. This “in-between” space has always been a central aspect of human existence and it is linked to the wisdom that comes from being in relation with others and nature. Our ancestors took the time to acknowledge and BE in that space of betweenness—to recognize the power, for example, of the stars at night. They had relationships with stars, honored the stars, and acknowledged their presence in their collective lives.

For my daughters, for my deceased husband, and for me, we inhabit liminal spaces for many reasons, but primarily because of our rich cultural backgrounds which positioned all of us to dually inhabit two very different cultures simultaneously. We are liminal beings and it is our primary way of knowing and being in the world. Physically for me, I have a genetic mutation that is known to cause breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and pancreatic cancer. While I have done all I can to address breast and ovarian cancer, it is commonly known that pancreatic cancer is one of the worst kinds of cancer and has few protocols to diagnose or cure it. The ability to prevent, treat, or cure pancreatic cancer is limited at this time; I know that. As a result, I live in a space internally between health and sickness; everyone else does too, but I have the scientific knowledge and documented proof. So, while I do all I can to maintain a healthy lifestyle, I live in a liminal space with a kind of passion and intensity that can intimidate others. It emanates from a place deep within me. Living life in liminality means certain uncertainty.

### **1.7. A defining tragic moment**

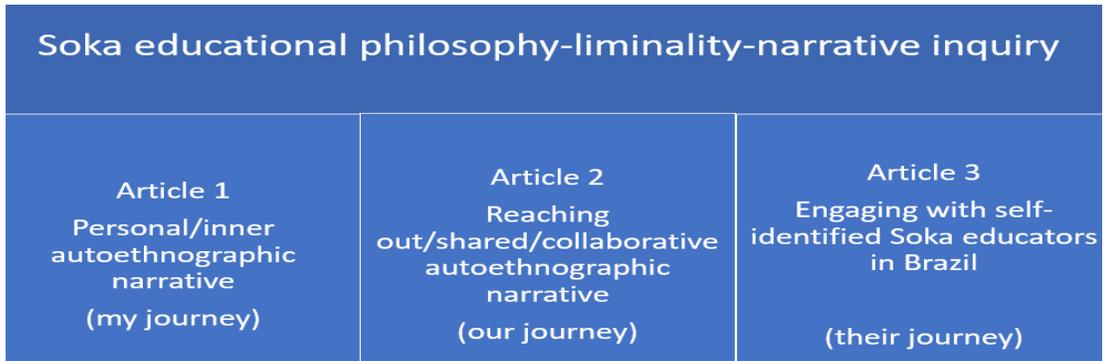
Since I cannot speak for my daughters and their experiences, I will only speak for myself; it is in recognizing this onto-epistemological liminality within myself that gives me some small clue as to the nature of my intensity and passion in life. The presence of liminality can also be made visible through experiencing some kind of severe trauma. For me the most traumatic experience occurred on October 7, 1992, after I called the police to seek help to get my husband to a hospital for his “crazy” behavior; he died that night and I was left to raise our daughters alone.

How did all this contribute to this work? At the core of my life, in addition to my faith, I was grounded in an educational philosophy that served to sustain me in the midst of one of the deepest sufferings a human being can go through. Those years of studying about Soka educational philosophy helped me to pick myself up and muster the strength and courage to continue living and face my life and my students again. Having young children to care for also served to push me to keep going. I remember being very, very quiet, numb, and sad. No words in any language could comfort me. The pain and the guilt for calling the very officers for help who killed my husband weighed heavily on me and yet, I found a way to continue my journey as an educator and as a mother. The sufferings throughout my life have served as pungent and powerful fertilizer for my soul to bring me to this point of conducting this dissertation and research, which consists of three papers.

### **1.8. Three articles that comprise this dissertation**

The first paper, a deep autoethnographic narrative where I turn the lens on myself, lays the foundation for the process of becoming a self-identified Soka educator and how I sustained myself and maintained equanimity in the midst of tremendous personal and public tragedies and sufferings. The second paper is my continued journey as a self-identified Soka educator in higher education and how I became a “teacher as curriculum maker” who sought to research with undergraduates the ways in which racism has impacted our identities over time. The third manuscript seeks to understand how self-identified Soka educators in Brazil--both at the Brazil Soka School and through the work of volunteers who do professional development in public schools (called Soka Education in Action)—make meaning of defining and clarifying the most essential qualities of Soka educators.

In all three papers, as shown in Figure 1, the interwoven threads are: 1) principles of Soka educational philosophy; 2) ways that liminal spaces are used to apply Soka educational philosophy; and 3) the use of narrative inquiry to lift up narrative truths. Since my studies on Soka educational philosophy center on a deep respect for human life, narrative inquiry is an ideal research approach to shed light on how these ideas can be more widely diffused among educators in order to create a paradigmatic shift in how we educate young people.



*Figure 1* – Flow of 3 article dissertation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research I am conducting for my three-paper dissertation explores how the Soka educational philosophy impacted me as a self-identified Soka educator working in a Texas public school, as an emerging scholar and curriculum maker on the university level, and through a narrative inquiry study with Brazilian educators who are formally and informally applying principles of Soka education in Brazil. This literature review is a scoping review in which I will “illustrate the field of interest in terms of the volume, nature and characteristics of the primary research” (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005, p. 30). This kind of review allows me to identify gaps in the literature I seek to fill through this dissertation. Since my research is qualitative, this scoping literature review provides a framework to offer concise narrative summaries of the literature available in the areas of interest related to my work.

The process for this literature review began by conducting a review of extant literature using Rayyan QCRI by reading abstracts of literature that contained key concepts linked to my study. After determining the articles best suited for this scoping review, I systematically studied the articles and compiled information on literature review matrices after populating both Zotero and Mendeley research software management tools. By using both Zotero and Mendeley, along with literature review matrices, I was able to bring a broad range of literature together in a more manageable form. I synthesized the concepts that reappeared in the literature, and the result is the following literature review, which is divided into 3 main sections: Soka educational philosophy, ideas about liminality, and narrative inquiry as a method of research.

Figure 2 provides a visual image of the literature review, which includes the idea that Dewey’s ideas about education are connected to much of the work in this dissertation.

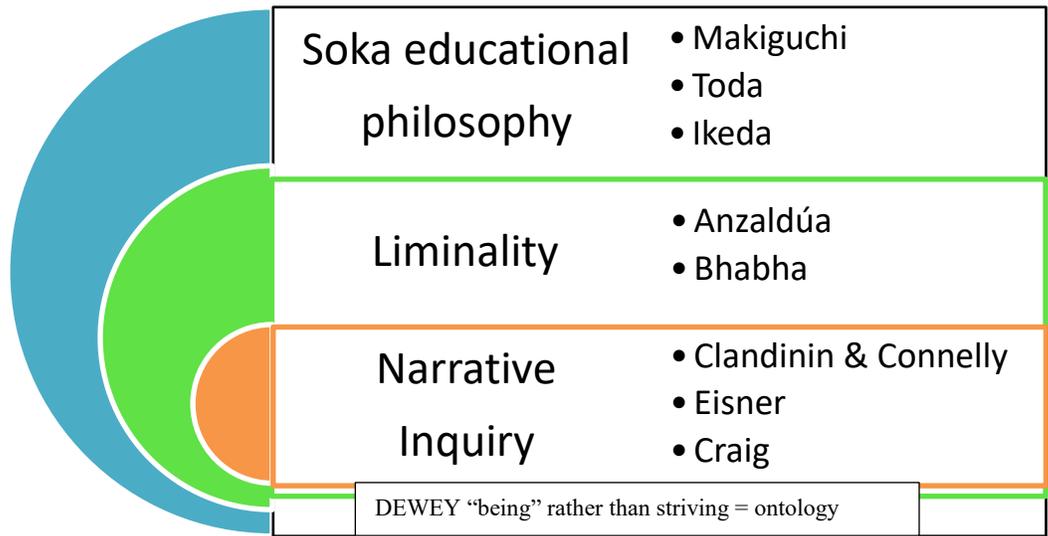


Figure 2 - Key points of the Literature Review

### 2.1. Soka educational philosophy

Soka educational philosophy is an emerging field in the broad river of ideas that comprise our collective understanding and application of education’s heart, soul, meaning, and purpose. In the world of education, it is a soothingly cool breeze from the East in the form of an educational philosophy, known as Soka, or “value creating,” education. Through this research, I plan to argue that Soka education may serve to refresh and revitalize the very way we think of, conceive, and implement education. When the term “Soka” education is mentioned, these kinds of questions naturally arise, which I plan to address: What exactly is Soka education? What are its historical roots

and why is it “shaking the ground” as it is emerging at this juncture in US history? Beyond the ideas, concepts, and philosophy of Soka education, how will it be possible to widely diffuse these ideas among public school educators and beyond to all educators? What would such a pre-service education include? What does it mean to be a “Soka educator,” and how is it that someone comes to develop such an identity? In particular, for those self-identified Soka educators who apply principles of Soka educational philosophy in Brazil, how do they understand what it means to be a Soka educator?

These questions are at the heart of this study, and much like the ancient Indian tale about the 3 blind men who are grappling to describe an elephant in all its glory and wholeness, I will make efforts bit by bit to explain the history of Soka educational philosophy, the pedagogical practices that reflect Soka educational praxis, curricular components central to Soka education, along with attitudinal qualities of Soka educators—based on a scoping literature review in this nascent field.

### *Defining Soka education*

The ideas of Soka education originally emerged from the Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944) who sought to humanize education in response to the rigid system of educating children he observed in Japan prior to World War II. As a young teacher he experienced great personal stress when he realized how many students lacked the necessary skills to meet the strict national standards (Goulah, 2013b). Makiguchi strove to seek alternative pedagogies, all the while observing his own practices and taking copious notes on those techniques and approaches that appeared to be most successful in his work with children (Bethel, 1973/1994; Goulah & Gebert,

2009; Ikeda, 2009a). Makiguchi's pedagogical ideas were later compiled by his younger colleague, Josei Toda, and the word "soka" is actually a Japanese neologism originally suggested by Toda to Makiguchi to convey this novel idea of "value creation," *soka*, which comes from the 2 characters for the creation (*sozo*) of value (*kachi*) (Gebert & Joffe, 2007; Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2009a). The Toda scholar, Shiohara (2008) acknowledges that Toda used the name "Jogai" from 1929-1939, but he is more commonly known as Josei Toda, and I will refer to him as such in this work.

Makiguchi's central idea about Soka education was that education's purpose is to provide a way for children to experience authentic lifelong happiness (Bethel, 1989; Goulah, 2009b; Ikeda, 2010; Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016), and he saw "his original plan for educational reform as a plan for nurturing the people who will build the ideal society" (Kumagai, 2000, p. 36). These ideas, then are at the heart of understanding what Soka education is: 1) education exists for learners' lifelong happiness and 2) through education, students and teachers focus on "creating value" for the greater social good.

Makiguchi's value-creating pedagogy has become a "spirit of educating, an ethos, or conceptual foundation of education rather than defined methodology" (Goulah & Urbain, 2013, p. 309). This idea of "creating value" within an educational context takes on a broad and significant meaning, which links students' personal happiness to a broader social context since the focus is on both students and teachers **creating** value, regardless of the circumstances—for themselves, as well as for a greater societal and collective good. Daisaku Ikeda (2009b) elaborated on this point when he wrote, "our

worth as a human being is determined by whether we live solely for ourselves or strive to realize happiness for ourselves and others” (p. 139). Recognizing this point is key.

Soka education today centers on Makiguchi and Toda’s visions for Soka education that Ikeda crystallized through building a network of Soka schools (described later in this paper) that seek to foster students to become global citizens, with the hope they will work to ensure a more peaceful world. Ikeda’s commitment to peace came after experiencing his family and country’s suffering from WWII, and his concomitant devotion to education and peace--towards a nuclear-free world--emerged from his personal experiences with war (Unger & Ikeda, 2016). In addition to actualizing Makiguchi and Toda’s visions for a Soka educational system, Ikeda, who is currently 91 years old, continues writing about his views on Soka education, nuclear disarmament, as well as writing poetry and essays on Buddhist philosophy (Garrison, Hickman & Ikeda, 2014; Ikeda, 2001; Sherman, 2016). His prolific writing is awe-inspiring and profound.

#### *Use of the term “soka”*

One key point centers on explicating how the term “soka” will be used throughout my dissertation, in order to maintain continuity and fidelity with other scholars in the field. On the one hand, Goulah and Gebert (2009) explain that “any proactive engagement with one’s environment that generates more beauty, gain, or good falls under the rubric of *soka*, or value creation,” (p. 126) which broadly can apply to any activity or situation in life. Asking “to what extent is value being created?” is a question that would be rooted in a *soka* perspective. However, in a personal communication with Jason Goulah, a prolific Ikeda scholar, linguist, and Japanese-English translator, he

elucidates the necessity to acknowledge significant nuanced differences in using the term “*soka*” versus “Soka” when conducting or describing scholarly research on Soka educational philosophy and ideas. A detailed explanation is warranted and Goulah’s (Goulah & Ito, 2012) explication of the important difference between *soka* (italicized with a lower case “s”) and Soka (unitalicized with a capital “S”) follows. For Goulah,

Soka has come to connote the entire educational philosophy and practice of [education] and inspired by Makiguchi...and Ikeda, including educational ideas they do not explicitly label as *soka* and those developed even before Makiguchi...coined this term and pedagogical concept. It is thus “Soka education,” not *soka* education (or even value-creating pedagogy, *soka kyoikugaku*), that today’s self-described Soka educators seek to enact in their own locales. (personal communication, September 16, 2018).

This very point is further clarified in Goulah’s (2019) chapter on dialogue and its role in Soka education. Throughout my dissertation, then, since my research is on the broader ethos and application of Soka education, I will be using the term “Soka” education to refer to the entirety of the Soka educational philosophy.

#### *Challenges with translations*

For my research, I must rely on translations of Makiguchi’s original writings—however imperfect they may be, as well as secondary research from other scholars who study Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda. It is critical to address some of the issues around doing scholarly work about an educational philosophy from another country when I lack the linguistic knowledge to conduct scholarly research in the original language of this educational philosophy, i.e., Japanese. Makiguchi’s (1903/2002) first book, *A Geography of Human Life*, and its English translation, was edited by Dayle Bethel in 2002, who acknowledges in the preface that he [Bethel] did not provide a word for word

translation; rather “ideas, concepts, perceptions, and points of view in which the original are spread over several pages or chapters have been summarized” (p. xi). The ideas presented in the current translations of Makiguchi’s two main works (*A Geography of Human Life* and *The System of Value Creating Pedagogy*) are “interpretive translations.” Goulah and Gebert (2009) highlight this important factor in studying Makiguchi’s educational philosophy and ideas in English, linked to the earliest accessible English translations by Bethel, who “selectively edited, revised and, in places, liberally translated” (p. 118) Makiguchi’s texts so that readers would be able to navigate some of the culturally-complex nuances through Bethel’s translations and interpretations.

In other words, Bethel provided “interpretive translations” influenced by his Western understanding of Makiguchi’s ideas, which came from a culture and era very different from Bethel’s. The challenges of translating complex theories from other cultures extends far beyond the scope of this research, but I want to acknowledge this limitation. For this reason, I triangulate the literature review section on Soka education by focusing on some of Bethel’s translations of Makiguchi’s works, as well as highlighting the writings of contemporary scholars. In this way, I seek to articulate the ideas of Makiguchi and the ways educators and scholars understand and apply ideas about Soka education today—beyond Bethel’s translations. However, I want to acknowledge that Bethel’s translations of Makiguchi’s writings thus far “served as the basis for translations into 13 languages and, more crucially, that these translations have inspired creative educational efforts in settings as diverse as India and Brazil, [which] is testament to the importance of his [Bethel’s] contribution” (Goulah & Gebert, 2009, p.

118). While imperfect, Bethel's translations of Makiguchi's works have served to help educators around the world learn about Soka philosophical and pedagogical approaches to education.

A contemporary scholar of Soka education, Nozomi Inukai, studies this translation-scholarship conundrum deeply, and her arguments are compelling. For example, she notes that Makiguchi (1930/1989) clearly distinguished between the purpose of education and the purpose of pedagogy in his second book, *Education for Creative Living*. However, Inukai (2013) notes that "Bethel underemphasizes Makiguchi's pedagogical arguments" (p. 42) by omitting an entire book in the volume Makiguchi wrote and Bethel translated.

An example Inukai studied causes serious concern for me, based on her knowledge of Japanese. Bethel's (1989) version of Makiguchi's original work, *Education for Creative Living*, states that "the good life can be realized only through the fulfillment of the individual..." (p. 192) However, Inukai's (2013) translation of the very same passage in the original Japanese by Makiguchi recognizes the translation of the word as "cannot," rather than "can." The huge difference in the sentence's meaning forces me to ponder the serious challenges of any translation. However, for an emerging Soka scholar like myself who does not read Japanese and whose interests are in pedagogy and how to apply Soka educational principles, I must rely on the limited translations and secondary scholarship available at this time. I want to acknowledge my concerns and limitations in the beginning. Nonetheless, what I read and studied about Makiguchi and Ikeda's ideas about Soka education over the years have so resonated with

me that I feel called to persevere with my area of scholarly interest in Soka education, knowing the limitations of current translations available to me.

*A brief history of Makiguchi's life*

Soka scholars consider Makiguchi the “father” of Soka education and for this reason, this literature review begins with a brief history of his life, summaries of his main works, key educational concepts and theories he developed, along with how contemporary scholars place his original ideas alongside Soka educational ideas as they are applied today. Makiguchi’s birth name was Choshichi Watanabe, and at the age of 3, his father abandoned he and his mother; they never saw him again. Shortly thereafter, his mother attempted suicide with Makiguchi in her arms, and she later remarried. Makiguchi’s paternal aunt and her husband, whose last name was Makiguchi, adopted and raised him; he never saw his biological mother again (Bethel, 1973/1994; Jaffe, 1993). Due to extreme poverty, at 13, Makiguchi left his family and moved to Hokkaido in northern Japan, where he worked as an errand boy in the local police station. Those who worked with him must have seen promise in him because he was encouraged to apply to and enroll in Hokkaido Normal School at age 18, a school specifically designed to train teachers (Gebert & Joffe, 2007; Saito, 1989; Takeuchi, 2004). At 22, when he graduated, he changed his name to Tsunesaburo.

Makiguchi was the first student from Hokkaido Normal School to pass a rigorous examination and become a secondary level geography teacher. He began teaching, and also married and began a family in his early 20s. He and his wife, Kuma, had 8 children, but through sickness and war, all of them died before Makiguchi did (Bethel,

1973/1994). For much of his adult life, Makiguchi worked as an elementary school teacher or principal (Takeuchi, 2004), and during the last 13 years of his life, he experienced a religious conversion and devoted his last years to studying, practicing and teaching Buddhism based on the teachings of the 13<sup>th</sup> century monk, Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra (Bethel, 1973/1994; Goulah, 2013b, 2015; Ikeda, 2009a). Makiguchi founded a study group of educators, called the *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai*, which translates into the Value Creation Educational Society (Gebert & Joffe, 2007; Goulah & Gebert, 2009; Kazunori, 2000). The organization exists today as a lay Buddhist organization called the Soka Gakkai International (SGI); however, the educational philosophy is secular.

*Makiguchi's ideas within the "Academy"*

How is it that Makiguchi's ideas about education are only now making their way into academic scholarly articles in the West during the past 30 years? One reason is that Makiguchi attended a Japanese "Normal School" for his teacher training, and the voluminous scholarship he produced in his lifetime was not seen as sufficiently "scholarly" by the academic Japanese elites in his era. As previously mentioned, the challenge to translate his writings proved to be daunting, due to Makiguchi's literary style of writing. Another reason links to his approach to education: "Makiguchi's emphasis on the value of teachers' practical experience—the lessons and learning to be derived from this—ran counter to the prevailing trends of his times, which were almost exclusively focused on the translation and importation of the newest theories popular in the West" (Goulah & Gebert, 2009, p. 116). Makiguchi valued teachers' knowledge.

It seems Makiguchi was a deeply caring and humanistic educator. As a young teacher in northern Japan, he greeted students with warm water on cold days; he prepared meals for children whose families had no food; and he supported college students on strike against oppressive school rules and resigned when those students were expelled. (Gebert & Joffee, 2007; Saito, 1989). Makiguchi's life is sprinkled with other such examples of being a man who maintained values and principles to uphold the rights and needs of the vulnerable and powerless in his midst. After resigning from his position, Makiguchi moved to Tokyo and continued working in education.

A key aspect of the original ideas on Soka education “stresses the importance of human agency in creating the values of ‘beauty, gain, and good’ to enhance the personal and collective lives of people” (Gebert & Joffee, 2007, p. 65-66). This point about “human agency” appears as a recurring theme throughout Makiguchi's life. Clearly, he strove to be a caring educator while the national educational system in his era sought to use education to train students to become obedient followers of the emperor and force-feed students to meet the needs of Japan's newly-industrialized economy (Makiguchi, 1930/1989). Makiguchi can be seen as an educator/activist from his earliest days.

While some of Makiguchi's contemporary scholars viewed Makiguchi's ideas as “radical” for his era, “Makiguchi sought to choose to be a change agent working within established structures” (Gebert & Joffee, 2007, p. 70) of an increasingly ultra-nationalistic society ruled by an emperor Makiguchi vehemently opposed. Saito (1989) noted the humanistic ideas “which appealed to him [Makiguchi] most strongly were the developmental education theories of Pestalozzi and Johonnot, and it is obvious that

Makiguchi did not agree in the slightest with the military-style training methods used at the school or the nationalist doctrines that the school authorities tried their best to inculcate in the students” (p. 6). In caring for students, Makiguchi resisted the educational status quo in his unique approach to education..

### *Makiguchi's death in prison*

Makiguchi's efforts in the earliest part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century centered on a humanistic pedagogy to teach geography in pre-WW II Japan, with the hope to develop students as critical thinkers. Makiguchi maintained a pragmatic approach as an educator; however, towards the end of his life, his unyielding spirit towards imperial decrees to worship a Shinto talisman cost him his life (Bethel, 1973/1994). Ultimately, Makiguchi protested Japan's military government's edicts issued by the emperor, and “the Japanese government arrested and imprisoned Makiguchi in 1943 under the Peace Preservation Law for sedition and refusing to capitulate to State Shinto. In 1944, he died in prison from extreme malnutrition at the age of 73” (Goulah & Gebert, 2009, p. 115). Makiguchi died in prison as a political prisoner who resisted Japan's war efforts.

Makiguchi's closest ally and fellow educator, Josei Toda, also served time in prison; however, Toda survived the ordeal. In 1945, soon after Toda's release from prison, he sought to re-ignite an interest in Makiguchi's ideas about education, as well as the Buddhist philosophy Makiguchi embraced during the last several years of his life, as the founder of the *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai*, or “Value Creation Educational Society.” Two years after Toda's release from prison in 1947, a young man named Daisaku Ikeda met Toda when Ikeda was invited to a meeting attended by Toda to discuss philosophy.

Shortly after that fortuitous meeting, Ikeda devoted the rest of his life to learning from and supporting Toda, as he [Ikeda] was deeply touched to meet a war resister who had survived imprisonment for anti-war beliefs (Ikeda, 2010). This was a pivotal moment.

*Key concepts developed by Makiguchi*

Since Makiguchi's curricular field was geography, a key contribution he made was to turn "the observing gaze of children on their surroundings...in which they were immersed" (Gebert, 2009, p. 152). Makiguchi's 1912 work on "community studies" provided teaching ideas to support his unique perspectives on pedagogy, which Makiguchi considered essential in children's education (Bethel, 1973/1994; Goulah, 2009a, 2009b, 2010b, 2013a; Takeuchi, 2004). Makiguchi saw geography as a means for empowering students to develop a critical understanding of the world, and his interest was in guiding learners to recognize the relations between their communities, its geographic features and human activities (Goulah, 2009a; Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016). For example, he encouraged teachers to ask students to consider the purpose of boundaries by examining the school's fence and developing critical thinking about power and politics from what was close at hand, such as the school's fence or gate. (Gebert, 2009, p. 157). This unique pedagogic approach helped students to think deeply.

The 1903 publication of Makiguchi's 1000+ page book, *The Geography of Human Life*, expressed the ideas that linked people, their cultures, and the land; he was 32. This monumental work on human geography originally came from what Makiguchi described as a massive number of notes, lesson plans, or book excerpts he accumulated from years of studying and teaching (Makiguchi, 1903/2002). This work, which became

a nationally-recognized textbook in Japan, begins with a profound reverence for the human connection to the earth. For example, Makiguchi (1903/2002) wrote, “we are born of the earth; we live on the earth; we are inspired by the earth; we die on the earth. The earth is our home” (p. 25). Such ideas reflect nascent environmental education.

Rather than simply focusing on land forms, he focused on relational ways of being and knowing, in that he sought to more deeply understand our collective relationships with our land, our communities, and each other. Makiguchi (1903/2002) poetically described land forms so students recognized lessons we learn from our land, when he penned these words: “just as mountains deeply influence our minds and spirits, so, too, do our rivers. But while the mountains give us impressions of height and strength and grandeur, rivers speak to us in images of patience, constant effort, and magnanimity” (p. 80). Such poetic and profound words reveal much about Makiguchi.

Makiguchi introduced a notion of “humanitarian competition” instead of military and economic competition and he held that education based on an awareness of the connections between human life and the natural and social environment could help develop within students a recognition of mutual interests and benefit (Goulah, 2010a; Makiguchi, 1903/2002; Nieto, 2012). In his own words, Makiguchi (1903/2002) wrote, “but what, one may ask is humanitarian competition? I would describe it as the endeavor to achieve individual and social goals through invisible moral influence rather than military force or naked economic power” (p. 285). Possibly, Makiguchi imagined a world where academics and their students “competed” to solve many of our social ills, such as homelessness, school failures, or poverty. If “humanitarian competition”

became central to our collective understanding of education, rather than military or economic competition, our world would definitely be transformed for the better of us all.

In 1920, at the age of 19, Josei Toda, a fellow educator, first met Makiguchi. What most impressed Toda was how Makiguchi challenged traditional ideas of Japanese education and that he believed in supporting children's growth and epistemological empowerment "to create values of aesthetic beauty; individual gain, or benefit; and social good" (Goulah, 2010b, p. 255). Ultimately, Toda fully supported Makiguchi and was helpful in seeing that Makiguchi's ideas about education were compiled into his second major book, entitled *The System of Value Creating Pedagogy* on November 18, 1930. To quote Makiguchi (1930/1989): "my central thesis is that the most important consideration in formulating purpose in education is the happiness of the students themselves" (p. 22). What kind of happiness was Makiguchi envisioning? Jaffe (1993) explains

happiness, according to Makiguchi, is more akin to the eudaimonistic philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Happiness arises out of the development of social consciousness which is a prerequisite, in Makiguchi's view, to living a contributive life. Thus to be able to contribute to society in a meaningful way is the essence of a happy life. (p. 102)

This version of happiness may not be the traditional Euro-centric notion, but this key concept at the root of Soka educational philosophy links personal happiness to a broader vision of a more generalized collective well-being.

A key aspect about Makiguchi's educational philosophy, which continues to be at the heart of Soka educational philosophy centers on the importance of teachers' attitudes. For Makiguchi, "methods are inconsequential if we do not first demonstrate

the proper attitude” (Goulah, 2015, p. 257). In an essay on teachers as chrysanthemum growers, Makiguchi (1936/2015) simply and powerfully provides a metaphor about teachers’ attitudes this way:

teachers must confine themselves to providing, as it were, the musical accompaniment of song in support of the active ‘dance’ of the children. Under no circumstance should teachers be the main performers dancing to the accompaniment of students’ singing. Should a teacher end up both singing and dancing on stage while the children watch the performance as audience, this would represent an utter failure. Teachers may play the role of singers at the outset, but gradually they should yield to the children the roles of both singers and dancers, becoming a background chorus and enabling learners to manifest their full dynamism ‘stage center.’ (p. 246)

The current available literature provides limited information about how to work with pre-service teachers to foster such pedagogical practices or approaches in teacher education, based on Soka educational philosophy, to encourage teachers to embrace such attitudes towards students; this is a gap in the literature my research seeks to fill through my own reflections as a self-identified Soka educator and through conducting narrative inquiry together with self-identified Soka educators in Brazil.

#### *Makiguchi’s death and legacy*

As previously noted, after teaching and serving as a principal for much of his adult life, Makiguchi converted to Buddhism in 1928 and for the last 16 years of his life, he committed himself to sharing Buddhist philosophy at first with educators and then more broadly in Japanese society, since he believed that the Buddhist philosophy was aligned with the humanistic ideas about education he developed over the course of his career.

Makiguchi and Toda vehemently opposed the Japanese military authorities and they were imprisoned for disregarding the Emperor's decree to display a Shinto talisman; they were considered "thought criminals;" Makiguchi died in prison on November 18, 1944, exactly 14 years after he published his book on value creating pedagogy. After Toda was released in 1945, he set out to rebuild the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Bethel, 1973/1994; Ikeda, 2009a; Nagashima, 2012). Daisaku Ikeda met Toda two years after Toda was released from prison, in 1947, and Toda committed the rest of his life to blazing the path set by Makiguchi. Ikeda has made it his life's mission to actualize both Toda and Makiguchi's visions for Soka education.

Educators around the world are seeking to study, embody and apply the principles of Soka education originally espoused by Makiguchi that focuses on the lifelong happiness of each child, and to develop each child's unique potential, while emphasizing the importance of teacher-student relationships (Goulah, 2010b; Ikeda, 2009a). While Ikeda never personally met Makiguchi, he learned about his teachings and spirit from Josei Toda. Ikeda has shared what Makiguchi once told Toda: "In the future, we must found a school based on the value-creating (Soka) pedagogy that I have been formulating. If we can't do it during my lifetime, please do it in yours" (Goulah, 2010b, p 257). This became Ikeda's quest, and my scholarship is coupled with the spirit to bring Soka education forward--a humanistic educational philosophy that can serve as a fresh alternative to the accountability model we now have. While current scholarship is replete with the philosophic ideas to explain and articulate Soka educational philosophy, many educators yearn to apply these ideas in everyday practice.

### *Ideas of Soka education linked to Dewey*

Scholarly research by Gebert (2009) points to a clear connection between Makiguchi and the ideas of John Dewey since Makiguchi's first published essay in 1896 contained this quote from Dewey about apperception, the absorption and integration of new knowledge: "To have meaning, the fact or event must be related to some other fact or event" (Gebert, 2009, p. 152). This Deweyan notion of knowledge and education connecting to one's lived experiences in the community continued as a theme throughout Makiguchi's career as an educator, scholar, and religious reformer. A clear connection between Dewey and Makiguchi centers on the emphasis on community studies and experiential education (Bradford & Shields, 2017; Goulah, 2009b, 2015; Goulah & Gebert, 2009); Dewey and Makiguchi had similar ideas on education and knowledge.

Another idea linked to Makiguchi and further elaborated by Ikeda, which is connected to Dewey, is about "education for global citizenship." For example, Ikeda (2010/2013) writes that "Makiguchi's focus of interest was never the state, but always people, individual human beings. This reflects his strong sense of human rights" (p. 244), which was a topic that Ikeda insists is one of the pillars in Soka education in order to foster students to become global citizens. In a dialogue Ikeda had with Felix Unger (2016), the President of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and the European Institute of Health, Ikeda recalled Makiguchi's ideas and shared "he [Makiguchi] wanted to avoid children being sacrificed to the needs of society and to help every child live a happy life of limitlessly expanded potentialities. This wish is the basis of all aspects of

value-creating pedagogy” (p. 85). This point clearly shows us the connection Ikeda makes between education and fostering children to care about the rights of all people.

Yet another idea that links Dewey’s philosophy to Soka educational philosophy centers on the essence of attitude of the teacher, which may be considered the most important element in the educative process (Goulah, 2015; Ikeda, 2010; Silva, 2000). In a dialogue with Lawrence Lau (2017), a former Stanford economics professor and vice-chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Ikeda share his views: “the true spirit of every educator lies in cherishing and respecting young people, fostering them into individuals even more capable than the educators themselves” (p. 49). This approach would require teachers to shift away from an egotistical mindset that ties in the teachers’ identity and self-efficacy to students’ performance towards a view that focuses on the longer-term happiness and well-being of each student—a daunting task in the “era of accountability.” Yet, it is precisely this kind of “Copernican” paradigm shift in teachers’ onto-epistemological approach to education that Soka educational philosophy proposes. This is directly related to the ideas Dewey (1897) expounded in his *Pedagogic Creed*, in which Dewey presents a position that inextricably ties schools to children’s lives and lived experiences in the world.

One other major connection between Makiguchi and Dewey couples their ideas around the importance of “being” rather than “striving.” Makiguchi’s ideas at the center of Soka educational philosophy focus on how education and teachers support students’ ontological development. The fact that Makiguchi died in prison, resisting the imperial Japanese edicts, as well as his approaches to humanize education show his strength and

compassion as a humanistic educator. He focused on grounding his students in their communities and ensuring all students, especially those most marginalized, felt respected and cared for, which demonstrated his passion for students' happiness—far beyond becoming obedient subjects to those in power.

Similarly, Dewey (1916/2005) suggested that we must be “willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, [and] philosophy may even be defined as the *general theory of education*” (p. 383). For both Dewey and Makiguchi, the quintessential focus of education is supporting students in their “humanization,” rather than fostering students to strive to take their places in either a military or economic order to serve those in power. These ideas are needed now more than ever.

#### *Ikeda's contributions to Soka education*

While ideas and theories about Soka educational philosophy began with Makiguchi and were supported by Toda, it was Ikeda who ensured those ideas were crystallized by creating Soka schools. According to the Soka Gakuen Education Foundation (2009), there are currently 15 official Soka schools inspired by Makiguchi's value creating pedagogy—in Japan, S. Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Brazil—6 Soka kindergartens, 3 Soka elementary schools, 2 Soka secondary schools, 2 Soka universities – in Japan and the US and a Soka women's college. Ikeda's core ideas about Soka education focus on the importance of 1) centering students' entire education on their lifelong happiness—both for themselves and for others, so students develop the spirit to contribute to the well-being of all people; 2) focusing on curricular ideas

towards developing students to become global citizens by studying a) peace education; b) human rights education; c) environmental education; and d) development education; and 3) emphasizing the importance of teachers developing meaningful and caring attitudes towards all students (Ikeda, 2010; Nagashima, 2012; Sharma, 2011 ). These ideas are pillars of Soka educational philosophy, according to Ikeda.

Further, Ikeda unapologetically and unequivocally states that educators must first and foremost be clear about education's goals and purposes, particularly around the needs of students. He says

the genuine goal of education must be the life-long happiness of those who learn. Education should never be subordinated to the demands of national ego or of corporations searching for profit-generating employees. Human beings, human happiness, must always be the goal and objective. (Ikeda, 2010, p. 150)

The question becomes how to more widely diffuse these ideas so educators will consider them and their significance, since so much of contemporary education has shifted to testing accountability being the singular most important factor. What does the current literature show us about this approach to education?

Numerous scholarly articles explore and explain both Ikeda and Makiguchi's philosophical underpinnings of Soka education that focus on an approach to education centering on "creating value" that supports both individual happiness and contributes to improving both the community and society in general (Gebert, 2012; Inukai, 2013; Nagashima, 2012). Matsuoka (2010) has specifically studied Ikeda's human rights philosophy. Many, though not all, of these scholars are bilingual in Japanese and English, and they seek to provide accurate and scholarly translations and interpretations of Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda's writings so that these ideas can be more widely studied

in the Academy and also, more widely diffused among all educators. This kind of linguistic and scholarly fidelity to Ikeda and Makiguchi's writings is critical.

## **2.2. Literature on applying principles of Soka educational philosophy**

Scholarly research available in English about studies on the practical application of principles of Soka education to PK-12 school settings are extremely limited and include the following: 1) studies of educator-student interactions in Soka kindergartens in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014; Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016); 2) a narrative inquiry on self-identified Soka educators who were educated in Soka schools in Japan and who are now teaching in non-Soka schools in Japan (Nagashima, 2012) 3) how Makiguchi's value-creating educational ideas served as the foundational philosophy of the New York City Renaissance Charter School (Joffe, Goulah & Gebert, 2009) and 4) a paper written by two doctoral students engaging with ecojustice and Soka educators who saw their work in schools as a form of resistance against neoliberal efforts to enforce standardization and accountability in education (Bradford & Shields, 2017).

While other doctoral students have written dissertations on self-identified Soka educators, and presentations have been made at conferences on applying principles of Soka education within classroom settings, this scoping literature review reveals a gap in the literature specifically about PK-12 teacher education or professional development to foster teachers to expose them to Soka educational philosophy and how teacher development in this area can unfold in the future.

Two other scholarly articles on applying Soka educational principles focus on 1) a literacy project in Brazil, called “Makiguchi Project in Action” (Silva, 2000) and 2) a scholarly article on how global citizenship education is implemented on the college level at Japan’s Soka University’s Faculty of International Liberal Arts (Guajardo & Reiser, 2016). Again, the limited number of scholarly articles on how principles of Soka education are applied in the PK-12 school setting reveals a gap in the literature my research will fill. It is for this very reason that the third paper in this dissertation centers on a study focusing on how self-identified Soka educators at the Brazil Soka School and through Soka Education in Action make meaning of the qualities of Soka educators, which can fill a significant gap in the literature.

#### *Ikeda’s views on Soka education*

While the original ideas about value-creating, or Soka educational philosophy, initiated with Makiguchi and were carried forward by Toda after the end of World War II, the ways that Soka education is currently applied within formal school settings is based primarily on the writings and speeches on education by Ikeda, as well as through published dialogues Ikeda has held with thinkers and intellectuals on a wide range of topics—from human rights, to issues of sustainability, jazz, civil rights, peace education, environmental education, as well as many other topics (Goulah, 2010a, 2010b; Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2009a). In total, Ikeda has published more than 50 dialogues with educators, artists, and world leaders, and in many of those dialogues, he expressed his views on education (Gebert, 2012; Goulah, 2012).

The primary ways PK-12 Soka education is put into practice today is 1) through formally sanctioned Soka schools, which as mentioned earlier, are located primarily in Asian countries, as well as in Brazil and 2) through the efforts of self-identified Soka educators around the world who have studied Makiguchi and Ikeda's writings and who seek to apply those ideas within their classrooms. Much of this scoping literature review focused on Makiguchi's ideas, and this last section is devoted to these key areas Ikeda emphasizes: 1) ways to foster students to become global citizens and 2) the role and attitude of teachers based on Soka educational philosophy

According to Ikeda's views on education, global citizenship education can naturally be embedded into a school's overall ecology. It is for this reason that Ikeda believes students need to learn about human rights education, peace education, environmental education and development education (Ikeda, 2010) while also learning national curricular standards that most countries require of all students. While he doesn't prescribe how students should learn about these topics, he has emphasized their significance in children's overall education. With regards to peace education, Goulah and Urbain (2013) recognize "these perspectives, principles, practices, and proposals for peace center on an *ontological becoming*, an inner transformation that occurs through dialogic exchange in the local-global space of the other" (p. 316). The emphasis begins with teaches' inner transformations that include a recognition of the interconnectedness in all life and the process of becoming such an educator.

This continuous dialectical inner dance that consists of self-reflection and acknowledgement of links to others is a central component for teachers who embrace

Soka educational philosophy. This very point is noted by Goulah and Gebert (2009) when they write that “in the Soka schools and among educators inspired by the philosophy, a strong emphasis on the human qualities of teacher-learner interactions” (p. 126) is a central aspect of Soka education. Ikeda (2001) emphasizes this, while echoing Makiguchi’s “vision of fostering people who could be described as true global citizens—individuals fully able to transcend self-seeking egotism and elevate their way of life to one linked to all humanity” (p. 20). The quest of this research is how to apply these principles and this philosophy within teacher education so that teachers recognize their immense power and agency towards creating a more peaceful world.

Ikeda took concrete steps to build and advance schools based on the original ideas about Soka education developed by Makiguchi, and Ikeda (2010) shared this view when reflecting on Makiguchi: “ultimately, he saw the welfare of the world as intimately linked with and necessary to individual well-being” (p. 5). The indisputable link between the individual and the world is a key view held by both Makiguchi and Ikeda. However, while seeking to maintain the spirit and essence of Makiguchi’s ideas, Ikeda introduced some of his own views into the Soka educational schools.

#### *Teachers as stewards of students’ growth*

Ikeda passionately shares his memories of his childhood teachers, and he concludes that what is key is for teachers to see themselves as “stewards” of children’s growth—much like those Japanese *sakuramori*, or those who tend to and carefully care for cherry trees and their growth. Ikeda (2010) explains that “stewardship expresses a spirit of awe and respect for the potential for limitless growth. I believe that such awe

and respect for children should be the foundation of education” (p. 139). This view mirrors Makiguchi’s (1936/2015) ideas about educators using a metaphor comparing teachers to those who care for chrysanthemums: “if teachers fully embodied the spirit of one who is a servant of chrysanthemums, determined to bring beautiful flowers to bloom, education would succeed without fail” (p. 245). Deeply cherishing each student is clearly a common thread in the lineage of ideas about Soka education.

Again, with regards to how teachers can develop these attitudes or dispositions towards students, there is neither a direct nor clear path. We can, however, recognize Ikeda’s ideas about this very topic when he shares in a dialogue held with Jim Garrison and Larry Hickman (2014) that focused on ways Dewey and Makiguchi’s ideas intersected and/or crossed over:

Everyone has the power to create value. The question is how to tap this power. The proper environment must be created. In the classroom, teachers are of prime importance. More than anything else, teachers’ abilities determine whether education will succeed or fail. They need to share with and pass on to students the inner spiritual qualities they have acquired. Only through communication on this profound level can students discover their own enormous powers, awaken to them, and act with vitality and vigor. This process is the quintessence of humanistic education (p. 84).

Without elaborating or being dogmatic on the kind of spirituality, it seems that Ikeda is suggesting that teachers develop a broad-mindedness and depth of spirituality shared at the root of all the world’s religions, based on a deep respect and love for all human beings. This, then, is where ideas about liminality enter into this research.

### **2.3. Liminality and education**

Throughout Ikeda’s writings and dialogues, he consistently emphasizes the significance of acknowledging and valuing each person, and especially each child. In a

world where political, economic, racial, educational, and social divisions are omnipresent, it is no easy task for teachers to develop a mindset that wholly and fully embraces and accepts each student.

What is the role of liminality in this research and why is it important? According to Merriam Webster, the term “liminal” has two official meanings: 1) “of, relating to, or situated at a sensory threshold; barely perceptible or capable of eliciting a response” and 2) “of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition.” Further, the Merriam-Webster dictionary indicates the “noun *limen* refers to the point at which a physiological or psychological effect begins to be produced.” The term “liminality” originally comes from the field of anthropology and the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960), based on his study of folklore and the rituals in everyday people’s life spans.

The terms most closely linked to the concept of liminality used in my research are the knowledge, ideas, or places related to: thresholds, in-betweenness, limen, the margins, third space, hybridity, and *nepantla*. Nuanced distinctions differentiate these terms, but in general they all refer to a physical, metaphorical, cognitive, psychological, spiritual, or emotional state that is unfixed, uncertain, and lies between two more clearly defined spaces or ways of being. Contemporary scholars link the ideas of van Gennep with “creative minds from Siddhartha (the Buddha), through Plato,” (Savin-Baden & Falconer, 2016, p. 992), recognizing that liminality is connected to deep contemplation and storytelling, which have been universal aspects of human existence from the beginning. Liminal spaces, then, are those spaces and places in-between where our thoughts, ideas, or very life are “between and betwixt.”

For teachers, the liminal space may be a physical space in a classroom or times during the day, such as recess, when learning and education happens, but in a more fluid and less structured way. In the context of my research, with regards to teachers, liminal spaces are also those private internal spaces where educators have their greatest agency to transform themselves and their capacity to teach. Liminal spaces can be seen as those internal places where the “magic ingredient” of teaching is born, nurtured, and emanates outwards to students and the world. Little attention is given to the potency of internal liminal spaces, with regards to teacher preparation, teacher education, or professional development. However, this component of the literature review focuses on what liminality is and its potential in the field of education.

#### *Origin of ideas about liminality in the West*

The term “liminality” can be understood as a uniquely situated space in consciousness and was first named in the Western world by van Gennep, who painstakingly conducted ethnographic studies on celebrations and rituals. Years later, Victor Turner revisited van Gennep’s ideas and through his studies of African tribes, Turner further elaborated on the “limen” spaces of in-betweenness he, too, observed in rituals. Turner’s interest in liminality quite possibly began when he was a 12-year-old child, when he witnessed the presence of “a big oval light at the end” of his bed at precisely the time the community’s priest he had befriended, passed away (from a personal communication in 1943 with his wife, Edith Turner, 2008, p. 28). This kind of “mystical” experience is the kind of event that often spurs people to seek to understand what lies beyond life’s veils.

For me, as a researcher who is interested in liminality and also postcolonial studies, a problematic aspect of this anthropological research conducted by van Gennep and Turner presents itself. Both were White men who devoted their lives to studying the cultures and practices of anthropology, and Turner specifically studied African tribes, thus possibly contributing to exoticizing these cultures and people for the “sake of knowledge” and to further “science” in the fields of anthropology and sociology. It is important to acknowledge that while the Western understanding of “liminality” came from van Gennep and Turner, European researchers have also contributed to a colonial mindset that shows “others” as objects to analyze, study, and pick apart, in order to explain various rites of passage most likely considered sacred by the African people they studied. Notwithstanding this, these theorists have given us in the West the name for the “space” of in betweenness in these cultures’ various rituals as a space to pay attention to, observe, acknowledge and recognize for their significance. It is important to recognize that this knowledge possibly came to the West from a colonial mindset.

This relationship between educators and neo-colonialism or post-colonialism is complicated and complex. On an international level, are we as educators the “neo-colonizers” who are doing the work that remains after the missionaries and before them, the European colonizers, left their posts? To what extent are we involved in the “complicity with Eurocentric discourses and practices” (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006, p. 257)? Education can be the vehicle to reproduce Euro-dominant ideas, or to the contrary, challenge this hegemony. A key thread running through the course of my research is linked to hybridity theory and ideas around liminality as the sites of in-

betweenness where a new kind of knowledge may emerge to challenge hegemonic forces.

It appears that van Gennep considered “himself as a folklorist and linguist” (Hockey, 2002, p. 211) who focused much more on carefully observing everyday habits of ordinary people, eschewing the French academic life. He was most intrigued by transition rituals, such as marriages and funerals, focusing primarily on the middle, or in-between, stage when a person is going through some kind of meaningful transition that communities often ritualize. This indeterminate stage is also what most intrigued Turner and later, Homi Bhabha, who applied these ideas to cultural studies.

Exploring threshold concepts and liminal spaces challenge us to consider our epistemology--what and how we think and the degree that our ways of thinking have been “colonized” and “constructed” to see and understand ourselves and others through a lens of separation and judgement. This has probably been the single most damaging aspect of our socialization that often remains hidden from us and obscured by our own ignorance. Our socialization process has worked so well that we go through life with a healthily functioning invisible “operating system” that impacts how we view ourselves and others. A severe lack of understanding of this internalized process influences all we do, how we see ourselves and others, and how we act in the world.

Much of this research is about making visible those hidden, liminal processes that contribute to our capacity to be powerful and supportive teachers, regardless of what we teach. An exploration and understanding of liminality and its role in education can inform how we work with pre-service teachers to support them in developing the “art” of

teaching—beyond the “science” of teaching, which focuses on mastering skills and successfully passing standardized tests in an age when neoliberal standardization and accountability dominates the world of education.

*Gloria Anzaldúa and liminality*

While the Latinx feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa (2010), linked liminality to her sexual identity as a lesbian who was “othered” in the borderlands of South Texas where she was raised, one notion linked to “in-betweenness” centers on bringing opposites together. This concept of bringing opposites together (which happens in liminal spaces) can be applied to ideas about educational philosophies, which Anzaldúa describes as “the coming together of opposite qualities within” (p. 4). Since an aspect of this dissertation includes studying how to face and dismantle injustices through liminal spaces in education, these ideas of bringing binaries together is important, and it is an approach to educational research that is rarely seen in the literature around this topic. An Eastern mindset and Buddhist philosophy, which are associated with Soka education, also evoke this idea of bringing opposites together, as evidenced by the familiar image of a Chinese “yin-yang” symbol. The liminal space can also be understood as that invisible power between the opposites that holds them together, in spite of the seemingly powerful energy to repel them or push them apart. Some kind of force and energy binds opposites together in the space between them.

My dissertation research includes how to apply ideas and principles gleaned from Soka educational philosophy into practice in liminal spaces in the US and Brazil. The topic of bringing ideas from Soka educational philosophy, an Eastern educational

philosophy, into Western-dominated educational systems, is linked to liminality; this is key, since this can be a novel approach to strengthening and supporting US urban education. While we may not currently have the capacity to dismantle neoliberal economic agendas that seek to maintain an economic system that benefits the few at the expense of the most marginalized, educators nonetheless have tremendous agency and power to enact change through the ways they engage with students. The potency of teachers is understudied and undertheorized; this research seeks to change that point.

*Beyond binaries: Bhabha's hybridity theory/liminality/neo-colonialism*

Again, a unifying thread in this dissertation incorporates ideas on finding and/or creating third spaces, which is linked to hybridity theory developed by Homi Bhabha (1994). The reason is that liminal spaces of "in-betweenness" provide opportunities for ideas to emerge that often are not affirmed within the confines of traditionally structured educational spaces. Sterrett (2015) explains that "in terms of Bhabhian theory this is a space where new cultural values and norms can occur, a Third Space" (p. 656). In terms of both content and process, my research seeks to uncover, acknowledge, create, find, and explore those third, or liminal, spaces where fresh ideas and values can emerge.

Bhabha's postcolonial theories on Third Space/liminality is an effort to seek a way beyond binaries because both Bhabha and Stuart Hall recognize that "any calls for a return to pure and uncontaminated cultural origins merely obfuscate the reality of the deep-rooted and largely irrevocable cultural effects of transculturation, which has taken place and defines the protracted experience of colonization" (Kalua, 2009, p. 25). In other words, the imbricated effect of the physical and psychic damage of the colonizers

in relation to the colonized is so deeply intertwined within both that the binary of “us” and “them” must be revisited. This is only possible in some kind of “third” or liminal space so that each of us can face how each other’s presence has impacted the other. A new way of “seeing” each other accompanies this new way of “being” in a world far beyond simplistic binaries.

### *Threshold concepts and liminal spaces*

Before entering a liminal space, we must first enter the threshold, and there is yet another journey before that to arrive at the threshold, but for now, we will explore threshold concepts, as they are the first step before entering into a liminal space. Meyer and Land (2003) propose that a threshold concept “represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress” (p. 1). They provide numerous examples from the fields of mathematics, economics, physics, veterinary sciences, sports sciences, social anthropology, visual arts, foreign language instruction, medicine, and literary/cultural studies, in which a key “threshold” concept is necessary in order to advance; such concepts are essential building blocks in order for students to progress. What are such “threshold concepts” in the field of teacher education? This is one of the sub-questions this doctoral dissertation seeks to uncover.

The characteristics of “threshold concepts” include how learners understand their particular field of study. As an example, the concept of “opportunity cost” is considered a threshold concept in the study of economics because it is through fully grasping the meaning of opportunity costs that a pathway is opened to understand many more ideas in

economics. Without a deep and full understanding of that threshold concept, the student may very well get “stuck;” hence, recognizing the value and significance of threshold concepts is critical (Meyer & Land, 2003). While ideas about liminality focus on the space “in between,” it is clear that threshold concepts also play a key role in learning.

Several qualities of threshold concepts indicate their potency for scholars and educators to consider the threshold concepts in their fields; in other words, what threshold concepts are critical for students to grasp in order to enter a portal of deeper understanding? Scholars have recognized that threshold concepts are: 1) transformative, since they shift how learners view the subject; 2) irreversible, since the learner sees the world differently once the threshold concept is grasped; 3) integrative, in that the understanding of the concept opens up ways to link to other concepts; 4) bounded, in that the delimitations of the concept become clear when encountering another concept; and 5) troublesome since the threshold concept forces the learner to question long-held assumptions (Barradell & Kennedy-Jones, 2015; Land, Rattray & Vivian, 2014; Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005). A closer study of threshold concepts expands how we develop knowledge and learn new ideas.

This last quality of threshold concepts is how threshold concepts move into liminal spaces, as through a permeable barrier. It is important to recognize that these ideas around how we learn are directly linked to Vygotskian views about the social construction of learning, as well as the different kinds of knowledge that emerge as students make meaning of what they are learning. As learners face fresh ideas or beliefs never before encountered, an internal struggle ensues. According to Prawat, (1999), it

appears that “meaning-making, Vygotsky came to understand, is in equal measure process *and* content” (p. 258). The focus on liminal spaces and “troublesome knowledge” addresses this very point of meaning-making through process and content, otherwise known as curriculum and instruction, or pedagogy.

Ultimately, “troublesome knowledge” is tied directly to a liminal internal space of questioning, but it is important to recognize the other kinds of knowledge. Perkins (1999), along with Meyer and Land (2003), suggest that learners develop: *inert knowledge*, which is far-removed from their life experiences and remains in our mind’s “attic;” *ritual knowledge*, which develops as an unquestioning ritual, for example, naming dates; *conceptually difficult knowledge*, which explains why so many people get “stuck” in some of the higher abstract mathematics or sciences courses; *foreign knowledge*, which is knowledge that one learner may find inconceivable because of a different religious or cultural background; *tacit knowledge*, which is deeply personal, hidden and possibly intuitive; and *troublesome knowledge* that requires the learner to become “unsettled” through interrogating previously unquestioned knowledge. Troublesome knowledge is what pushes a person into an internal liminal space that may ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of one’s self, others, concepts, or life (Barradell & Kennedy-Jones, 2015; Hill, Thomas, Diaz & Simm, 2016). While threshold concepts are not a central part of this research, it is important to acknowledge their role.

#### **2.4. Third spaces/hybridity in education**

A broad range of scholars acknowledge and study various activities, such as breast-feeding (Dowling & Pontin, 2017), travel abroad experiences (Craig, Zou, &

Curtis, 2018), and consulting (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003) as liminal experiences which are in a “between and betwixt” space. For my research, I will focus on liminal spaces specifically within the field of education, which are often referred to as “third spaces” (Cho, 2018; Sterrett, 2015). At times, these liminal, or third spaces are physical places, and at other times, they are internal spaces. For example, Alemán, Bernal, and Cortez (2015) describe an advocacy program, *Padres en accion*, “in which parents, in particular, are creating spaces of transformation” (p. 21). This program is in the liminal space of “between and betwixt” the school and the home; it is a place linked to the school, but not exactly part of the school--where parents can gather and advocate for their children’s success in school, thus being a place in which transformation emerges.

Additionally, scholars who have studied bilingual language classrooms recognize how hybridity theory, constructing “third spaces” of fluidity in language usage, and the physical space in classrooms can provide a way to “understand the complexity of [such] learning environments and their transformative potential” (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejeda, 1999, p. 287) by allowing students to interact with each other and the instructors in both languages. Yet other scholars study teachers who create hybrid/third spaces in their classrooms focusing on critical citizenship education, health profession education, and science education that allow for more permeability of boundary crossings in ideas and approaches to knowledge that question taken-for-granted assumptions about hegemonic perspectives in their fields (Aguilar-Valdez et al., 2013; Cho, 2018; Sterrett, 2015). The value and role of third spaces seem to be a potentially transformative aspect of education often overlooked and neglected—both in research and in praxis.

Third space and teacher education are also central to the work of Zeichner (2010), who sees the value of hybrid learning experiences within the field of teacher education, where pre-service teachers, as well as university faculty and veteran teachers develop the kind of hybrid partnerships so that the traditional boundaries between universities and schools are collapsed. In this conception of third spaces and teacher education, a university professor might have an office in a school, in order to develop closer bonds and be more accessible to school staff.

Drawing from the ideas of Bhabha, Zeichner (2010) applies them to teacher education and recognizes that

third spaces involve a rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge and theory and practice and involve the integration of what are often seen as competing discourses in new ways—an either/or perspective is transformed into a both/also point of view. (p. 92)

It is evident that educators and scholars are recognizing the value and potency of collapsing either-or binaries and embracing the “troublesome” knowledge that often emerges in liminal spaces. Another scholar that links liminality and third spaces around education, Flessner, (2014) notes that

third space theory offers two important ideas for research in the area of teacher education. First, by recognizing binaries, assumptions are analyzed and re-examined. Next, hybridity allows teacher educators the opportunity to rethink the original binary to create new spaces for reflection. (p. 233)

This notion of the “third space” as a critical place for reflection is a key point of connection to my research in both external physical spaces and also through internal spaces that are essential for deep reflection. Scholars who come from cultures that have been colonized, such as Bhabha, du Bois, and Anzaldúa provide keen insights.

*Gloria Anzaldúa: Liminal spaces as the site of Nepantla wisdom*

In the borderlands of South Texas, Anzaldúa studied the ancient term, “*Nepantla*,” which is that internal liminal space of in-betweenness that ultimately propels us to become bridge-builders in a divided world. How can educators benefit from a deeper understanding of liminality, and in what ways can such abstract ideas be applied directly to the important and noble work of educators? How does Anzaldúa use the ancient word, *Nepantla*, and what might she seek to teach us by using this word?

Extensive quotes by Anzaldúa are warranted, and in an interview with Karin Ikas, Anzaldúa (1987) explains that

*Nepantla*, which is a Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, [is] the space between two worlds. It is a limited space, a space where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and haven’t left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition. And that is what *Nepantla* stands for: It is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla* because you are in the midst of transformation. (p. 276)

And in her work, “Now Let us Shift,” Anzaldúa (2015) further states that

*Nepantla* is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. *Nepantla* is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. (p. 127)

As educators, the challenge is to both do the inner work and face our rigid and fossilized ideas about our students, learning, and ourselves and shift our focus and attend to the students and their needs; that’s the paradigmatic shift. Otherwise, students’ education becomes all about educators’ needs. The challenge is to be attentive and reflective,

while focusing on the lesson to teach; it is about being present and aware of the students and their needs and challenges.

What then, can we learn from Anzaldúa about liminality, or *Nepantla*, and empathy? In an interview with AnaLouise Keating from 1998-1999, Anzaldúa (2000) was adamant at the end of the interview to share that

I want my last words in this book to emphasize being empathic to people. Listen to people, be open to people or to any experience, open your hearts, stop being so busy that you don't have time to listen to other people and to the world... We need to do the things we want to do, the things we have passion for, instead of spending twelve hours attending to somebody else's agenda, hours and hours doing things we have no love for. (p. 291)

Anzaldúa's impassioned plea is for all of us to live our lives with passion for what we are doing, focusing on opening our hearts; this is especially true for teachers.

Liminality is about paying attention to and exploring those cracks—those hidden spaces within those calcified places in our hearts and memories from years of unexamined experiences, ideas, and beliefs about ourselves, our students, and our field of study. In construction and brick-laying, the foundations of many brick homes and retaining walls periodically have small spaces between bricks where they are bound to the foundation. Why is that? The small, barely perceptible spaces, called “weep holes,” serve a very important function to allow for shifts in the earth's movement and a way for moisture to be released, which allows for the house to have the “flexibility” to stay in place. Thus, these barely perceptible “liminal spaces” serve to keep the house standing and also preventing an internal build-up of moisture (Gurevich, 2005). In the same way, teachers must pay attention to the liminal spaces within themselves, while also being sure to provide them for students. This would allow for “flexibility” of stability amid

the ever-present shifts within the classroom and in students' lives, as well as a way for excessive frustrations to be released. Tending to internal liminal spaces is essential.

For teachers, there can be ever so slight internal shifts that can gradually contribute to much more significant shifts of consciousness. While experiences can significantly contribute to transformative processes, so can cognitive dissonance that comes through intentional lessons, dialogues, the arts.... The artist does not worry about the effect of her art; she conveys her heart and spirit through her art—as does a teacher...a guide...a nepantlera. The shift will come in time from the spirit of one linking to the spirit of the other. Palmer's (2003) "pedagogy of the soul" echoes similar notions, when he writes that "despite our cultural bias that all power resides in the outward, visible world, history offers ample evidence that the inward and invisible powers of the human spirit can have at least equal impact on our individual and collective lives" (p. 378). Again, another activist/scholar who is a practicing Quaker recognizes this same principle: the potency of our inner lives.

As a teacher educator, I often contemplate on the ways I am (in)directly participating in the (de)humanization of students and their cultures or (not)resisting any efforts that in any way (dis)respects students, their families, or cultures. This is very difficult when we work within a society and institutions that structurally and systematically work to oppress Students of Color. Bartolomé (2006) makes this point, when she writes that "educators who refuse to connect with Anzaldúa's cry for human dignity and liberation will remain complicit and reap benefits from the 'tradition of silence'" (p. 31). We can claim neither innocence, nor ignorance. Our silence is our

complicity when we are faced with injustices. So, how can we navigate this world and be part of systems that we are seeking to change? It all starts within—seeking to open our hearts. We must both look within and create outer liminal spaces for shifts—through experiences along with intentional dissonances that cause discomfort and questions-- always hopeful that the shifts will come to pass and our hearts will expand.

In the words of Anzaldúa (2015) at the end of “now let us shift:”

We are ready for change

Let us link hands and hearts

together find a path through the dark woods

step through the doorways between worlds

leaving huellas (paths) for others to follow,

build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes (bridges) our “home”;

si se puede (yes, you can), que asi sea, so be it,

estamos listas, vamonos (we’re ready; let’s go)

Now let us shift. (p. 159)

Anzaldúa invites us to enter liminal space ready to embrace changes on the other side of an unknown world. In education, we must fear less if we aspire to be fearless and make such internal shifts.

## **2.5. Liminality in connection to Soka education**

Ikeda uses the term “human revolution” to describe the internal journey and process of grappling with our way of being in the world, in relation to ourselves and others as the first step in dramatic internal and societal changes (Garrison, Hickman & Ikeda, 2014; Ikeda, 2010, 2013; von Weizsacker & Ikeda, 2016). Ikeda also encourages us to re-consider how we view children. Traditionally, education has been (and continues to be) based on what Freire (2012) called the banking method in which “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon

those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). However, in a dialogue with von Weizsacker (2016), Ikeda shared that we must see “children not so much as needing protection from a variety of threats but as agents of change and reform, capable of stirring a groundswell for transformation in their families, communities and society” (p. 95). An essential key for a dramatic shift in education, then, starts within the hearts and minds of educators and the approach to students, regardless of the area of study.

This process must first begin within, and Anzaldúa recognizes the important role spirituality plays in our personal and collective growth. For Anzaldúa (2015), “spirituality is a different kind and way of knowing. It aims to expand perception; to become conscious, even in sleep; to become aware of the interconnections between all things by attaining a grand perspective” (p. 38). Ikeda, too, emphasizes repeatedly about the interconnectedness in all of life. This is the most important point. Once an educator goes through a process of deep self-reflection, and an inner transformation or human revolution shifts the understanding of the teacher’s role and students’ need for love, care, and support, the “magical ingredient” of teaching occurs. Ikeda (2017) explains: “the same power that moves the universe exists within our lives. Each individual has immense potential, and a great change in the inner dimension of one individual’s life has the power to touch others’ lives and transform society. Everything begins with us” (p. 3). This very point is repeatedly emphasized by Palmer, Anzaldúa, and Ikeda.

One aspect of this inner shift includes awakening to and embracing one’s intuitive knowledge. Quotes from both Anzaldúa and Ikeda make this clear. Intuitive knowledge that honors a hidden way of knowing, while not quantifiably measurable, has

been attended to and honored for millions of years by our ancestors and is at the very root of most religious faiths before the “god” of science claimed the reigns. Teaching, however, is both an art and a science, and this research seeks to further study and expand our understanding of the “art” of teaching by making visible why it’s so important to attend to our inner world. Each of us must go on this journey alone but with unimaginable support from fellow sojourners on the path.

For Anzaldúa, the “cracks” are the place from which the most dramatic changes occur. Anzaldúa (2015) writes, “*Nepantleras* function disruptively. Like tender green shoots growing out of the cracks, they eventually overturn foundations, making conventional definitions of otherness hard to sustain” (p. 84). Ikeda similarly recognizes the potency of a transcendent approach to binary distinctions that cause teachers to separate themselves from their students. Ikeda (2010/2013) acknowledges the potency of these interstitial spaces when he writes about Leonardo da Vinci and says that da Vinci had the capacity of “‘transcending the world’ (*shusaken* in Japanese). The ‘world’ refers to the realm of difference, as between good and evil, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, advantage and disadvantage” (p. 33). Such transcendence, like green shoots growing in cracks, are disruptive forces in their capacity to both be part of binaries, yet transcending them also. Soka educational philosophy can be a gently disruptive approach to education that can provide educators and students a way to approach education that is expansive, humanistic, and centers on learners’ long-term interests and well-being. The best approach to studying Soka educational philosophy and liminality

grounded in stories of lived experiences and narratives is through narrative inquiry, the next component of this literature review.

## **2.6. Narrative inquiry's roots in Dewey**

The research method I use for my dissertation topic is qualitative and broadly under the umbrella of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is often traced back to the ideas of John Dewey (1897), who proclaimed in Article II of “My Pedagogic Creed” that “education, therefore is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.” This simple and powerful phrase signaled a shift from the traditional focus on the purely cognitive and skill-based focus of education to an approach that embraced the educative aspects of all life experiences. As a shift in the philosophical premise of education emerged, so did approaches to researching it, which gave birth to the ideas of narrative inquiry. According to Xu and Connelly (2010), “the key dimensions in Dewey’s analysis of experience are temporality (past, present, future) and personal-social” (p. 360); and Clandinin and Connelly added the importance of the component of *place* to Dewey’s construct (as cited in Xu & Connelly, 2010)-- “to generate what they call a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, i.e., the life space” (p. 361). These three elements, then, are central to narrative inquiry: temporality, person-social, and life-space.

The shift in epistemology about education suggested by Dewey resulted in the need to develop a new approach to methodology, and Eisner (1988) points out that “method influences how we think and what we are permitted to feel” (p. 19). This is a crucial point, since narrative inquiry’s methodology expands possibilities for both

researchers and educators, in terms of thinking about and considering feelings towards education. As stated above, an important component of the method includes both how and where it is done, and Eisner (1988) further addresses this very point when he writes about the significance of researchers going “back to the schools, not to conduct commando raids, but to work with teachers as colleagues in a common quest and through such collaboration to rediscover the qualities, the complexities, and the richness of life in classrooms” (p. 19). The methodology of narrative inquiry also shifts the very intention of educational research from critiquing classroom teachers to an approach that is affirming and respectful—by including their voices within the research process itself.

*“Defining” narrative inquiry*

To describe narrative inquiry, key concepts need to be explicated that relate to its genesis. In the 1980s, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) connected with a philosopher, Mark Johnson, as they were seeking to understand teachers’ *personal practical knowledge*. According to them, “our central ways of understanding their [teachers’] knowledge was an inquiry into the nature of their images of teaching” (p. 3). Narrative inquiry began, then, with a wondering--about teachers’ reflective images of teaching. Elements that have emerged to describe narrative inquiry include “the notions of story, image, narrative, narrative unity, and embodied knowledge [which] are all central to the Connelly and Clandinin research program” (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 11). The question is how to draw out those stories and images. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that emphasizes the importance of honoring the collaborative spirit and collapsing power dynamics, so that equality pervades the researcher-educator relationship, and it is

grounded in a sense of mutual respect and care. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) see educators and researchers together as “engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories” (p. 4).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994) “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experiences” (p. 416). The role of the researcher, then, is key in capturing the story—in conjunction with the educators. The terms Clandinin and Connelly (1994) use in their work are “*temporality, scene, plot, multiple researcher ‘I’s,’ and character,*” and they acknowledge that in 1989, Norman Denzin used similar terms, such as “*emplotment, text, plot, point of view, personal and impersonal narration and author’s voice*” (p. 416). Further, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) also acknowledge ideas from Clifford Geertz, who gave us the gift of the term “thick descriptions” and who emphasizes the importance of honoring signature and author’s voice when conducting narrative inquiry.

Many other scholars have contributed to narrative inquiry, contributing new ways of approaching it. Drawing on the ideas of Polyani, Schon asserts that a unique form of knowledge is what he refers to as “knowing-in-action”, which can best be understood through “reflection-in-action.” Schon (1995) explains that “reflection-in-action occurs in the medium of words. It makes explicit the action strategies, assumptions, models of the world, or problem-settings that were implicit in reflection-in-action” (p. 30). How, then, can a researcher tap into and connect with teachers’ “reflection-in-action,” as a way

to understand their “knowing-in-action?” This remains both the quest and challenge of narrative inquirers.

Craig (1999) further both clarifies and expands Clandinin and Connelly’s ideas about narrative inquiry though explaining the different varieties of narratives that emerge in the process of narrative inquiry: *sacred stories* (that go unquestioned), *cover stories* (which deviate from expected story plots), *teacher stories* (stories teachers tell), *stories of teachers* (stories told about teachers), *school stories* (stories from the school’s view), *stories of school* (stories others tell about the school), and *parallel stories* (e.g., stories of teachers and schools studied simultaneously). The wide range of options in the narrative inquiry “toolbox” provide educational researchers concepts and vocabulary to describe the complex phenomenon that emerge through the telling and retelling of stories with teachers in schools.

Essentially, narrative inquiry is a methodology that educational researchers can use that is relational in nature, specifically in that educators are viewed as collaborators in the research through the process of their telling and re-telling of their stories and experiences, rather than as “subjects” for researchers to “study” in an “objective” or scientific manner. Educators’ stories are lifted up and central to the methodological process, rather than critiqued or analyzed. The first paper in my dissertation can be considered either a “personal narrative” or an “autoethnography,” and the second paper in my dissertation can be considered a narrative inquiry or a collaborative autoethnography. In both cases, narrative storytelling will be included, as well a question, or inquiry. The third paper is clearly within the “narrative inquiry” genre.

*What genre of research is it? Why?*

In *Touching Eternity*, Tom Barone (2001) provides numerous examples of how Jerome Bruner has mapped out the ways research has been classified into different genres. In order to more easily visualize the concepts and ideas presented by Barone and through other sources (Garvis, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), I have created Table 1 below to succinctly compare the research genres.

<i>Table 1 – Research Genres</i>	
<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>
Paradigmatic- based on science	Narrative –based on people’s lived stories
Efforts are made to reduce uncertainty	Ambiguities and nuances are expected
Numbers as data	Stories as data
Tries to uncover an “objective truth”	Recognizes multiple truths
Deductive reasoning	Inductive reasoning
Relationships are formal & hierarchical	Relationships based on empathy & care
Parsimonious language	Expressive language
Researcher uses power to control process	Power is shared

Based on my understanding of research genres, my research primarily and clearly fits in the qualitative genre and it is specifically narrative because the majority of my research

will be a form of narrative inquiry. I am not intending to conduct any quantitative research, and I am not trying to confirm or verify an objective “Truth;” rather, I am seeking to understand how Soka educational philosophy can be applied in various contexts—recognizing that it is one of many approaches to education. Also, as previously mentioned, my research comprises three sections: 1) an auto-ethnography/personal narrative; 2) a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative; and 3) a narrative inquiry with self-identified Soka educators in Brazil—all of which are narrative and relational in nature.

#### *Differences between narrative inquiry and other qualitative/quantitative methods*

The chart above succinctly maps out the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, but I would like to further elaborate on what they are. Based on my understanding, the clearest distinctions between the key research genres center around epistemologies, power, and relationships. The quantitative genre approaches research in education from the epistemological view that “there is a single reality within known probability, objectivity, empiricism, and numbers” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 5). Narrative inquiry, on the other hand, recognizes that “knowledge need not—and I would say should not—be restricted to what one can claim” (Eisner, 1988, p. 16). The way that researchers understand knowledge dramatically impacts how to conduct research.

In terms of power, the mindset from the quantitative perspective is that the researcher is on a quest to verify and study the “Truth,” resulting in anyone or anything that will contribute to that quest can be “studied”—in the name of Truth. For example,

if a quantitative researcher wants to “prove” that a particular reading or math program is significantly more impactful for students to improve their skills, that researcher will create an “experiment” where some students will receive the “treatment” and the control group of students will not. This is done to “prove” that their approach is better, and it is done in the name of authentic scientific research. Parents, teachers, and students are **used** by the researcher to prove their findings, and even though forms are signed and permission is given, who truly benefits? Ultimately, it is the researcher and their interests, and not the children. Rarely (if ever) do researchers get dramatically significant results and return to provide that same “intervention” to all the other children. The students in the control group rarely benefit from a proven intervention. For my particular research interests on Soka education, narrative inquiry seems like a natural fit, but why Brazil?

### **2.7. Why conduct research on Soka education in Brazil?**

First, Brazil is the only Western country that has both an ECE-12 Soka school, as well as an organized coordinating body of volunteers who are seeking to spread principles of Soka educational philosophy throughout Brazil. According to the Soka Gakuen Educational Foundation (2009), all of the other ECE-12 Soka schools in the world are located throughout Asia. Education scholars in the Western world can learn much from the Brazilian educators who are applying ideas of Soka education in different contexts, since US culture has more in common with Brazil, than with Asian countries.

Second, I bring a unique web of skills to this research. As a 15-year old girl, a Brazilian girl lived with my family for six months, and then, I lived with her family in

Brazil for six months. I became fluent in Portuguese, and I have since returned to visit Brazil on five different occasions; this has resulted in my continuing to speak Portuguese and having the capacity to conduct research through narrative inquiry as a co-researcher with Soka educators in Brazil. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994) point out, “personal experience methods inevitably are relationship methods” (p. 425), and my familiarity with Brazilian language and culture can support my capacity to forge relationships with Brazilian Soka educators and co-researchers.

This is critical at a time in Soka education scholarship when most (though not all) of the published scholarly articles come from research directly connected to Soka education theory and philosophy, or focuses on how these principles are implemented in schools in Asia (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014; Inukai, 2013; Nagashima, 2012). While scholarly articles on Soka education linked to Western education have been published (Joffe, Goulah, & Gebert, 2009; Sharma, 2011; Sherman, 2016), there is a gap in the literature about how Soka education is being applied systematically outside of Asia, and particularly, in Brazil. This research seeks to fill that gap in the literature.

Another reason that conducting research on Soka education in Brazil is important now is because of Brazil’s positionality as a country geographically, politically, socially, and culturally--grounded in Western ideas, philosophies, traditions, and complexities. However, Brazil is also the country outside of Japan with the greatest population of people of Japanese descent. In fact, “after Canada, the USA, Mexico and Argentina had tightened up their immigration conditions in the mid-1920s, Brazil became the main migration destination for the Japanese” (Stelzig, 2008, p. 2). As a result of the large

population of people of Japanese descent, Brazil is in the unique position of being a country that embodies the convergence of Eastern-Western philosophies. Narrative inquiry research with self-identified Brazilian Soka educators who are applying Soka principles at the Brazil Soka School and through Soka Education in Action (formerly Makiguchi Project in Action) fills an important gap in current literature.

#### *Soka education and US urban education*

Ultimately, then, it is the praxis of Soka education that holds the greatest potential and relevance to support US students—especially in urban schools. This research can provide a blueprint from theory to action to help US educators better understand how to implement the ideas and ethos of Soka educational philosophy in public schools. Conducting this kind of research on Soka education using narrative inquiry also perfectly aligns with some of the key values of the principles of Soka education, specifically around the importance of valuing relationships, the centrality of dialogues, along with long-term aim of creating a more just and peaceful world through education. In writing about Soka educational philosophy, Ikeda (2010) further articulates some key components of his views on Soka education in this way:

I firmly believe that every young person has the power within him or her to change the world. It is the role of those who teach to believe in that power, to encourage and release it. The relationship between teacher and pupil can be a vital link through which new horizons are opened and life develops. To me, the essence of education is this process whereby one person's character inspires another. When teachers become partners in the process of discovery, burning with a passion for truth, the desire to learn will naturally be ignited in their students' hearts. (p. 151)

Similarly, in a seminal work about the research methodology of narrative inquiry, we see

how Clandinin and Connelly (1994) view research in a parallel light, when they write that “it is in the research relationships among participants and researchers, and among researchers and audiences, through research texts that we see the possibility for individual and social change” (p. 425). It is clear to see how this principle on valuing relationships as key to personal and social change is central to both Soka educational philosophy **and** the academic research method of narrative inquiry, such that the two align, complement, and support each other.

*Linking narrative inquiry to education*

Huber, Caine, Huber, and Stevens (2013) opened a window of fresh ideas to me by introducing me to the methodology of narrative inquiry in education—beyond the superficial understanding I had previously held. Being a critical, questioning, and curious educator/researcher, I never felt quite comfortable in the world of educational ethnography that suggests that the researcher maintain the stance of a detached, neutral outsider/observer of phenomenon.

I particularly struggle with the deluded notion that an observer can be detached from a phenomenon. This is because all of our dialogues, interactions, and experiences in the world and in our wonderings about the world involve a movement within our souls and between ourselves and those with whom we are interacting. To ignore and disregard the relational experiences leaves much out. The challenge becomes how to research, articulate and communicate the uniquely subtle and strong invisible bonds that occur in the liminal spaces of betweenness in relationships in the course of research in the field of education. Narrative inquiry however, according to Huber et al. (2013), offers an

approach that acknowledges “relational knowing,” (p. 291), a concept which originally came from the ideas of Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, and Minarik (1993). It is through stories, the authors suggest, that relational knowing can be conveyed because stories are punctuated with the emotional reverberations that remain beyond the experience(s). Clearly, stories or narratives within and about education, then, contain a rich reservoir of knowledge that is often overlooked or discounted in traditional educational research.

Since stories are the retelling of impactful experiences, Huber et al. (2013) highlight scholars, such as Craig (2011), who emphasizes how “thinking narratively” (p. 229) serves as a counter-narrative to the predominant technical field of research in education. This is a significant contribution, in that narrative inquiry provides scholars as a methodological approach to counter traditional research, which perpetuates a Euro-dominant hegemonic worldview. Rather, narrative inquiry seeks to interrupt this approach and introduce a refreshing way of experiencing research in education. Key ideas and theories about narrative inquiry as an approach to educational research center on the relationships amongst and between researchers, educators, families, and students, which are central. Such relationships are both included and honored within the research process itself, rather than ignored and rendered invisible in the research process.

#### *Narrative inquiry “in action”*

Huber et al. (2013) systematically present the ideas of key scholars who have been foundational in the field of narrative inquiry—weaving together salient quotes to illustrate and substantiate the importance and significance of narrative inquiry in educational research. As I begin to dig into this approach to educational research, I am

left wondering about two aspects of how to conduct this kind of research: 1) how does the researcher approach those with whom s/he will be conducting research? Is there openness about the centrality of the relationship between the researcher and the others engaged in the research? Is that kept in “the background” or the “foreground” of the process? and 2) How are issues of power addressed, since power dynamics are an inevitable, invisible, and often unspoken component of all relationships, especially within research and academia?

Huber et al. (2013) provide several examples of ways in which narrative inquiry is conducted in educational research. For example, they describe teachers who developed a “*support circle space*” and a “*peace candle space*,” which provided safe spaces for students and teachers to go beyond the official state curriculum. It was through creating trusting spaces of liminality that these teachers were able to open up opportunities for students’ counter-narratives to emerge (p. 230). While this kind of liminal space is critical for children’s growth and lives, I am left wondering about the research component. What were the teachers’ intentions? Was it purely for the students’ social-emotional growth? Was it to seek to discover new pedagogies to support students’ development? Were the students aware and cognizant of their roles in this research? As an educational researcher, how will I be able to transcend the role of voyeur and authentically be present in the relationships with both students and colleagues? This question directs me back to reflective practice. Morally and ethically, I believe that I must study myself first and foremost—as an educator and as an emerging scholar.

Another example Huber et al. (2013) provide of “narrative inquiry in action” centers on a teacher education program in an after-school program, which was a drop-in center for youth in a low-income neighborhood. The preservice teachers were put in the uncomfortable position of interacting with youth different from themselves, which created “dispositioning moments of interruption in their stories to live by” (p.232). As a result, they were able to question their lives as guided by a Euro-dominant narrative and begin to envision another story for their way of thinking and being in the world-- especially with students different from themselves. While I can understand the value of such an approach to learning and growing for the preservice teachers, I grapple with the ways in which the low-income youth were used as a vehicle for the preservice teachers’ growth. How did the youth in the program benefit from this kind of research and inquiry? Were they openly included in discussions on race, power, education, and equity? Or were they expedient vehicles for the preservice teachers’ growth? Could narrative inquiry be combined with participatory action research in order to be both participatory and reflective—honoring the relationships of all involved? I believe an uncertain and exciting journey in educational research has begun for me, and Huber et al. (2013) provide a blueprint to guide me.

*Narrative inquiry linked to other disciplines*

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* serves as a rich resource for writing narrative inquiry with ample examples woven into the text for illustrative purposes; a goldmine of aphorisms and metaphors that describe aspects of narrative inquiry; and a foundational work for

narrative inquirers to refer to as a companion or resource when in the midst of conducting research in education using narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that “for us, Dewey transforms a commonplace term, experience, in our educators’ language into an inquiry term, and gives us a term that permits better understandings of educational life” (p. 2). The paradigmatic shift in education birthed by Dewey has been further advanced in educational research by Clandinin and Connelly, and they map that journey by explaining key terms and connecting this research method to the ways it has been used in other disciplines.

In the field of anthropology, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain how Geertz and Bateson used narratives, and for Bateson, “all of us, lead storied lives on storied landscapes” (p. 8). A key point that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize about Bateson’s work is the importance of “allowing difference to challenge assumptions, values, and beliefs; improvising and adapting to the difference; and thereby learning as the narrative anthropologist” (p. 9). For the research in Brazil, this point is key and for all educators conducting narrative inquiry, it is important to acknowledge and embrace ambiguity—leaning into it as a way to challenge assumptions, rather than resisting the uncertainty that arises from ambiguity.

Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) focus on institutional transformations using narrative, and Cole uses narrative in his research on the lived experiences of his psychiatric patients. Polkinghorne (1988) is a practicing psychotherapist who examines how stories inform our collective ways of knowing through exploring narratives in literature, history, literary history, and psychology; he recognizes the ways in which

narrative inquiry can be used in his work as a research tool. All of these examples of researchers in other fields set the foundation for Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to use narrative inquiry as a way to “understand experience” (p. 17) in the field of education.

*The “why” of narrative inquiry in my research*

In the first two papers for my dissertation, I use autobiographical/ auto-ethnographical narrative writing. This aligns with what Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) ideas when they write that “narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle* (called by some the research problem or research question” (p. 41). I want to understand how my own experiences as a teacher were influenced and informed by my studies of the principles Soka educational philosophy and through my research conducting narrative inquiry in Brazil, to explore that same question with Brazilian Soka educators.

What I am learning from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is quite simply to “think narratively” (p. 46) and to more deeply understand and explore “the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author” (p. 71). It is not so much about what narrative inquiry IS; rather, it is about what narrative inquirers DO. It is within the “three-dimensional space” created through narrative inquiry “in which narrative inquirers would find themselves, using a set of terms that pointed them backward and forward, inward and outward, and located them in place” (p. 54)—a place full of “ambiguity, complexity, difficulty, and uncertainties associated with the doing of the inquiry” (p. 55). This three-dimensional space of the narrative can give form to the confusing, yet profound stories that comprise our lives, and Clandinin and

Connelly (2000) remind us that “as we begin work on a research project, we are beginning a new story” (p. 71)—one in which we grow and are transformed in the process of learning about and with those who are part of our inquiry.

The intimate nature of the work of the narrative inquirer is situated “in the middle of a nested set of stories—ours and theirs” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63), which can often feel like a confusing maze. It is for this reason, as well as the emotional challenges that may accompany the work due to the intimacy and intensity of bonds, temporary nature of the work, and its complexity and ambiguousness, the authors recommend that it’s best for “narrative inquirers to establish response communities, ongoing places where they can give accounts of their developing work over time” (p. 73). The authors acknowledge that “for us, doing narrative inquiry is a form of living. Living in its most general sense, in unbounded” (p. 89). Attempting to capture and articulate the “unboundedness” of life, particularly around education, seems daunting and it’s clear that a community of fellow researchers will be helpful on such a journey.

A key aim of narrative inquiry is to consider the significance of the meaning of the research and knowledge claims it makes. It is important for the researcher to provide order and structure on the unbound landscape, in order for the work to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work, and its epistemological value. This is no easy task!

#### *The “how” of narrative inquiry from the field to completion/ethical issues*

While narrative inquiry is “strongly autobiographical,” researchers have the challenge to “connect with larger questions of social significance” (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000, p. 121) in order to justify the significance of the research, while also clarifying the **why** of conducting narrative inquiry, instead of an ethnography, for example. The next step in the shift from field texts to research texts revolve around the research puzzle or question at the heart of the inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elaborate on the complex process of transitioning from field to research text, since it becomes “an archival task” (p. 131) of reading and re-reading field texts and organizing them in order to code them in ways that provide insight into patterns, “gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear” (p. 131); in the end, “it is responses to the questions of meaning and social significance that ultimately shape field texts into research texts” (p. 131). The authors openly express the poignancy and fears that may emerge from sharing research texts with the research participants. The next challenge is how to present the research texts and the form they’ll take.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge ethical issues and persistent concerns connected to narrative inquiry, such as “Hollywood plots” and the “dangers of narcissism and solipsism,” which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest can be avoided by engaging in “*wakefulness*,” which includes an awareness of “criticism but not necessarily accepting of it” (p. 183). In essence, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) succinctly provide us with qualities of a “good narrative as having an *explanatory*, *invitational quality*, as having *authenticity*, as having *adequacy* and *plausibility*” (p. 185). These concerns spark questions about my limited experiences: Can I adequately describe complex phenomenon and find the right words to shed light on nuances that

may tell us more than the obvious? Are my skills sharp enough and my vision clear enough? This approach to educational research is appropriate for my research, since a central point of narrative inquiry is that “relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). Dialogue is at the heart of the foundational ideas in my research, and the methodology of narrative inquiry supports the philosophical/theoretical perspectives in this dissertation.

### *Narrative inquiry and teachers’ knowledge*

Another key scholar in the field of narrative inquiry is Elbaz (1991), who takes on the complex challenge of providing ideas and approaches for researchers to begin to understand teachers’ knowledge, along with considerations as to how researchers can study this phenomenon. As a researcher of education, Elbaz acknowledges the position of power that researchers have when studying teachers’ knowledge, and she seeks to challenge the use of that power by advocating for the need to honor and center research on teachers’ knowledge within the teachers and their stories. This is a very respectful approach, since it is an attempt to honor teachers and their knowledge, rather than critique them. Specifically, Elbaz focuses on three themes, with regards to curriculum researchers and their studies on teacher knowledge: 1) story; 2) ordinary teachers vs. extraordinary teachers; and 3) voice, in regards to allowing teachers to use their own voices when telling their stories.

Elbaz (1991) provides scholarly justification for the validity of a teacher’s story, and she ultimately argues that she is making “an epistemological claim that teachers’ knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way”

(p. 3). Elbaz substantiates this position, with a strong emphasis on the ways that teachers always provide rich contexts in which stories are told. Ultimately, Elbaz (1991) makes convincing arguments about the validity of teachers' stories as central portals to understanding teacher knowledge and she insists that fellow scholars "experiment with forms that involve less risk of taking teachers' stories out of their hands" (p. 6).

Narrative inquiry centers the research on teachers' voices, which is essential.

Further, Elbaz more deeply explicates important nuances about teachers' stories, and she brings to light an essential aspect of teachers' knowledge, which is that so much of it is tacit. Elbaz (1991) elaborates on the point about tacit teacher knowledge, explaining that "it is nonlinear; it has a holistic, integrated quality; it is at least partly patterned or organized; and it is imbued with personal meaning" (p. 11). A key distinction Elbaz makes about teacher knowledge is the way in which teacher knowledge is embodied knowledge and of a high context nature, in contrast to academics' knowledge, which is of a low context nature, and seeks to be explicit, with a focus on critical discourse removed from context. This is a significant distinction, which highlights the very different ways educators think, see, and understand the world. Finally, Elbaz highlights the moral and critical aspects of teachers' voices, with a central focus being pupils' well-being and how schools either support or undermine them.

#### *My Interpretation/Reflections*

Elbaz's scholarship helps me to more clearly understand the divisions and dichotomies between teacher/practitioners and scholars in the Academy. The notion I sense is that researchers/scholars (wrongly) see themselves in some way "above"

teachers, and have developed the (incorrect) notion that it is their place to “study” and critique the teacher/practitioners in order to better understand and improve education. Before my doctoral studies, I had never deeply even thought about “teachers’ knowledge.” For me, teaching is what I always **did**. I truly never thought about the meta-cognitive aspect of how or what I thought about my teaching. While I have distinct memories of always being full of stories and critiques—mostly about the administration’s lack of respect and regard for teachers, students, and families, I do not have memories of engaging in thoughts about what my knowledge was as a teacher. This is important because part of my current research is about the lack of concern, time, focus, or energy spent on teachers engaging in deep critical self-reflection.

*Other significant works on narrative inquiry*

In a seminal article on narrative inquiry entitled *Narrative Inquiry in Teaching and Teacher Education*, Craig (2011) traces the genealogy of how narrative inquiry has been used in education. Craig provides examples of scholars from disparate backgrounds who have used narrative inquiry to bring together ideas from a broad range of cultures and educational philosophies. Based on a review of the literature on narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig, 2011; Mattos, 2009; Xu & Connelly, 2010), clearly there is a gap in the literature about the use of narrative inquiry on how Soka educational philosophy is applied in educational settings in the global South, and particularly, in Brazil. This research fills such a gap.

As a US educational researcher who would be using narrative inquiry to study how principles of Soka educational philosophy are applied in two very different

educational contexts in Brazil, I would be honoring and valuing educators from the global South. This is important, since much of international educational research is centered on a Western onto-epistemological orientation. However, Soka education was born from Makiguchi's insights in which he "viewed authentic happiness as inextricably linked to agency and empowerment. Thus, not only are empowered people happy, but happy people are empowered to reshape and reform society toward more ideal conditions" (Gebert, 2009, p. 163). Soka education, then, holds the potential to function as an approach to education that interrupts the hegemony of a Euro-dominant system that perpetuates racial and social injustices, which will require broad alliances amongst educators. Michael Apple (2013) addresses this point when he writes that

we must create *decentered unities*—alliances that cut across our differences and that incorporate struggles over both redistribution and recognition—that are based on a nuanced and politically open recognition of the multiplicity of relations of exploitation and domination and of struggles against these relations. In this way, a richer and more diverse 'we' can be built based on not false and romantic notions that we can all share in each other's pain, but on a crucial understanding that alliances when possible are crucial to strategies of interruption. (p. 52)

The opportunity to broaden a collective "we" who can envision societal changes beginning within education and the liminal spaces connected to it can expand, based on this research and through understanding **how** Brazilian educators are seeking to apply Soka educational principles in schools.

### **2.8. Significance of my research and gaps it can fill**

This research seeks to address areas that focus on the idea of third/liminal spaces as places to support teachers, students, and parents to confront injustices, such as racism

and to explore who it becomes internalized, while simultaneously manifested in our communities. Also, this research focuses on the importance of educators expanding their hearts and developing cultures of care in schools. What is unique about this research is that the liminal/third space that is part of this dissertation study includes an organized group of volunteer self-identified Soka educators who are fostering grass roots bonds in their communities and seeking to provide support in the field of education by introducing Soka educational ideas in third spaces, in addition to educators who work at the Escola Soka do Brasil (Brazil Soka School). A literature review on the uses of third spaces in education reveal a gap that precisely this kind of research can fill (Anzaldúa, 1987; Flessner, 2014; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999). This is an ideal time for this research.

Finally, it is important to address the component of my question that seeks to understand how the innovative programs in Brazil are linked to US educators confronting injustices and expanding their hearts. In a speech given at Columbia University's Teachers College in 1996, Ikeda (2010/2013) shared that "both Dewey and Makiguchi looked beyond the limits of the nation-state to new horizons of human community. Both, it could be said, had a vision of global citizenship, of people capable of value-creation on a global scale" (p. 54). The question, then, is **how** educators who are seeking to widely share principles of Soka educational philosophy are putting these ideas into action, and linked to that is the primacy of expanding teachers' hearts. Nel Noddings (2003) sums up the urgent need for schools to recognize the importance of the role of the heart in education when she writes that "if children are to be happy in

schools, their teachers should also be happy. Too often we forget this obvious connection” (p. 261). The relationship between happy teachers, students, and larger societal change is clear, and research on educators who are seeking to put the ideas based on Soka educational philosophy into action is critical at a time when US urban educators can benefit and learn from Brazilian educators in the global South.

Many educators around the world seek to more deeply study and apply the principles of Soka educational philosophy originally espoused by Makiguchi that focus on the lifelong happiness of each child, and to develop each child’s unique potential, while emphasizing the importance of teacher-student relationships (Goulah, 2010b; Ikeda, 2009a). I hope my research can in some way contribute to shedding light on Ikeda’s significant contributions to Soka educational philosophy, with regards to helping teachers develop those qualities most needed to foster students as global citizens. This research is timely in order to support current and future educators who want to learn about, embody, and apply the principles of Soka educational philosophy.

### 3. ROOTED IN, YET RESISTING WHITE PRIVILEGE: A BRICOLAGE OF AN EMERGING SOKA EDUCATOR

#### **Synopsis**

This paper is an evocative autoethnographic narrative that recounts one educator's journey from a comfortable childhood of privilege in the deep South of the US through rebellion in teen years and the journey to become a high school teacher, mother, widow, and then a doctoral student. The emotional, psychological, and spiritual components of her path are excavated and shared in a narrative form to shed light on how she drew from her faith and Soka educational philosophy to sustain her through those struggles. This personal narrative explores her husband's death by police officers and the complexity of the lived experience of this educator who challenged herself to press forward.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." - Nelson Mandela

#### **3.1. Introduction**

For this evocative autoethnographic narrative, a marker event in my life was seeing my husband shot and killed by two police officers in front of my young daughters and me. As a scholar and educator, I seek to elucidate how this has impacted me—and how my spiritual faith and practice, along with Soka educational philosophy, sustained me to maintain my wholeness and integrity as my world fell apart. This narrative is not easy to write and I imagine it might not be easy to read. Say his name: it was Tesfaie Mokuria.

Say his name. He had a name, and it was Tesfaie Mokuria. He was a gentle man, a loving man, a hardworking man, and he was the love of my life. He was not perfect; neither was I, and our relationship was complicated. He battled addictions, and I felt powerless and confused facing them while trying to raise our two young daughters

and maintain a professional identity as a high school teacher in a public school. This is my story, and I want to share it because being a teacher is about so much more than working with students every day. Aspects of my story became public because of his death, but I have kept silent for many years. The pain, the shame, and the hurt made it too difficult. But the time has come for me to tell my story.

My story begins long before that tragic evening. It is a sad story. A tragic story. And yet, it is a story of victory and overcoming something that it would seem is impossible to overcome. Where do I begin?

### **3.2. Early years and unfortunate events**

What am I? I am asked that often by both bold friends and strangers. It's a natural curiosity, but a bit complicated. Sometimes, I just say, "I am a citizen of the world" and leave it to their imagination, basking in what some have termed my "ethnic ambiguity." I sometimes feel that I give up some of my power by sharing private aspects of my being just because I am not easily identifiable by some people; yet, being ambiguous is also an unearned privilege.

I was five. I was standing with my arms behind my back at the bottom of the driveway at our neighbor's house across the street. We were outside a lot playing basketball in the driveways of our suburban homes in a sleepy Southern city, but for some reason, I was on the edge of the driveway. I remember turning around because I saw one of my older sister's classmates coming down the street riding his bike. It was a warm afternoon and I remember the heavy humid air of that summer evening.

And then, to my shock and disgust, he spit on me. My arm had his unwanted bodily fluid on it. The deeply rooted feeling of violation of having another person's unwanted bodily fluid on my body is difficult to describe or explain. No amount of soap can fully clean it off, and even after all these years, those memories of disgust and violation reappear with the simple thought of remembering the unfortunate incident.

Even from this very distant vantage point, I wonder what he was thinking. Why would he do that to me--a young child who was on the periphery of his life? The only thing I can think of is that he did not like Jewish people and he was taught not to like Jewish people and that was his immature and inappropriate way to deal with his own feelings of repulsion and hatred for people he did not even know. Can I forgive this person who at the most was on the very fringe of my life, but someone who, nonetheless violated my younger version of me? I am still working to forgive such ignorant and hurtful behavior.

### **3.3. The genesis of my emerging identity as a Jewish girl**

I grew up in a solid middle-class Jewish family in the deep South in the 1960s and 1970s—the youngest of three girls, and we were oblivious to the students and progressives around the world who organized themselves to fight for basic human rights. For most of those years, the events of student protests and civil rights marchers were distant images on a grainy television set. I was in a cultural cocoon safely ensconced from the turmoil of those years, and yet I now know that those ideas of fighting for basic human decency long denied to African Americans and Mexican farmworkers, women's reproductive rights, and to end a contested war in Southeast Asia, all seeped into my

consciousness. Though distant from my lived reality, I somehow got the message and the memo from those warriors who were tired of the status quo in a society that clearly benefited some at the expense of many others. My eyes and body knew before I did.

My father was a tall man and he had a large, solid frame; he always had a huge grin on his face, and I once heard that his nickname was “Slits” because when he smiled, his eyes disappeared and formed two slits on his face. After he passed away, I saw his elementary school report cards and realized my dad never did very well in school. He was a really likable and friendly man, but school just was not his thing. So, I imagine he may not have scored very well on the tests all military recruits started taking during World War II. When the clarion call came for young men to enlist in the military when the US entered World War II, my dad did the patriotic thing most young men of his generation did—who could—and he enlisted in the army. His size and strength meant he would become a foot soldier and march throughout Europe. While he scarcely talked of that time in his life, he did speak fondly of British Jewish families welcoming him to commemorate Jewish holidays with them.

Family stories that swirled around were that his mother had a nervous breakdown and died young for two believable reasons: 1) Before the Great Depression, my grandfather owned a carpet mill and they lived very well; during the Great Depression, they lost everything and she—together with my father--sold eggs from an uncle’s farm; and 2) Two of her three sons enlisted to support the war efforts in WWII, and the worry and concern became unbearable. As young children, my father and his two older brothers were observant Orthodox Jews who davened daily with the ancient prayer

robes, Tefillin, and they kept a Kosher home. All that changed when my father married my mother, whose family practiced Reformed Judaism.

As a result, I grew up as an observant Reformed Jew in Savannah, Georgia. Every Friday night, my mom made a special dinner, and we ate Shabbos dinner on fine china in our dining room with a tablecloth on the table. My mom said the ancient Jewish prayers and lit the Sabbath candles, and my dad sang the prayers over the wine and the challah—making sure we each got some. It was a family ritual my whole life, and I even learned to make challah when I was older, so I could contribute and support the family and our faith in some way. Every Sunday morning of my childhood, I attended Sunday school, where members of our congregation taught us about the Jewish faith, holidays, and beliefs. Every Jewish holiday was a big event in our family, and we always had new outfits. We went to temple together as a family, and depending on the holiday, we went to a close family friend's home for a special meal, or we hosted the celebration in our home.

Within, however, I began to ask a lot of questions, and I think that if I dared ask the questions out loud, I would have been silenced rather quickly. As a child, I got the message that I was to participate and follow along, which I enthusiastically did. But inside, an entirely different kind of dialogue was going on. Much of it stemmed from several experiences in my young life that left me baffled—about life, its meaning, and my place in it, which created fissures in my consciousness. I sincerely wanted to believe what I was taught by my parents and through my religious training, but over time, I found that I could not. I learned to love to read, which has served me well in life. Along

the way, I came to develop my own ideas about life that diverged over time greatly from how I was raised.

From a very early age, I came to question core ideas of the faith of my family and ancestors. Some of this, I now realize, was because my parents' good friends had a daughter around my sister's age, named Nan. Nan had severe cerebral palsy and was always in her wheel chair—sitting up with the help of thick leather straps. Her hair was disheveled; she drooled constantly; and I always remember hearing her moaning incessantly because she was blind, deaf, and mute. I could never understand how it was possible for the all-loving and all-powerful God I learned about at our family's temple allowed that to happen to a child and her parents. I knew she was both loved and capable of loving, but she was trapped in a body that made it hard for her to navigate life as we know it.

As a young child, there were no answers for me. Other unanswered questions chipped away at whatever pure, child-like faith I had come to develop. I witnessed dramatic economic inequities in my hometown, especially between African Americans and Whites, and I often questioned how and why such injustices existed. On the limited (4) television channels available to me in the days before cable, I regularly saw video footage of young African children who were clearly distressed and malnourished. Such images further exacerbated my own angry feelings about the racial and economic inequities I saw all around me in my local community at a very young and impressionable age.

I gradually came to reject the Judeo-Christian view of an omnipotent and all-loving God because as a child I could never understand why there was so much suffering in the world. It was when I was introduced to the poetry and writings of Thoreau and Emerson that I began to believe in God's presence in all of nature and in people's hearts. Being in nature helped me to feel a spiritual bond, and I yearned for a different way to make sense of life and its many contradictions. When I first learned about Buddhism and was introduced to the possibility of "being at peace with myself," I immediately felt myself drawn to such a belief system. In my early 20s, I had been introduced to and practiced Sufism, based on the writings of Rumi, but it did not feel fully satisfying to me. When I was formally introduced to Buddhism in my mid-20s, my life was ready to embrace this philosophy, and so, I began my Buddhist practice of Nichiren Buddhism within the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) almost immediately after I learned about it when I was 25. Learning about Buddhism ultimately lead me to learn about Soka educational philosophy.

#### **3.4. Early formal schooling memories**

My formal schooling started in kindergarten at the Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) in Savannah in the early 1960s. My teachers were Mrs. Blumenthal, Mrs. Rubinitz, and Ruby, the teacher's assistant, who was African American. I'm not sure if we called her Miss Ruby, or Ruby, but I am quite certain we simply called her "Ruby." Neither my sisters, community of friends, nor I were ever explicitly taught to either disrespect nor to respect African American people. However, the truth is that it was

commonly accepted for young children to call any African Americans in our environment by their first names and not to call them “Miss” or “Mrs.”

This is a fact I am just now coming to terms with and facing as a critical aspect of my upbringing: the truth is that we WERE explicitly taught to disrespect African Americans in our environment by not being explicitly taught to call them “Mr.” or “Mrs.”—while we were taught to address all other adults in that way, or in the more familiar way of “Aunt” or “Uncle.” In my limited world when I was young, I saw children address all African Americans in our environment by their first names. While on the surface, it might appear that we were not overtly taught to disrespect or disparage African American people, we, in fact, were. It is clear we were never overtly taught to honor, respect, or see the African Americans in our lives as adults to look up to, or as people worthy of our respect. From a young child’s perspective, the African Americans in our lives were paid to do menial jobs; that was my lived reality as a young girl growing up in the South in the 1960s. This is very difficult to face and admit to myself.

Jewish people remind ourselves of our place as God’s “chosen people.” Jewish people have their own Yiddish word, “shvartza,” to describe African American people, and I heard it often. As I remember, this word was used so that African Americans did not know they were being talked about, and it was not used as a term of endearment or respect—that I do remember. In fact, it was a way for Jewish people to embrace their whiteness in a society that would give them more power, privileges and prestige at the expense of African Americans. I could never understand why my religion taught that

God loved everyone and had all the power of the universe, and yet, so many injustices surrounded me on all sides.

All, or most, of the Jewish children my age went to the JEA for preschool, kindergarten, and/or day camp in the summer. The JEA was the center of our lives on a lot of levels, and I spent many hours of my youth there. It was the “third space” where much of my informal education happened, and it was only for Jewish youth. On some levels, I felt safe, secure, and happy there, but for some reason, I never felt fully accepted in the Jewish community. The dominant group in our Jewish community were the Orthodox Jews, and they were the most observant Jews. In Savannah, I always felt that the Orthodox Jews looked down on us reformed Jews, believing we were not quite Jewish enough. In essence then, I felt “othered” by my own people.

### **3.5. Elementary school years**

I mostly loved school, especially beginning with my second-grade teacher, Mrs. Moseley. I never once remember any warmth, concern, or care coming from the life of my first-grade teacher. Not once during the whole year of my young life. We just mechanically sat in our chairs and learned to read about Dick and Jane. “Run, Dick, run.” That’s all I remember about my first-grade education, except for that feeling of being someone who didn’t matter at all to my teacher. Yet, I was yearning for attention and to be noticed; I was curious and thirsted to learn.

From what I remember, everyone in my neighborhood public school was White, except for the lunch ladies. But growing up in Savannah in the late 1960s, that was “just how life was.” My family accepted, benefitted from, and did not resist the status quo. I

now recognize that this was part of a long history of a way to survive for Jews, as well as to gain social status, wealth, and privileges denied to many. For many Jewish people, this created tension—while many unquestioningly embraced the benefits of whiteness, many Jewish people were also on the frontlines of the Civil Rights Movement. I felt that as a child, but I didn't have the political acumen to understand it. The prevailing social order was that African Americans in our world at that time worked to clean our homes, iron our clothes, cook, cut the grass, run the elevators in the department stores downtown, and take care of any custodial needs in our schools or places of worship. There was a clear social order, and as Jews, we were reluctantly allowed to live as Whites, while also never fully respected by nor accepted by them. Every Jewish family I was ever with in Savannah hired African Americans, who served as the “others,” which complicated Jewish identities and privileged us to become “Whites” in a society highly suspicious of us. It did not matter that we were othered; it served our interests to be White, and that was the choice I saw my parents, as well as other Jewish families, consistently make.

A refrain I heard often was “Blacks and Jews are not allowed there,” which usually referred to a golf club, or exclusive eating club that was only for the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or WASPS. WASPs were at the top of the social pecking order. I remember seeing the images of the African American protesters in Alabama when fire hydrant hoses were used against them, as if they were the fire needing to be extinguished. Put out. Silenced. Stopped. It was never discussed in my clean, comfortable home, at least not that I remember.

### **3.6. Some hidden family secrets**

It is only now in my sixth decade in life that I have developed a deeper understanding of my mom and much more forgiveness for her. For many, many, many years I simmered in anger at her because her cousin's husband touched me inappropriately when I was very young—like six or seven years of age. She had been caring for and supporting her mom; she was in the difficult position of watching her mom waste away from cancer—all while trying to raise her young children 900 miles away. As I watched a close friend deteriorate from the ravages of cancer, I see how heart-wrenching it is to witness a loved one battle such a disease. It leaves one numb and paralyzed, feeling utterly powerless. My mom still had three young children to raise, but I now can imagine she was in a state of shock after my grandmother passed away--just going through the motions of living. She could not fully be available to her young children. She did not have the capacity to support us; she was not capable of it at that time—being in what I imagine to be a deep state of grief.

And yet, I am horrified when I look back to one particular experience. I was so excited to share a scrapbook I so painstakingly put together about my summer camp experiences in rural Alabama. I was the youngest one to attend the summer camp because my mom begged them to allow me to go with my sisters so she could support her ailing mom. The scrapbook I created was full of pictures with my hand-written descriptions and every ribbon I got for Bible study or a certificate for participating in camp activities deep in the heart of Alabama. It had my National Rifle Association (NRA) membership card and even targets showing how well I had done in rifle practice.

I was so proud of that scrapbook. And that dirty old man, my mother's cousin's husband, had me go through that scrapbook and describe my experiences while he touched me in a way no grown man should ever touch a young child. I was too shocked to know what to do; I froze. I became paralyzed and pretended it was not happening. And yet, I want more than anything to erase that memory from my life forever. He messed with my sexuality at a time when I should have been protected. For years, I was furious that he and my mom's cousin continued to be invited to family events and I would still have to greet them and pretend like that never happened—all the while feeling disgusted, dirty and angry...and confused because boys and men confused me. It took me many years to embrace sexual pleasure after that because that very first sexual experience was such an inappropriate and perverse one. And I think on some level, I blamed my mom because it was her cousin's husband and she left him alone with me to "tuck me in" and put me to bed. I weep thinking of this; my heart hurts for my younger me. It was wrong, and he had no business doing that to me. He violated me on a deep level and scarred me in ways I do not fully fathom. I am quite sure it has influenced how I think of men and sexuality and myself. I feel so very grateful that later in life, I came to embrace the Buddhist philosophy, which emphasizes over and over that we—each of us—are precious human beings. I am a precious person. I must constantly remind myself of how very precious and beautiful I am in spite of ways that others have wounded me--ways that I am just beginning to examine, and explore.

As a child, I retreated into other worlds through books, and my eyes gradually began to open. Mostly, I loved reading biographies that included stories of people who

showed great courage and grit, like Helen Keller, Harriet Tubman, and Florence Nightingale; they were women who took action. I began to consider other perspectives and other ways of living life in this world—mostly through books I read. Internally, it caused me great dissonance, and I was at a loss as to how to reconcile what I intuited, what I was taught, what I witnessed, and what I felt. I believe my mother sensed my internal angst, but she did not know where to begin to support me, or how to help me untangle it myself. I put all my energies into school, and I think I got straight As my entire life, or close to it, but the unprocessed internal volcanic angst remained because my lived reality that I experienced every day did not align with the views of life presented to me by my family and through my religious upbringing.

This was all further complicated because my family enjoyed teasing me and watching me get upset. I entertained them with my anger. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, the woman who until recently I considered my favorite teacher, often read to us as a class; I was drawn to one particular book: “Epaminondas.” Our teacher, who was White, read this book to us—a classroom of Southern White children—as if she were an older African American woman who was reprimanding her simpleton son, Epaminondas. I related to Epaminondas because I always seemed to get into trouble without meaning to do so. I went home to tell my parents this story and they laughed hysterically. Over time, I became a one-child minstrel show who re-told that story in the vernacular of working-class African Americans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It took me more than five decades to fully realize how I was socialized to disrespect a noble and beautiful group of people in my midst. Unknowingly, I was spoon-fed White supremacist ideology.

### **3.7. Adolescence, awakenings, awareness**

A different kind of dramatic and life-changing event occurred for me when I became a teenager. My dad always sought international experiences for us, within our capacity; he responded to an ad in the local paper, and one day, a young Brazilian girl moved in with my family as an exchange student. She and I became close, and we remain friends 50 years later, and my lifelong love affair with Brazil began at that time. My parents let me go live with her and her family for 6 months in 1974 in Salvador, Bahia in Brazil; I was 16. I am still not sure if they knew what they were doing by letting their naïve 16-year-old go to Bahia just in time for Carnival! However, a profound shift in my consciousness occurred as I was able to see and experience an entirely different way of BEING in the world. It seemed to me at the time that Brazilian society was much more based on class, rather than race, and my Brazilian family had very close family friends who had a wide range of skin tones; the maid at the house was the most fair-skinned of everyone. For starters, this was dramatically different than life as I had witnessed it in Savannah. Over time, I have come to realize Brazil, too, has its own complex issues around White supremacist racism and ideology, albeit a slightly different set of issues than those of my home country—and particularly my Southern state in the pre-desegregation-early desegregation years.

### **3.8. Beginnings of becoming an educator as activist**

Upon returning from Brazil, I finished high school and headed to the Boston area for college, where I studied sociology and English. For me, college was an expectation in my family. While I had some great professors, who opened my mind to a wide range

of new ideas, I did not deeply value education at the time; rather, I saw it as an obligation I owed to my parents. It took me many years to develop a genuine heart of appreciation for them and all their efforts on my behalf. I was the little girl they had loved, cared for and made huge sacrifices for; they had big hopes and dreams for me. Within a year of graduating from college, I do not think they had any idea that I had grown to question everyone and everything...that I had been inappropriately touched as a very young girl by an older male relative and nursed an angry grudge towards them...that I had learned to love Bob Marley and the lyrics in his songs (“emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds”)...that I had hitchhiked to South America with my boyfriend while in college...that I had fallen in love with someone who was the most pure-hearted person I’d ever met...that I was wounded deeply on every level of my being...and yet, I yearned—deeply yearned—for some kind of peace within and forgiveness of myself and others. They had no idea of any of that, and I lived as far away from them as I could for my own protection and sanity, as well as theirs.

### **3.9. Young adulthood**

After college, I moved to Santa Cruz, California, where I first worked in factories, and taco stands; eventually, I found a job as an “Advocacy Worker,” where I worked with farmworkers and their families. Ronald Reagan had recently taken office, and the neoliberal policies of Reaganomics meant that community action agencies, such as the one where I worked lost all funding sources. In order to protect funding for the program, I faced the Board of Supervisors with a group of mothers from the community.

It was a powerful, but brief moment in which we, a small group of us, advocated for our rights. I remember the beginning of our presentation when the board members were ignoring me, as they had done to previous speakers. I started by insisting that they listen and acknowledge me and the farmworkers' wives who had come that day. I let them know very clearly that our voices and lives were to be respected, and I expected them to stop talking with each other and listen to us and what we had come to say that day. I spoke truth to those in power and challenged how they treated me and the women with me that day, which stirred something within me—to find my voice and fight injustices.

Around that time, I decided to move to Dallas, where my sister was living—thinking I would work in Dallas long enough to begin a Bohemian life of travel or join the Peace Corps and move to Africa. None of that happened. Such thoughts I now know are born of privilege, but I had no understanding of that at the time. Throughout my life, White privilege served as an invisible barrier and shield that deluded me to think I could do whatever I wanted. Oblivious to it, whiteness and colonialism permeated my thoughts as a young woman of privilege. I was able to simultaneously be “othered” as a young Jewish woman, while also benefitting from the privileges of whiteness our social order had decided “deserved” more privileges. I sensed injustices on a visceral level, but I had neither the vocabulary, nor the structural understanding to make sense of it all.

Moving from Santa Cruz to Dallas was a shock I was not expecting. In Santa Cruz, I often took very long walks by the cliff walks with the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks below me. Listening to the sounds of the ocean has always calmed my soul like nothing else I know. When I moved to Dallas, I lived with my sister, and

within 3 months of moving, I found a job at NorthPark Mall working at a restaurant. It was close to Christmas, and on my shift one day, I saw Tesfaie walk in. He was wearing his long dreadlocks down, and in the early 1980s, very few men had dreads in Dallas. I gave him my phone number and asked him to call if he ever heard of reggae music playing in the area.

We were both in our twenties, and neither of us was seeking a life partner at that time. I had fallen in love with the music, lyrics, and spirit of reggae music a few years before we met, so when a young man who looked just like Bob Marley walked into the restaurant at the mall where I worked in Texas in the early 1980s, I approached him. We decided to meet the next day and we were together almost every day from the first time we met. There was a beautiful and deep bond that words cheapen. While there was definitely a physical attraction, we felt united in a deep bond like a subterranean underground river from the very start.

Physically, we were almost like twins. We were the exact same height—nose to nose and there was a familiarity and comfortability with each other from the start. A deep unspoken bond brought us together; we both knew this, and we could never fully find the right words to explain it. We shared a deep pain for the suffering of others. I would often come home to find a homeless man in our living room that my husband wanted to support by providing a meal and a shower, and possibly a way to make money by helping him in his landscape business. While it did create contention between us, I had grown to accept his generous spirit to help others. We did not seek material wealth, but focused more on how to support others who struggled. Something very deep

connected us from the beginning; it was a bond we both felt. When we held hands, or when he put his arm around me and our fingers intertwined, there was a closeness unlike any other I'd ever experienced.

Our first baby daughter was born the following year, and Tesfaie-- who was part Ethiopian and part Italian—taught me about another way of **being** in the world. He had a complex past that he rarely talked about. Historically, Italy unsuccessfully tried to colonize Ethiopia. From the bits and pieces of stories he shared, I believe my husband's mother was raped by his biological Italian father, and he was primarily raised by his aunt and uncle. I now recognize that Tesfaie brought addiction issues into our lives to anesthetize him from the pain of not fully knowing his own past. I did not know how to reason or love addiction out of our lives. My parents and I were estranged during this time, and I felt utterly alone as I navigated life as a new mother, working through the twists and turns in my relationship with Tesfaie, the bureaucracy of teacher certification and trying to find myself.

### **3.10. Acquiescing to capitalism: Becoming a teacher**

It was when I was pregnant with our first daughter, after having worked multiple jobs—cleaning the YMCA at night, cleaning houses during the day, and working as a phone solicitor—that I began to seriously think about what kind of work I would or could do. My formal education at an elite private New England university had contributed to my becoming a Marxist, and I almost joined the Sandanista movement in Nicaragua at one point, but the situational poverty in those first years together with Tesfaie took a toll. I realized I did not want to live the rest of my life scrounging money

to eat and pay rent, nor to raise our baby girl in the abject poverty we experienced. I grew weary of going to church food pantries and government offices to get food stamps. Even though it was situational, I experienced the sufferings and challenges of extreme poverty. However, when Tesfaie told me about life in Ethiopia under a communist regime, my Marxist ideas gradually shifted away from revolutions. We had to pay bills and care for our young baby.

A fellow phone solicitor was taking college classes to get her teaching certification, and she shared that she thought I would be a great teacher. Even though I had loved school as a child and vividly remembered playing school in my childhood, I had later embraced the ideas of Ivan Illich and had deeply thought about how much we need to “unlearn,” recognizing how damaging formal schooling can actually be for many children. By this time in my life, my parents wanted nothing to do with me and let me know their views: “You made your bed; now go lie in it.” That simple phrase made it very clear to me where they stood. I had not followed the path they set out for me and violated several familial and religious taboos, but I was not turning back. Later in life, I profusely thanked them for the courage to cut the umbilical cord and let me figure out life on my terms. Ultimately, I returned to school for my teaching certificate in sociology and English. As most of my childhood friends had become doctors, financial advisors, and lawyers, my parents did not consider my becoming a teacher something to be proud of; teaching was not a profession they hoped I would choose. I ended up loving teaching.

It took me some time to admit that my husband battled addiction issues, which further complicated our lives, and it took even longer for me to recognize that his addiction issues were also mine. Addiction, like whiteness, has built-in denial mechanisms that blind us to reality staring us in the face. Some say “hell” has to do with death; I think hell is living with the chaos and uncertainties connected to addiction. Our baby daughter was the only thing that kept me focused or grounded in any kind of reality because it was a primal need on my part to care for her and do whatever I needed to do to make sure she was protected and had food and shelter.

In the midst of that scenario, I had a kind of spiritual break because I was truly a lost soul: no friends; no family; no support; no money. I was so thin and so alone at that time. I did not know where to turn and as much as I loved Tesfaie, he was not a support at that time because he had his own confusion and issues, being a new immigrant to this country. I could have “repented” and returned home to my parents, but I never saw that as an option. Becoming a teacher at that time in my life, I don’t think I had the capacity to really care for or teach students in a genuinely meaningful way. I was in a strange kind of survival mode.

At first, I taught ESL to immigrants; I began in a private school and then at a non-profit that served immigrants seeking employment. Ultimately, I got a job in the Dallas ISD in a magnet school for high school students who wanted to become educators or social service professionals. Over the course of 27 years I worked in that position, I loved it and flourished as a teacher. Now, I recognize through the lens of a White liberal, that I was deluded to think I was “helping” in the desegregation process by

working in a magnet school. I was ignorant to the fact that magnets also served to erode thriving African American communities and schools by skimming the community's brightest students and enticing them to attend a desegregated school—while also pushing many African American teachers out of the public schools. I acknowledge the intentions of magnets were sincere; however, the unintended consequences were the destruction of thriving African American communities and schools, and I took part in that unraveling process without realizing it. Another perspective could be I participated in supporting students from varying backgrounds to learn to live and thrive and grow together; nonetheless, I have to face the fact that while most magnet schools were “successful,” they also (re)created segregated schools. Regardless, I do know that countless former students, many of whom were first-generation college bound students, have now become successful professionals who work in social service professions.

During the early years of being an educator, I was introduced to Nichiren Buddhism, and my life was ready for both a daily practice and a philosophy that resonated with ideas about life and the universe that I first learned about through the writings and poetry of Thoreau and Emerson. At first, Tesfaie was not happy that I had re-directed my energies away from him and our relationship to Buddhist practice and study, but after about a year, he joined me in practicing Buddhism. Over time, he overcame his addictions, started a successful landscaping business, and we enjoyed life as a rather non-traditional family who often went around the city with our pet parrot, sometimes slept under the stars on a mattress in our backyard, or took walks in the neighborhood with our pet goose. We bought a beautiful new house, and our 2<sup>nd</sup>

daughter, Aileen was born. Tesfaie helped me take such good care of her, and they adored each other. Life was good and everyday was an adventure. Fond memories of those days still sustain me.

### **3.11. Tesfaie's death**

Our rebellious, free spirits were together for eleven years--trying to navigate life as a bi-racial couple in Dallas in the early 1980s and 1990s--until he was shot and killed in front of our young children and me by two Dallas police officers. That moment changed my life forever and I still grapple with the reverberations of it on a soulful level. I now recognize that falling in love with Tesfaie was the highest form of rebellion against my childhood of privilege and the silent pervasive racism that permeated every aspect of my life. For me, as a young Jewish woman, and for him, a young Ethiopian man—both of whom came from ancient cultures that frowned on marrying outside of our “tribes,” we each sought to challenge traditions we viewed as archaic and contrary to shared core beliefs we had developed on our own--about life and love.

At first, the numbness and shock were palpable. I had a very young child to care for, who was barely one, as well as a nine-year-old, who had witnessed the entire event and was traumatized by seeing her father shot and killed in front of us. For the younger one, it was a visceral trauma that she is still coming to come to terms with as she has grown up and understood what happened to her dad. For my older daughter, who loved, adored, feared and respected her dad, this was an unspeakable shock. I could only go through the motions of life, telling myself to pick up one foot and then another to walk from point A to point B. My world had been shattered, and yet, I had young daughters

depending on me for their very survival. Inside my heart, I was a tangled, numb, angry, devastated woman who was not sure how to proceed. Could I ever walk into that house again? How would we survive? I felt absolutely alone in the world to pick up the shattered pieces of my heart and life, even though I had fully reconciled with my family and they had grown to respect and admire both me and Tesfaie.

Tesfaie's murder at the hands of the police was also on the news and in the papers. It was public for all to read about or see, so there was the added humiliation of feeling the looks of judgement and pity on the faces of all who knew me, regardless of how they tried to hide it. I felt it and saw it in their eyes, even though I sought to avert all contact. I wanted to crawl into a hole—a dark hole. But I had children to raise.

How was my spiritual faith the glue that kept me together, as both a parent and a teacher? I had developed a foundational belief that in life and death, people are connected on a very deep level. This Buddhist notion gave me some kind of comfort, even though I had the daily challenges of caring for others in the midst of my own deep suffering, hurt, guilt, anger, and confusion. Since I came to believe in the inseparability of life and death, I made up my mind that I had to be strong and look after our children, thinking of their future rather than wallowing in my grief—as a way to support Tesfaie in death and my children in life.

When I reflect on the series of events, I truly believe he knew he was going to die. On the Sunday afternoon before he died, we went to our Eritrean neighbors' home for a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Tesfaie read coffee grinds at the bottom of cups and after we drank the coffee, he twirled the cup around and looked into it. He said

something in Amharic. After he died, the neighbors told me he had predicted an imminent tragedy, based on what he saw in the coffee grinds in his cup that afternoon. A few weeks before, he brought a crew of workers to our home, and they worked feverishly to paint the entire interior of the house. He worked tirelessly on the garden the summer before he died, and one of our neighbors told me that he put everyone else to shame because our garden looked so beautiful. Knowing how much I love gardenias, he planted a hedge of about 15 gardenia bushes in the front and on the side of our home. His love language was to plant beautiful flowers and cook tasty Ethiopian food.

On the night he died, I was exhausted. It was the perfect storm because I felt so beaten down and frustrated by the nexus of our circumstances. In those days, I got up at 4 am every day to feed the baby, do my spiritual practice, get our girls ready for daycare and school, and prepare our food--leaving the house by 5:45 am. It was not easy to do that day-in and day-out and teach every day, while also volunteering and taking on a leadership role in a world peace organization I supported. On the night he was killed, I felt particularly exhausted and worn out.

Tesfaie had not been home for a night or two. I had grown weary of being a nagging wife asking him where he was. He said he could not sleep and he had been riding his bike around White Rock Lake. I believed him. At the time, I did not think it was drugs or manic depression. I had grown used to his mood swings and the good moods made up for the heaviness of the depression, so I quickly forgave him time and time again. I can admit that I know I was not an easy person with whom to live. I am always full of energy and enthusiasm in the morning, and he was more of a night person;

I imagine that was exhausting for him. I am sure he must have needed time away from me and my passionate and bubbly nature. Nonetheless, our deep love persisted.

The night he died was actually joyful for us. I was in the middle of cooking onions and meat for a spaghetti dinner, which was a family favorite and one of the few I cooked well and on a regular basis at that time; that meal had become our family's comfort food. In the middle of cooking, he came home and insisted I turn the stove off and go outside. He called to Sara and I grabbed our baby, Aileen, and together with his friend, Berekat, we all went outside to admire the beautiful sky and the sunset together. It was one of those breathtakingly beautiful orange, pink, purple Texas sunsets that are part of why so many Texans love Texas; he insisted we all enjoy the sunset together before coming back in the house to eat our spaghetti.

His friend Berekat had worked with him that day, and he had dinner with us. Afterwards, Tesfaie took Berekat home, which always irritated me because I did not fully trust Berekat. Tesfaie always seemed to get into some kind of trouble whenever they were together. And truth be told, I think Berekat insisted they go get some weed. I now feel certain the weed they bought that night was laced with PCP. Did they know that? In the world of illicit drugs, how does anyone know what they're really buying, its purity or potency? I have absolute conviction that Tesfaie deeply loved life, our girls and me. Maybe he was seeking a "new" high with the PCP, or maybe the dealer convinced them to give it a try; I will never know, but I do know that whatever he smoked that night made him 100% psychotic. He became a drug-induced psychotic monster the night he died.

When he called my name and I went into the garage, I remember my exhaustion. I was physically tired and I was emotionally drained from never knowing what to expect. Addiction makes family members crazy; it is definitely a family disease and issue. I was always on edge because I never knew what his mood would be. But I didn't have a choice. I had two kids and I had a job to keep; I had to keep it together. It was very simple and clear to me. I had to keep it together. My kids needed sanity and stability, but over the past several weeks, things had started to degenerate. Always the optimist, I was sure things would improve. He'd quit drinking; he'd see how hard I was struggling. We would work things out. In our happy sober moments, we would talk and laugh about growing old together. We enjoyed being together and had lots of good laughs. But we also had our fights and disagreements. We always wanted to spend more time together, but we only got moments here and there in the hectic rhythm of our lives.

That cold autumn night, when he called for me to come in the garage and said, "you are going to see blood tonight," I knew that he knew something I did not. He had a crazy look in his eyes; there was a wildness I had never ever seen. He had a huge kitchen knife he was holding in the air when he said that, and I was terrified, exhausted and confused. For a minute, I thought I could reason with him, and I said, "If you kill me, they will come get you and you will go to jail. Who will raise our girls then?" I heard myself say those words. Those words were the words that shifted me into a protective mode, and I decided I could not allow him to kill me that night; I called the police and asked for help to get him to a hospital. He was acting crazy.

He had never ever ever acted that way before. After it was all over and I had time to reflect on everything, I realized that he was in the midst of a drug-induced psychosis. He was not grounded in reality the way we know it. He was truly out of his mind. I have no doubt about that when I look back. The toxicology report revealed he had PCP in his system, and based on the psychotic behaviors I witnessed in my husband that night, I saw what PCP does to a person.

Yet, I believe police officers can figure out how to disarm a person with mental health issues or shoot them in the leg; there must be techniques on how to deescalate a volatile situation and not go to the “use of deadly force” default button. That is the part I have always had the hardest time with. Why are cops trained to kill? That is something I just do not get. I do not care how high or deluded he was, he did not have to be shot and killed that night. But he was. He was shot 7 times right in front of me and my girls.

Police officers are trained and feel completely justified to use deadly force when they feel threatened. This, for me, together with a deeply internalized White supremacist ideology, is at the core of the reason why police brutality is a systemic issue. Instead of seeking to protect lives at all costs, police officers are trained to protect themselves at all costs. If they feel threatened, they feel justified to use deadly force.

Only my daily spiritual practice and Soka educational philosophy sustained me to keep myself going as both a mother and teacher. I did not waver; I determined that I would not cave to my sorrow, anger, shame, guilt and hurt. Ikeda’s encouragement on how to approach education served to remind me that as a Soka educator, I must find ways to help students develop their unique potential. And as a broken-hearted mother

and widow, I came to believe that we must push forward and beyond the pain, hurt, shame, and anger and find meaningful ways to live out the rest of our lives. I gradually shifted my suffering to appreciation for the love and joy I had shared with Tesfaie and how much I learned from him. That small but significant shift made all the difference in the world, and I was able to direct my energies again to raising our daughters and being a nurturing and supportive educator, standing on a foundation of Soka educational philosophy and encouragement from the writings of Ikeda.

### **3.12. From my role as a teacher to my role as a student**

Fast-forward several years. I had made complete peace with my parents and we became very, very close. In 2001, after spending a week with them at the beach, they died together in a car accident. I was devastated and shocked. This was two months before September 11 in 2001. Six years later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and went through very aggressive treatment at the insistence of doctors: chemotherapy and a double mastectomy/reconstruction. While part of me felt that my body had betrayed me, I also mustered the fighting spirit of a warrior to battle cancer. The only days I missed work were Friday afternoons for chemo treatments. In addition to losing two friends to breast cancer who were battling it alongside me, I lost all my hair and was quite thin. Ultimately, however, I came to truly appreciate the journey I took with cancer and learned so much more than any book or university could teach me. Again, appreciation saved me and I can now gratefully say I am a cancer survivor.

After spending two nourishing years at Soka University of America, working on my second master's degree, I decided to continue my education and work on a doctorate,

a dream I had deferred for many years for many reasons. I wanted to come back to Texas, so here I am in “Aggie Land.” At first, culture shock set in because of the contrast between College Station and Southern California. But I soon realized that opportunities abound at Texas A&M, and I appreciate the word often used at this campus: fearless. I heard about a program where graduate students could conduct research with undergraduate students, and I attended the informational session. I shared that my research question centers on anti-racism and that I did not have a clear “project” yet. I was planning that the project would emerge based on my work with the students. The professor/ administrator explained that such a concept had never been tried, and that reluctantly, he said I was welcome to give it a try-- the subject of my dissertation’s second paper.

To a great extent, my greatest joy that is part of my doctoral journey now comes from teaching multicultural education classes. As I read my students’ reflection papers, I can see and feel how they are able to grow, learn, challenge and reflect deeply about issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia. It is a joyful process for me, and I recognize that part of my “secret sauce” of teaching for me is that I consider myself to be a Soka educator who approaches education and pedagogy in a unique way that is affirming for students and induces growth on a deep level. I am still trying to articulate exactly what that “secret sauce” is so I can share it with others and they can learn more about what it means to be a Soka educator.

At the core of my life, I am constantly working to fill myself up with appreciation: to my parents and family for their love, education, and foundation; to my

husband—for helping me grow and love in ways I never expected; to my daughters and grandsons—for being my best friends and challenging me in ways only they can do; to my friends who support me in so many ways; to my past—for being the exact path I needed to lead me to my present life. For me, appreciation is the antidote to any hurt, grief, anger, sadness, or lingering bitterness. My past neither defines me, nor determines my future; it is part of who I am. My journey continues.

#### 4. THE EMOTIONAL LABOR OF EXCAVATING INTERNALIZED RACISM: A COLLABORATIVE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE INQUIRY

##### **Synopsis**

This paper reflects the collective efforts of four undergraduates and one doctoral student to de-construct ways racism influenced our identity formation, excavating into the depths of childhood. The core of this collaborative autoethnography was to create a process to explore internalized racism. As a result of developing such a process, the authors recognized common themes in their experiences, in spite of the fact that each comes from a background drastically different than the others. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the stories are presented in such a way to ensure confidentiality, while giving voice to every person's narrative.

"A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind." - Daisaku Ikeda

##### **4.1. Introduction**

It was a hot Texas summer day and during a tour at a local vineyard, our tour guide took us outside for a brief visit under the sweltering sun. The leaves on the grapevines looked shockingly healthy, green and vigorous. Our tour guide explained the rather "cruel" process that included a drip irrigation system, and the use of the word "cruel" captured my attention since growing grapes and cruelty were two ideas rarely used together.

He said the reason grapes are so sweet is because it is with great intentionality that scientists have figured out each adult grape plant needs only one drop of water a day to survive. As the hot sun beat down, it was difficult to take all this in. He further explained that with just one drop of water a day, the plant will put all of its energy into its reproductive process. As a result of the plant's efforts to recreate itself, it puts all of

its life force into the grapes and keeps itself alive on one drop of water a day, even in the extreme heat of Texas.

I was left speechless and wondered if I could ever truly enjoy a savory grape or glass of wine again (I have since worked through that dilemma), but it was soon afterwards that it occurred to me that the vineyard tour guide and the grape plants had taught me some very important life lessons. One of them is that herculean efforts go into ensuring some things are reproduced. In the midst of my own research, I have come to believe that White supremacist ideology is one of the deeply rooted colonial ideas that seeks to reproduce itself at all costs—even if it is cruel, inhumane, and utterly counter to nobler visions of life that include lifting ourselves and others up in meaningful, humane, or spiritual ways.

As educators, readers recognize this principle at work: great energy goes into reproducing ideologies, whether they are affirming and uplifting, or even if they run counter to some of our core beliefs about people or children. We are affected by and infected with these ideologies, and we must engage in de-colonizing our thought processes if we are to be authentically caring and effective teachers. The vineyard tour guide, scientists in agronomy labs, and the grape plants all became our teachers that day. How do these ideas about growing grapes and reproducing White supremacist ideology relate to this co-authored study and to education?

The heart of education lies within teachers and their capacities to deeply honor, cherish, respect, and care for each student. This is no easy task, especially since teachers and students often have vastly different life experiences, cultures, and backgrounds.

Current research (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016) reveals that teachers of even our society's youngest preschool children enter and remain within the teaching profession with unexamined biases and prejudices towards students and their families, which could potentially impact a teacher's capacity to educate and connect with students in meaningful ways. What can be done in preservice teacher education—and beyond into teacher professional development—so that educators can recognize the ways in which their socialization processes have impacted their personal and professional identities, as well as often unconscious attitudes towards students? As people learn about ideas in anti-racism education, facing unexamined, deeply rooted, and internalized racism can be jarring and unsettling, though necessary.

This collaborative study emerged in response to the first author's personal quest to face pervasive hidden inner shadows of internalized racism, while also seeking to find a process for anyone who wants to go on such a journey to uncover, recognize, and acknowledge how racism has impacted our identities and lives. This study is a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry, which combines critical reflections of four undergraduates and one doctoral-level graduate student, each of whom is seeking to understand the ways in which White supremacist racist ideology has influenced our identity development—by examining the kinds of familial social interactions that most impacted us.

With the persistence of racism in our society, it is essential to explore racism within ourselves, and a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry is an appropriate method for this sensitive type of research. Internalized racism can often hide

deep within, and this approach can perceptively uncover it. Current research (Boatright-Horowitz, Marraccini, & Logan, 2012) reveals a significant gap in **how** to uncover internalized racism, indicating that “the effectiveness of various antiprejudice teaching strategies is still in its infancy” (p. 909). This study seeks to extend current knowledge in ways to support people who want to face and overcome racism, especially as it has become internalized, regardless of our cultural backgrounds—by providing an approach that includes self-reflection, journaling, and dialogue. In addition to developing a process to examine internalized racism, this research focuses on what specifically has contributed to racism affecting our identity formation and sense of self.

#### **4.2. Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework for this study combines ideas from critical race theories (CRT) that examine the persistence of systemic racism decades beyond the passage of civil rights legislation that sought to eliminate societal discriminatory practices, together with transformational/relational theories that emphasize the importance of combining inner, reflective self-work with dialogue, which ultimately leads to action. Specifically, ideas and theories of Gloria Anzaldúa and Daisaku Ikeda will be foundational, with the intention being to articulate and clarify how to [metaphorically] dive into deeply muddied internal waters, while also coming up for air periodically to describe that experience and also connect with others who are likewise engaged in such an experience. Ultimately, like lotus flowers that bloom with purity from the muddiest of ponds, we hope to be able to re-frame and re-claim our identities with fresh eyes and perspectives where we can at once recognize, and yet go far beyond,

the internalized ways racism has impacted us to take social action towards creating a more just world.

*Defining ethnocentrism and racism*

The nature of this kind of research requires defining key concepts central to this work. Lugones (2003) provides succinct definitions of both “racism” and “ethnocentrism,” which is linked to racism. In simplest terms, she defines ethnocentrism as “the explicit and arrogantly held action-guiding belief that one’s culture and cultural ways are superior to others” and racism as “one’s affirmation of, acquiescence to, or lack of recognition of the structures and mechanisms of the racial state” (p. 48).

Ultimately, however the work of deconstructing internalized ethnocentric racism, according to Lugones (2003), is connected to how one positions oneself in the work, recognizing that acknowledging positionality helps to “unravel the connections between racism, ethnocentrism, White/Anglo self-esteem, polite arrogance, polite condescension, and a troubled sense of responsibility in the face of people of color” (p. 51). According to Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012), who focus on decolonizing knowledge and epistemic ide through colonization, “racism, in the final analysis, rests on the control of knowledge/understanding and subjectivity” (p. 56). Since racism is so tightly linked to subjectivity, our research can claim even more potency. How can we define or explain ways to challenge ethnocentrism or racism, which is called “anti-racism education?” And why call it “anti-racism” education?

A central focus of our collaborative efforts seeks to “incorporate strategies that interrogate hegemonic understandings concerning race” (Picower, 2009, p. 213), which

is necessary if racism is to be challenged and dismantled in our country—beginning within ourselves. This work is both phenomenological and inquiry-based because “a phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the essence or nature of a particular lived experience” (Martinez, 2015, p. 767), precisely what we sought to accomplish through our collaborative efforts. An urgent and earnest need exists for this kind of study because “racism has visited suffering upon both its victims and upon those who must now bear the responsibility for the ‘sins of the past’” (Carson & Johnston, 2000, p. 81). Denying the ways that racism has impacted us all only serves to exacerbate the problem; facing it within is crucial. How could we begin?

### **4.3. Research questions**

After agreeing that we wanted to explore ways to tackle racism, we decided to start within ourselves. Ultimately, we agreed to focus our research on these queries:

1. What process can be developed and/or refined to examine the ways that racism impacts our racial/cultural identity development?
2. What common threads emerge when diverse people from varying backgrounds embark on a self-study to examine ways that internalized racism has impacted their (people’s) lives?
3. What is involved in rupturing the negative implications of internalized racism, while also salving and healing within--forging a wider consciousness and broader heart?

The five of us as authors conducting this project journaled independently and met regularly to reflect on and refine the process, as well as to selectively share what was

surfacing in our writing. Both reflective journaling and dialoging were essential; this is because “race reflection is an inquiry-based process, an intellectual activity that is sometimes a consequence of social dynamics—those experiences in society that shape our thinking and thus our reality” (Milner, 2003, p. 175), which oftentimes need to be worked through together with others. The inquiry process occurs both in quiet reflection and through dialogue, so that the researchers can learn and grow from insights into their own experiences, as well as from each other’s reflections.

#### **4.4. Literature Review**

##### *Anti-racism education*

Anti-racism/anti-oppression education includes using education to develop a level of consciousness about the systemic power struggles in society, while also seeking solutions and ways to take action to change such systemic and structural inequities. This is what distinguishes anti-racism/oppression education from other fields. In a book on anti-racist methodology, Dei (2005) explains: “we operationalize *anti-racist research* as research on racial domination and social oppression, and proceed with an objective of providing local subjects with an opportunity to speak about their experiences within the broader contexts of structural and institutional forces of society” (p. 11). Dei insists on the necessity of collaboration in anti-racism work. DiAngelo (2012) helps us further understand the lifelong labor of this work, when she writes:

racism cannot be overcome through good intentions or wishful thinking, or by personal self-image. We actually have to be willing to *change*. This requires great humility—a willingness to *not know* in the face of often-intense emotions, which is life-long and ongoing work. (p. 296)

DiAngelo (2012) further articulates that we are either passive racists, passive anti-racists, active racists, or active anti-racists. While these labels may shift and continue to shift on this self-reflective journey, they are helpful for us to reflect on as we do this work.

Again, it is important to clarify why use the term “anti-racism” or “anti-racist.”

The clearest explanation is from Frye (1983), and her quote below suggests the reason the terms “anti-racist/antiracism” are apropos. She states that

as a white person one must never claim not to be a racist, but only to be anti-racist. The reasoning is that racism is so systematic and white privilege so impossible to escape, that one is, simply, trapped. On one level this is perfectly true and must always be taken into account. Taken as the whole and final truth, it is also unbearably and dangerously dismal. It would place us in the hopeless moral position of one who believes in original sin but in no mechanism of redemption. But white supremacy is *not* a law of nature, nor is any individual’s complicity in it. (p. 126)

Precisely since we are either complicit in maintaining or challenging societal structures that allow White supremacist ideologies to flourish, we have a responsibility to claim our agency and face racism and all the ways it has impacted us and others—especially as educators.

A seminal work in anti-racism education, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), looks at the link between Derrick Bell’s ideas from Critical Legal Studies in law and applies them to education—linking ways that property rights serve as a funding mechanism in education and causes educational inequities based on endemic, structural racism. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) further propose “a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms” (p. 59) brought about through a “multicultural paradigm.” Similarly, Solorzano and Bernal (2001) address these very notions from the perspective of the Latinx community, stating

that “transformational resistance framed within the tenets of a CRT and LatCrit framework allows one to look at resistance among Students of Color that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (p 320). This research draws from ideas central to CRT and LatCrit theories, with an eye towards questioning how to push towards more significant changes—within ourselves and in society.

### *Disruptive pedagogies*

Current trends and examples of anti-racism education today fall into two main categories: 1) using counter-storytelling by people of color to challenge the Euro-dominant narrative and 2) introducing disruptive pedagogies that seek to challenge ways that racism is approached in classrooms. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain the purpose and power of counter-storytelling, saying “stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism.” (p. 21). Delpit (1988) suggests that educators teach students “the explicit and implicit rules of power” (p. 280), in order to dismantle racism. hooks (2003), who addresses the intersectionality of racism and feminism, writes about a “pedagogy of hope,” and she acknowledges that in her work, she sees “denial that leads many unenlightened white people, as well as people of color, to pretend that racist and white-supremacist thought and action are no longer pervasive in our culture” (p. 25). The challenge in anti-racism education and research today is how to break down those thick walls of deeply embedded persistent denial and confront internalized White supremacist ideology, which is a pervasive aspect of the American socialization process.

The question then arises about where and how anti-racism work can occur within the realm of education. Three philosopher/theorists from differing backgrounds provide substantive insights as to how we can challenge racism: Gloria Anzaldúa, Paulo Freire, and Daisaku Ikeda. Anzaldúa (1987), a Chicana feminist writer, echoes the notion that education and a shift in one's consciousness are key, writing that

the struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation comes before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our head. (p. 109)

This perspective on social change provides a Copernican-like shift in how we see and understand our world. The solution for social ills, such as racism, according to Anzaldúa, then, can only begin within our own hearts and minds and nowhere else. No one can do this work for anyone else; it is a very private and personal journey though others may be with us along the way.

Anti-racism/oppression education, then, seeks to 1) bring awareness to the consciousness about the nature of the racial or economic oppression so the internal work can be done; 2) support learners/students to claim agency to act; and 3) create spaces to make changes based on a new consciousness and understanding of the nature of the oppression. Again, how and where? Dialogue is a key component, in order to recognize “how certain social scripts come to be read and performed as normal, how they are challenged and how they are developed or replaced through time” (Meghji, 2017, p. 1010). The idea of “social scripts” from positioning theory explains why dialogues are

so important in the research process of exploring what those social scripts are, where we develop them, and how we can change them.

*Mutuality through dialogue*

Freire (1970/2012), a Brazilian philosopher and educator, emphasizes the importance of dialogue when he writes that “founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (p. 91). This collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry is based on just such a dialogical horizontal relationship that emerges, based on a shared inquiry. Additionally, two other writers and philosophers who emphasize dialogue are Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber. Friedman (2001) makes it clear that Bakhtin had studied Buber and that “Bakhtin, like Buber, was concerned with methodology for the human sciences, and like Buber too he found that methodology in the dialogical” (p. 32). Honoring dialogical knowing, then, which acknowledges the role of dialogue in epistemology, is the heart and a core principle of this research and approach to facing and challenging racism embedded within ourselves.

Further, Freire (1970/2012) emphasizes that dialogue in education is essential and he insists that it is grounded in love, saying that “love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical” (p. 89). Unapologetically, Freire recognizes the links between love, dialogue, education, knowledge, and transformation. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2012), Freire’s most famous work, a pedagogy of liberation based on dialogic problem-posing grounded

in love is not sufficient—without action. The term he uses often, *praxis*, suggests that theory is not enough without action, saying “human activity consists of action and reflection; it is praxis; it is transformation of the world” (Freire, 1970/2012, p. 125).

These key Freirian concepts of a liberating/transformational approach to education through dialogue, critical self-reflection, problem-posing, and praxis--from a place of love--are central to the epistemological and conceptual framework for this research. Another central point in this study includes how power is collapsed in relationships by recognizing teachers-as-students and students-as-teachers, which is also key in Freire’s ideas and recognizes each participant equally as an “I” and “Thou” (Buber, 1958).

#### *Linking societal change to inner transformation*

The notions of love, knowledge, dialogue, and transformation also emerge in the writings of two disparate writers: Gloria Anzaldúa and Daisaku Ikeda. It is through considering dialogues and the nature of power that the Anzaldúan concepts of “*Neplantera*,” “spiritual activism,” and “*El Mundo Zurdo*” (“The Left-handed World”) emerge as foundational to this work. Ikeda, a Japanese Buddhist philosopher and writer, and Anzaldúa, a Chicana lesbian feminist, share identical beliefs that inner transformations are connected to societal changes. In her essay “*La Prieta*,” (“The Black Girl”), Anzaldúa (2009) writes

that by changing ourselves we change the world, that traveling *El Mundo Zurdo* path is the path of a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society. (p. 49)

However, Anzaldúa grapples with the ways an inner transformation links to societal changes.

Similarly, Ikeda (2010/2013) says that what is needed is “the reformation of the inner life, its expansion toward and merger with the ‘greater self’ of wisdom, compassion and courage. It is my firm conviction that a fundamental revolution in the life of a single individual can give rise to the kind of consciousness and solidarity that will free humanity from its millennial cycles of warfare and violence” (p. 239). For Anzaldúa and Ikeda, the quintessential struggle is within, and there is no doubt that societal changes are intertwined with spiritual changes first.

A critical concept that Anzaldúa and Ikeda also share that is central to our research is what Anzaldúa refers to as “spiritual activism,” which AnaLouise Keating (2006) explains is “spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (p. 11). Similarly, Ikeda (2010/2013) refers to the poet John Donne’s famous words that “no man is an island entire of itself” to explain

the Buddhist view of dependent origination: All human beings are connected to one another. Thus, encouraging another person through dialogue also serves to encourage yourself. Likewise, to awaken another is to awaken yourself. To pay respect to another is the same as respecting yourself. The self and other are ultimately inseparable. (p. 217)

The Buddhist idea of “dependent origination,” mirrors Anzaldúa’s “spiritual activism,” and Anzaldúa’s “*El Mundo Zurdo*” echoes the Buddhist notion of a “human revolution.” All of these concepts are foundational in this work. In what kind of spaces can such shifts occur? It is within spaces at the edge--in the margins, since internal and external oppression reside in static, rigid structures; changes can only occur within cracks that allow for potential shifts. Lugones (2003) makes this very point, saying that

all oppressive control is violent because it attempts to erase selves that we are that are dangerous to the maintenance of domination over us. But one may also inhabit the limen, the place in between realities, a gap ‘between and betwixt’ universes of sense that construe social life and persons differently, an interstice from where one can most clearly stand critically toward different structures. (p. 61)

Such liminal places of “between and betwixt” are neither here nor there, yet bounded by both, and it is in such liminal spaces—such cracks in rigid structures—that deep, internal shifts occur.

Anzaldúa (1987) calls such a space “Nepantla, which is a Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds....it is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that Nepantla because you are in the midst of transformation” (p. 276). For such a “space” to exist and be held for people to be together that simultaneously maintains boundaries, while also allowing permeability of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, trust must develop through honest and open dialogues. This takes time, as well as deep reflection, and the difficult task of entering *Nepantla* means “confronting the dominant ways/thinking that we have internalized—ways and perspectives that we are so unaware of but must consciously identify and name” (Koshy, 2006, p. 154). The essence of this research, then, can be seen as a journey into the world of *Nepantla* that was consciously sought out by the participants who chose to explore unexamined aspects of ourselves. This voyage seeks to uncover how we have been impacted by racism, in order to liberate and extricate ourselves from a troubling aspect of our socialization we viscerally and intuitively felt the need to face and overcome. According to Anzaldúa (2009), “nepantla is the only space where change happens” (p. 156). It is precisely this kind of work that allows the researcher to enter an inner world

of *Nepantla* where “we let go of control and are able to sit with ambiguity and contradiction” (DiAngelo, 2012, p. 296), which is *Nepantla*.

This state of *Nepantla*, or “in-betweenness,” often causes tremendous emotional and/or psychological duress and dissonance, which is why the term “emotional labor” is key to our research. Much of the work around emotional labor originally comes from the field of organizational psychology (Becker, Cropanzano, Wagoner, & Keplinger, 2018; Fineman, 1993; Hochschild, 1993); yet educators have also begun to study the role of emotional labor in teaching (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Lee, Chelladurai, & Kang, 2018; Steinberg, 2013). According to Hochschild (1993), “emotional labour includes knowing about, and assessing as well as managing emotions, other people’s as well as one’s own” (p. x), and Fineman (2000) further suggests that “emotional labour leads to the co-presence of positive and negative feelings” (p. 213). This requires work.

While Steinberg (2015) extends ideas of emotional labor to include the component of teachers’ agency, she differentiates between emotional labor and “emotional rules as the implicit, socially constructed expectations of how emotions can be expressed, given and received in social encounters” (p. 430). In our work, we sought to explore, question, and deconstruct those emotional rules.

Kelchtermans openly and unapologetically recognizes the ontological component of teaching and the emotional work involved for teachers to be fully present, and even vulnerable with students. In essence, Kelchtermans (2005) suggests “vulnerability is not only a condition to be endured, but also to be acknowledged, cherished, and *embraced*” (p. 999). For an educator, vulnerability allows for a fuller and deeper authenticity and

broader humanity within the teacher-student relationship, or in the case of this research, in the relationships between researchers/ participants. Kelchtermans (2005) recognizes that “teachers’ emotional practices therefore deserve further critical conceptually sound and methodologically rigorous attention from researchers” (p. 1005). This collaborative autoethnographic narrative inquiry advances his call for further research on precisely these kinds of “emotional practices” linked to vulnerability.

While many scholars study the nuanced distinctions between “emotional work” and “emotional labour,” this research focuses primarily on the inordinate amount of intimate emotional work and raw vulnerability that freed us to examine how racism has impacted our development. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) recognize the urgency of “the need for examining the relationship between caring and emotional labour” (p. 124) specifically within teaching, and this research contributes to understanding a process in which educators may safely engage in just that kind of important work in order to authentically care for students.

#### **4.5. Research method**

##### *Collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry*

This research is a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry—combining collaborative auto-ethnography with narrative inquiry. It is almost like splitting hairs to distinguish how they differ. This is because in narrative inquiry

each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives. Narrative inquiry is marked by its emphasis on relational engagement, whereby the understanding and social significance of experience grows out of a relational commitment to a research puzzle. (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 577)

According to this definition, this study is clearly a collaborative narrative inquiry, with the relational focus being on the impact of race on our socialization. Undoubtedly, the research method for this study is clearly qualitative and broadly under the umbrella of narrative inquiry, primarily since it is based on the stories and memories of the participants that have emerged through reflections and dialogues.

In general, narrative inquiry traces back to the ideas of Dewey (1897), who proclaimed in Article II of “My Pedagogic Creed” that “education, therefore is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.” This phrase Dewey proclaimed demarked a shift in education away from solely a cognitive focus to a broader view of the very purpose of education in children’s lives. As scholars and educators embraced this perspective, many felt the need for a fresh approach to methodology in educational research. Eisner (1988) recognized that “method influences how we think and what we are permitted to feel” (p. 19). This point by Eisner is quintessential, since the research in this article expands possibilities for the researchers, in terms of thinking about and considering feelings towards our socialization and racial identity formation—a cultural aspect of our being that is difficult to face and address.

Again, this research cannot be easily categorized, and some scholars might consider it a collaborative self-study, a personal narrative, or an auto-ethnography. However, Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) provide clear guidelines that distinguish how these methodologies are alike and different. Based on the ways they distinguish nuanced differences in methodologies, it seems this research is also a collaborative auto-ethnography because it focuses on racism. I would like to suggest,

however, that this is a “collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry” because we collaboratively researched our narratives; this was the research process we utilized.

### *A blurred genre*

As a research method, a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry might be what Geertz considers a “blurred genre,” since “the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities had become blurred” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 15) over time. Since this is a form of qualitative research, it includes data much like other qualitative studies, including journaling, photographs, family artifacts, family stories, letters, autobiographical writing, and conversations (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The difference in this narrative is that individual persons become the sources of inquiry, rather than a research participant or someone else. Another key distinction is that even though it is an inward process, ethnography and narrative inquiry are different.

Through auto-ethnography, writer-researchers “eschew the conventions of disinterested and impartial analysis, choosing instead to point their inquiries toward ‘acts of meaning’ associated with the lived processes of creating and managing identity, making sense of lived experiences, and communicating it to others.” (Pensoneau-Conway, Adams, & Bolen, 2017, p. vii). Personal narrative, within narrative inquiry, is slightly different in that “the professional identity and knowledge of the researcher is revealed in the narratives and explored by those in the inquiry” (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 19). It is important to acknowledge that autoethnography is a methodological approach that has a long history of focusing intently on the impact of

marginalization within a hegemonic system, which is why it is important to include this term in naming our inquiry.

The primary methods used to conduct a robust analysis using autoethnography are called by a wide range of names that all seek to support researchers in connecting their personal stories to wider racial and social contexts, such as: self-study, S-STEP (Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices), race reflective journaling, reflective writing, narrative self-study, and self-study narrative (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Milner, 2003, 2007; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). However, in addition to self-reflection that may include various genres, such as journals, memories, or photos, the main aspect of methodology that is unique about auto-ethnography is “the intentional attention to cultural elements and disruptions and insights into cultural understandings” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015, p. 92). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) emphasize that “the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). By calling this work a “collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry”, then, race is brought to the foreground, and since this research involves a group of students who are choosing to take on the formidable challenge of doing this inquiry-based research together--centering on the ways racism has impacted our socialization and identity formation, it seems fit to call it a collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry.

### *Process and participants*

What exactly was the methodological process of this research? The beginning stages of the research consisted of introductions of the participants. This included

background, aspects of childhood and family settings, and any anecdotes or qualities regarding socializing histories we felt shaped or affected us in a specific way. Towards the end of these introductory activities, the group determined 1-3 questions that each participant reflected on during the week and journaled about to explore our own socialization process and circumstances that shaped us throughout our lives. When the research group met at the following meeting, everyone chose to share what emerged in our thoughts and writings/journal entries. The group considered if there were any similarities or differences between circumstances and processes in each other's reflections. Notes were taken about these similarities and differences, so that we could further explore similar issues as the meetings continued and increasingly go into more detailed information.

Of the five participants in our shared research project, three of them had grown up with close ties to immigrant or marginalized communities and they strongly identified as "hyphenated" Americans--signifying equally deep connections with their countries or cultures of origin, as well as to their American identity; two participants were bilingual, as well as bicultural. The other two participants had ancestors who immigrated to the US in the past, but they no longer maintained cultural or linguistic ties to those groups and they fully identified as White Americans.

The research group collaborative occurred in a face-to-face setting in a weekly or bi-weekly time frame. The individual participant's journaling happened at each person's own pace; however, all were encouraged to complete the self-reflective study throughout the week. At no time in this process was anyone required to journal or to share. Beyond

the weekly discussions, the group chose 5-10 questions and selected journal entries we felt comfortable to place onto a shared document. Data were analyzed, in order to highlight the patterns or themes that emerged.

This study consists of two parts. The first aspect is about the **process** to uncover effective techniques to examine, unpack, and dismantle racist ideology within ourselves. Since “taking action is the ultimate piece of anti-oppressive education” (Summer, 2014, p. 197), we believe this moment in history demands such purposeful action to address racism. The second section focuses on our findings that emerged from participating in such a process.

Conventionally, the next section of studies such as our own would be the presentations of our different stories of life. However, due to the sensitive nature of our topic and our vulnerability as family members and professionals, we have merged our narratives so that our individual voices and stories are present but are not identifiable or traceable to any one of us.

#### **4.6. Data: A bricolage of stories**

Here, we present a bricolage of collective thoughts and reflections which the reader can liken to an impressionist painting whose colors merge into each other naturally. The entirety of this project, except for the personal journaling and this final piece of writing, has been dialogical and collaborative. Each storied memory serves to illustrate the kinds of intimate social interactions that, upon reflection, perpetuated discriminatory, prejudicial, and/or racist mindsets within our families. We wanted to share the process, our stories and this journey with others, since it had such a profound

effect on us. While it has been well documented by many scholars (Bonnett, 2000; Feagin, 2014; Omi & Winant, 2015) that racism is prevalent, ongoing, and systemic, we wanted to explore its impact on us that had remained unexamined, but deeply felt. We feel a responsibility to honor, respect, and tenderly share our stories, while ensuring that no individual can be identified.

Each word and sentence in this section came from one of the collaborators, but it is with great intentionality that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to ever know who said exactly what sentence or uttered which phrase—except for the person who said it. It is a humbling responsibility to share others’ stories, and this attempt to make public very private thoughts about how racism has impacted us **must** honor each person and their parents and siblings. Why?

First, this research makes it extremely clear that racist ideas come first and foremost from those with whom we are most intimate: our families. For those of us who participated in this research and dug deep within ourselves to explore the impact racism has played on our identities, this is very clear. While teachers and others in our lives may also influence us, our families have had the most impact. And yet, for most of us, our families are also those very people we love and cherish because of their tremendous struggles, care, love, and concern for us. While (most) families are also fraught with contested relationships embedded with complex and tangled conflicting emotions, a universally-held belief is to appreciate, honor, and respect our family members. This is precisely the conundrum we faced: how to collaboratively and collectively share our journey and our stories, while remaining respectful and having appreciative hearts for

our families. To protect each author's identity, this approach to share the storied data provides a level of anonymity—to show respect for each person and their families' lives.

Second, this process of excavating our memories deeper and deeper to uncover how racism has impacted us has been grueling and emotionally painful. Memories that had been tucked away far from our consciousness were brought out (even if only for a bit), questioned, deconstructed, and explored. We sat with painful memories and we stayed with each other as we mustered the courage to share them, but the cathartic experience of facing and acknowledging racism's impact on us served to give us the surprise gift of forgiving ourselves and those in our families. None of us want to show our family members in a negative light, so by writing a piece in a collective voice, we feel that no one's family or family member will be singled out.

Third, while each of us spent time pondering, writing about, and discussing the painful and pervasive topic of racism rarely discussed openly, we were regularly shocked to see that our journal entries were often almost identical. In other words, individually, we all reached very similar conclusions about how racism impacted us. It is for this reason, that the data consists of snippets of everyone's thoughts and recollections, without identifying who said what.

Lastly, while this has been a journey that reflects our struggles, we feel this is everyone's journey and struggle. Stories have kernels of universality to them, and the stories we are telling of our shared findings similarly, we believe, have been experienced by many others. The deepest root of our collective underbelly is rife with hidden notions that are based on separation, othering, prejudice, and discrimination, which taints and

affects us all. Each of us may or may not focus on the color of someone's skin, but most people who meet you will use that as the first thing to base their assumptions of your inner being on. And much like Thoreau or Emerson's ideas of the divine spirit within us all, we suggest that the tendency to judge, criticize, or separate ourselves from others is also within each of us.

This paper dismantles, shines a light on, deconstructs, and acknowledges the hidden roots of racism; we have chosen to face those inner forces so they no longer have power over us. This journey has been liberatory, and as a group, we would like to present our field texts around three key findings: 1) ways in which racism is passed down through families; 2) the impact of whiteness on our sense of self; and 3) the painful and healing aspects of the process to face racism within ourselves. We have chosen to organize our storied data around findings because we have elected—for reasons of confidentiality—to not present individual narratives of experience. As an aside, we also provide details about the process we refined, with suggestions for how it could be used others in other settings.

#### *The “family effect”*

A key understanding that emerged from our research was that families play a central role in reproducing racism. Intertwined with the (not so) subtle role of families passing down racist ideologies, we found that whiteness impacted our identities from very early stages of our development and in differing ways. Our identities were impacted depending if we saw ourselves as a White American, or if we felt in any way judged, othered, or discriminated against because of our skin color, hair, or other facial

features that suggested we are ethnically ambiguous and clearly not White. Again, ideas of being different from others or seeing others as different from us first emerged within our own homes and families, with regards to some aspect of our physical being—whether it was the color of our skin, facial features, or the texture of our hair; and most often, these ideas came from our mothers. The further we were from the Euro-dominant porcelain white skin, light eyes, and light hair, the more we faced internal struggles.

This finding about the power of the “family effect” (or “parent effect”) corroborates other scholar’s findings around the role parents play in their children’s academic lives. While education policymakers and scholars heatedly debate how resources can best be allocated in education (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Hanushek, 2016), most scholars do agree on one point: they recognize a direct correlation between students’ motivation and achievement and the ways that parents influence, impact, or are involved in their children’s education (Fisher & Kostelitz, 2015; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Robih, Suratman & Soesatyo, 2017). We have even seen the parent/family effect when it comes to why undergraduate or graduate students choose to pursue STEM careers (Craig, Verma, Stokes, Evans & Abrol, 2018) or when Terence Nance (artist who created HBO’s *Random Acts of Flyness*) expressed his path to becoming an artist based on his parents-as-artists’ influence in an interview with Audie Cornish on July 29, 2018.

These examples reflect the universal adage of “an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” Our research reflects the veracity of this aphorism with regards to how racism is generationally passed down, and an analysis of the data showed that for all of us, the

thoughts and reflections about race we found as we dug through our journals and dialogues emerged in our earliest memories within our families. The work by Elton-Chalcraft (2009) corroborates our finding that racism is learned very early within one's family unit. A disturbing and notable finding linked to this is that for each of us, families explicitly and specifically made negative comments about African Americans, in addition to more generalized negative comments about people different from their cultures. The findings presented throughout the paper are in italics, and while each thought may not reflect every person's views, the visual bricolage represents views expressed by at least two group members.

#### *Being judged and judging*

*I grew up hearing derogatory words about people different from us. My family was different from them, and it seemed that they needed to compare me or us to others. I believe we have a natural tendency to compare ourselves with others. In order to make ourselves feel better, we unconsciously and wrongfully degrade groups different from us. I know I was definitely taught that my family's culture was superior to that of others whenever my parents talked badly about other people and their cultures in our own language. In a way, these comments made me feel better in that we were the special ones. I knew we were trying to fit in and be accepted by people who would never fully accept us, and at the same time, we judged them and their culture.*

*I remember my first crush and my mom's reaction to it. It was on a dark-skinned boy in my kindergarten class whom my mother made seem ugly, calling him all kinds of names. I thought to myself color was an odd thing to notice and it had nothing to do*

*with how attracted I felt. Regardless, she insisted I like someone else. That was the first time I realized color mattered to my family.*

*I'll never forget my best buddies in kindergarten who were African Americans. My face still lights up when I talk about them; I'll always remember that chaotic Christmas morning when my grandfather questioned my mom about my having African American friends and how we abruptly left. I have had to admit that his racist comments pained me. I still miss those friends.*

*My parents used stereotypes to describe people different from us—lumping everyone from a group together. They had specific words in another language to describe people who were different from us. There was a price to this because many times those stereotypes hurt my relationships with people close to me—directly or indirectly. My mom would warn me about hanging out with certain types of people, and she made it clear that anything against her cultural beliefs were viewed as negative. She said I could not marry certain people because she held onto stereotypes and she planted those ideas in me. She is very traditional, so anything against her cultural beliefs was viewed as negative; the look in her eyes made me know she meant business.*

The common thread in our narratives was clearly our parents' efforts to solidify and maintain fidelity to our cultures or the group with whom our family most identified. This was an attempt at cultural preservation in the midst of great pressure outside of the family to become socialized as Americans. For all of us, however, this centripetal force and pressure to honor and maintain our own ethnic connections simultaneously included a repelling pressure and force to distance ourselves from those our families deemed as

“others” or some kind of threat to our cultural identity and long-term sustainability to maintain our cultural heritage. We viscerally felt this from a young age, and it was through our reflections and discussions that we began to recognize and articulate these excavated memories we had each experienced.

*You kind of feel a little ashamed*

*I clearly remember my mom and other family members telling me to be careful and not spend too much time in the sun. They'd say, 'You don't want to get darker than you already are.' I had never thought deeply about that simple phrase I often heard in my home--until now. I wondered why they didn't want my skin to get darker. Growing up few, if any, women looked like me. On TV shows, they mostly had lighter complexions, light-colored eyes, and light-colored hair. If there were women who were not like that, they were usually the much older actresses or unattractive maids. Or, on the complete opposite side of the spectrum, they were the exotic, darker-skinned oversexualized, home-wrecking lovers. Overall, women who didn't fit that whitewashed version of beauty were unwanted by American society (except those with perfect bodies ideal for sex).*

The realization at an early age that a White Euro-dominant ideal of beauty was the American standard pained those of us who knew very early on that such a standard of beauty was forever elusive and an unattainable standard for us. We admitted this and shared ways this realization impacted our sense of self-esteem and self-worth. We also challenged ourselves to face how the media impacted us all from a young age. On many levels our inner beings had been colonized into believing a sense of what was beautiful,

and yet, we knew we would never be seen that way. Our process of questioning, journaling, and dialoging helped us de-colonize our ways of seeing ourselves.

*I can clearly remember the first time I saw someone who had features like mine on TV. I had finally found someone I could see myself in--someone I could relate to in a positive way. She (or the artists who created her) had found a way to be beautiful with those very features of mine that I saw in a negative way. However, after that show was over, I was back to a sea of whiteness. Over the years, seeing all those blonde, blue-eyed beauties all the time made me want to be like them. I began to internalize those images as I started to form my own self-image. But I knew I could never compare. As I got older, I minimized my time in the sun and looked for natural ways to lighten my hair and my skin. I was able to have cosmetic surgery after an accident to fix some of my facial features so I could hide part of my ancient people that showed up on my face. I always had the impression, from my parents as well as other sources, that light eyes, hair, and skin were the ideal features of beauty. You really want to love your family and put them high on a pedestal, but when you go back and look at how they grew up and realize how they socialized you, you kind of feel a little ashamed.*

A painful question lingering unanswered was why our parents, and especially our mothers, had not explicitly and intentionally taught us to love and cherish ourselves exactly as we were. Seeking to release any blame, we recognized that this was our task now; we had to give ourselves the kind of love, acceptance, and affirmation we lacked on a deep level.

*Racist ideas planted early on*

In addition to the finding that our racialized identities first formed within our families is our finding that this occurred by the age of 7. Without a doubt, what our family members said and did strongly influenced how we developed our sense of identity and thoughts about others different from us, and this happened very early in our development. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Drs. Mamie and Kenneth Clark, who developed a “doll test” in the late 1930s to study “race and self-awareness in children,” (Markowitz & Rosner, 1996, p. 90), which ultimately contributed to the US Supreme Court decision to strike down the Brown v. Board of Education ruling and legally ended segregated schools in the United States.

*I was taught very, very early that it was okay—even encouraged—to make fun of and laugh at people different from me. So, I guess at age 7, my racial identity had been established. Because I was taught on the one hand to “love all God’s people,” I confused religion, race, and natural curiosity and innocence. I was left profoundly befuddled but it ultimately caused me to ask more and more questions as I grew. My confusion pushed me to seek deeper answers. I felt utterly confused about race as a child. After I found out my family’s immigrant status and heard our family’s story (at the age of 7), I struggled with this idea of identity. I sang songs about being proud to be an American (“Proud to be an American”) and came home to eat my family’s ethnic food. I identified with both my culture AND the American culture. I had a sense of racialized identity at a very young age.*

*My family would normally avoid certain sections of our town, not on purpose or by anger, but because we simply never went to that area of town unless it was the area's major flea market or festival. My family allowed me to have friends of all types, but they were quick to tell me if they thought a child did not meet their standards. They then proceeded to tell me to be a good girl and act better than that. My grandfather was far less accepting, and as I grew up, my grandmother began to act and speak similarly of people different from us, children specifically, and how they behave in her store. I see how the younger I was, the more words impacted me without realizing it and that even now, it is hard to change that thought process.*

Again, our memories from excavating our childhoods showed us that by age 7, we had already clearly understood distinctions between people, and (un)knowingly, our parents had planted seeds in our hearts that taught us to see others different from us in a negative light. This realization was very difficult for us to admit to ourselves and each other.

#### *How whiteness impacted us*

Whiteness is a term often used in scholarship to describe how White supremacist ideology is at the root of racism. One of the earliest scholars who introduced this idea was W.E.B. Du Bois, who recognized that the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans such as himself, had the gift of having a double consciousness, which allowed him the clarity and insight to understand his people and their culture and values, as well as that of the Whites who oppressed them for centuries. Du Bois (1903/1989) describes it this way:

It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 5)

Whiteness, then, in the Euro-dominated Western world, has served as the ever-present yardstick against whom all others are measured. Much like a computer's operating system that invisibly supports the computer's ability to function or English grammar that is forever present but invisible, whiteness is the term for the ways that White supremacist ideology seeks to ensure that the core values, beliefs, and ideology of the putative superiority of Whites is maintained.

Morris (2015), who has written extensively about W. E. B. Du Bois, explains that Du Bois "was the first sociologist to develop the foundation of what has become the social constructionist approach to race....and 'whiteness' was invented precisely for the purpose of bestowing economic and political privileges on those with white skins" (p. 219). Blair (2008) further explains that whiteness, "like 'patriarchy' is an organizing principle which maintains the power or access to power and privilege of White people but not necessarily deliberate or the result of the conscious actions of individual White people. Indeed, most of us, regardless of colour, ethnicity or belief are implicated in the perpetuation of 'whiteness'" (p. 249). Matias (2016) elaborates further and asserts that "whiteness is so actively repressed that it becomes a subconscious and latent aggressive act of enforcing racial superiority" (p. 87). Our research sought to examine racism and bring to our conscious level how whiteness has influenced our beings and sense of self.

As scholars, it is difficult and elusive to describe clearly and succinctly such a pervasive, yet abstract concept such as whiteness. Cuomo and Hall (1999) suggest that it is “because of its foundational role in justifying and maintaining racism and colonialism in the United States (and now most of the world), whiteness is uniquely located on the racial map” (p. 3); further, whiteness has been socially constructed and reproduced in order to maintain racial dominance. The question remains: how does racist ideology reproduce itself and what can be done to challenge it? This is the core of our research.

In *Racist America*, Feagin (2014) connects whiteness to a “White racial frame” as the lens of whiteness and sees it as a

strong framing that has had a very positive orientation to whites and whiteness and negative orientation to the racial ‘others’ who are oppressed (p. 26); at the center of the dominant white frame is a pro-white subframe accenting white privilege and power, as well as a certain arrogance and certainty of racial judgement. (p. 28)

This White racial frame has served to justify blindness for those who do not question it. Again, the work to face and dismantle whiteness and racism is critical.

#### *Whiteness and feelings of inadequacy*

As with all people, the impact of whiteness was different for those in our group, based on each participant’s life experiences; however, what clearly emerged for those who are from groups marginalized in US society was a strong sense of deeply rooted feelings of inadequacy. Ideas about color-blindness were expressed more by those who identify as Whites or have most benefited from whiteness and its privileges. What emerged from our excavations about the ways that whiteness impacts us, as women of different ages and from different cultures?

*I felt like an outsider. Like I was trying to be something I could never become. My attempts were never sufficient and thus, I was never sufficient for American society. At least that's what I used to think. Now, I've stopped trying. But I still feel like an outsider. Racism has impacted my self-esteem, self-image and confidence. While I used to attribute it to bullying and media propaganda, I realize now that colorism and other negative factors are all intertwined.*

*At very young ages, we were given the impossible task to become our mothers' versions of the ideal beauty—to resemble porcelain white dolls who are held as the paragons of beauty, with the sense that everyone else is judged based on how they stack up against this socially constructed version of beauty. That idea of clear white skin, light straight hair and light eyes was unattainable for us, and it seems as long as I can remember, lighter blemish-free skin signified beauty—like those images of Jesus in some churches. And we all know Jesus didn't look anything like that. He was a Semitic Jew who lived in the Middle East. But that ideal of beauty persists and as a child, the closer we were to that, the better. Only we were far from it.*

*We sat there, laughing uncomfortably at our shared realization of the depth and extent of our deep wounds. We had written almost the exact same words as we sat in our own rooms silently contemplating the questions we had developed about how racism affected our sense of beauty and how we would never be able to attain such a standard. And the answers that arose from deep within our lives were identical: we had all described the pain of the recognition that our beloved mothers who had sacrificed so much and devoted so much of their lives to our growth had inadvertently also damaged*

*our souls through seemingly innocuous words about our skin color or looks never being close enough to the Euro-dominant ideal of beauty. I would never be able to **be** that ideal. Ever. Our shared realization pained and surprised us all.*

The realization of our shared experiences and feelings that emerged in extremely different eras, cultural family milieus, and circumstances call to mind the work of Conle (1996), who wrote about narrative resonance saying, “both echo and resonance have meaning as phenomena in the physics of sound. The two terms are complementary in my work. An echo is what comes back to us, reflecting what we say, although in subtly changed form” (p. 305). In our dialogues, we lived such echoes and narrative resonance often, which came as a surprise to us all.

*Both this and that; neither this nor that*

*My food, my jokes, my music; it has all been different than yours. And my normal isn't your normal. Those of us who are othered are often grouped in one category with those who share some similar qualities, but in reality, we have distinctive cultures and we 'are **not** all the same thing anyway.' We all get lumped in together—as if Puerto Ricans and Nicaraguans are all just like Mexicans because we're all 'Hispanic,' or as if Laotians and Japanese are all just like Chinese because we're all 'Asian.' We are each unique and beautiful within ourselves and our distinct cultures. I am the same as others and different from them. Yet, it's been hard fully embracing myself as being both this and that—from my culture and American at the same time. I had to know both cultures, history, and language, and I still felt inadequate. I could never be White enough for the Americans, nor culturally in-tune enough with my own*

*culture. I still feel resentful. I am still hurting from having to defend myself constantly to both of my cultures. Living this state of in-between is my burden. I have been fighting all sides with no clear way out and no set place to belong. I am trapped. I live in the borderlands—the Nepantla.*

*Being an outsider is horror. It is being in a room full of people that you can't recognize and being silent. It is the feeling of being ignored; looked-through; invisible. It is trying so hard but not getting close enough. It is not understanding why it makes you feel so bad. It is being desperate to be seen and heard. It is afraid of doing anything. It is silence. Being an outsider hurts because you feel like nobody wants you; like you don't matter. You feel like what makes you feel like yourself or what makes you unique isn't valued. I started feeling stuck because I couldn't fully share my experiences, my life, with anybody. The feeling of being an outsider is a feeling I will never forget. It is a feeling I don't want anyone to feel and as a kid I tried to reach out to those I thought might also feel the same way--to those who feel excluded from this culture. To those who don't fit in. I will never fit in. And that still hurts. It hurts that I can never truly feel like I don't have to try to be like others around me. My mind is more American, but my heart is with my people and my culture. And that's ok. It's my normal.*

*The self-hatred and self-loathing I never asked for nor wanted came from my wish to appear White so I'd be accepted more-- even though I knew it would never happen. I tried to ignore and push away my ancestral roots that I now admit I felt some shame about. I wanted people to look at me and become legitimately surprised about my background. I desperately wanted to fit in, which I knew would never happen. I turned*

*all the confusion, anger, hurt, and sadness onto myself and made bad choices that in the end just served to hurt me. I hurt others, too, but mostly myself. But, being from an ancient culture is also powerful; it is about being connected to something that is greater than yourself. It is having love on the table and good food in your belly and laughter in the room. It is always having a family member around to help with anything and always having things to talk about. Being from a marginalized group in the US can be difficult because we are often looked down upon. But there's much joy and love and acceptance, too. White Americans may never fully understand or experience that, except possibly through glimpses.*

Malcolm X gave a speech in 1965—the night after his home was bombed and one week before he was assassinated. In that speech, he similarly described the challenges of internalized racism and its impact on African Americans, saying:

*...in hating Africa and in hating the Africans, we ended up hating ourselves, without even realizing it. Because you can't hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree....You know yourself—and we have been a people who hated our African characteristics. We hated our hair, we hated the shape of our nose—we wanted one of those long, dog-like noses, you know. Yeah. We hated the color of our skin, hated the blood of Africa that was in our veins. And in hating our features and our skin and our blood, why, we had to end up hating ourselves.*

For those of us from marginalized groups, the self-loathing and self-hatred were palpable. We faced it; we discussed it; we admitted it to ourselves; and those feelings lost their potency. The White participants struggled, too, but in ways we didn't expect to uncover.

*Growing up White, I now can admit that I am not a stranger to prejudice. Now that I am more aware of it, I can control and re-write my thoughts when faced with*

*people that are different than me. After looking at my past and connecting it with my current thoughts and ideas, I realize a lot of my insecurities stem from feeling like I am “not enough” and/or feeling disliked because people thought (wrongly) I was better than them. Breaking through these struggles to look a certain way or be a certain person, has allowed me to love myself more.*

A point of startling clarity was that whiteness had impacted us all, but in different ways. For those from marginalized cultures, whiteness functioned somewhat like the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness, but there was a difference. Our reflections indicated an internal space of in-betweenness in which there was neither full acceptance from the dominant White American culture, nor within our own. This goes beyond what Du Bois described as double consciousness and into a more nebulous state of “neither this nor that,” which Anzaldúa referred to as *Nepantla*. The pain connected to deeply examining these memories evoked a wide range of emotions long buried by exhausting efforts we all made to fit in.

*Cracks in spaces provide possibilities*

Where, possibly can these inner movements of the soul occur? Bhabha (1994) suggests that “private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed” (p. 19). This “interstitial intimacy” of the liminal spaces within and between us are the invisible sites of transformation intertwined in our stories. This is why this kind of work that internally excavates deeply sedimented racism leads to greater social changes. Anzaldúa (2009)

knew this to be true when she wrote that “by changing ourselves we change the world, that traveling *El Mundo Zurdo* (the left-handed) path is the path of a two-way movement--a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (p. 49). Our stories taught us as much. As in the other finding sections, the data from our reflections have been combined and are presented in italics.

*We admitted to ourselves and each other that we would never be enough in our mind’s eye, in terms of a standard of beauty our mothers and society had established. To admit this was difficult and yet, we also felt as though an excruciatingly painful boil within our souls had been lanced. Or that we had subjected ourselves to a moxibustion cupping process. The pain was sharp, deep and intense; and then it dissipated and disappeared. We realized the younger versions of ourselves had been stained by a colonized version of whiteness and permeated our lives—unbeknownst to us, until that epiphany of clarity and realization. In that moment, we didn’t have the words to articulate it, but we felt relieved from lancing a long-infected inner pain and knowing we were not alone in our thoughts so long buried inside.*

*We discussed our concerns about leaving ourselves shattered. The process involved ripping ourselves open and tearing aspects of ourselves apart to dig through densely packed memories we had desperately tried to ensure would stay far from our consciousness. As we created our own questions each week and journaled, we saw and felt memories bubble up throughout the week. Once the seemingly innocuous questions were agreed upon, our hearts and minds sought to find that answer inside. And even*

*though we were all busy with school work, it stayed with us in the back of our minds. The questions themselves served an important purpose. The questions became our internal shovels to help us dig into ourselves.*

### *Healing beyond the wounds*

Each of us, as participants in this project, have led different lives which has caused our thoughts and inner feelings about the very word “racism” to drastically differ. As we spent hours delving into this project, one stand-out event was that we each had created layers of buffers to protect us from facing the pain of actual occurrences in our lives in which we had our most significant experiences. This process provided a mechanism and process to excavate our innermost wounds, which ultimately allowed us to heal from them.

*This process has made me more aware of myself as someone in the dominant culture and helped me be okay with that, while at the same time acknowledging that and what I can do to not abuse that. I have kind of had a feeling of growing up feeling a certain way and I put it in the back of my mind but when I revisited how race has impacted me with the project, it opened a lot of wounds. This project has definitely been difficult. It helped me open up a lot of past negative things that I didn't think were wounds until I ripped them open. It has all been very uncomfortable and difficult. We made ourselves vulnerable by talking about this. This is not Starbucks conversation. It is something we all feel uncomfortable about. It is not easy to talk about how racism has impacted us way deep down. The fact that we are all able to support each other with those things that we are most vulnerable about is what brings us together and what helps*

*us trust each other. Essential aspects of this process' success were having open communication and being vulnerable with ourselves and each other. We helped each other develop tools to compare experiences with each other and deconstruct our experiences to find out why I am the way I am or feel the way I feel.*

*The combination of personal reflections and dialogues were key. Being able to share my painful experiences with others of different backgrounds and yet feeling the same emotions is powerful. The fact is that I would not be able to come to any of these realizations on my own without the reflections of others to help me see myself; we served as each other's mirrors and support. And another critically important aspect of our work included the power dynamics of the group. The power was totally collapsed. We all wanted to be here doing this work; no one was getting a grade, money, or benefitting from it at the expense of anyone else. We knew that, and we tacitly agreed to that; there's even more power when the power dynamics are level. For that to happen we had to have open communication, trust, and be able to be vulnerable. I'm not sure if this can be forced on people, or if they need to come to it on their own. Everyone has a different starting place, but the important thing was that we were all willing to do the painful archaeological digging into ourselves. That is the only way to truly see how racism impacts us.*

*I had never before understood whiteness and how it works before, but I could see how it immobilizes me at times. I cannot grasp what it is like to **not** be White or part of the dominant culture. I grapple with my inability to truly understand others from societal groups who continue to be marginalized systematically because I've never*

*experienced it. I can say I sympathize with everyone's struggles in our group, but I have no frame of reference from my own life experiences to empathize with them. I know the struggle is real and so are their experiences. I'm doing the work to look at myself and as an ally and support.*

*Ultimately, this whole work has been about healing our deeply wounded younger versions of ourselves, forgiving ourselves and our families, and re-emerging from this journey with more clarity and confidence about who we are. Tears were shed. Quiet moments of listening, nodding heads, and hugs gently moved into our time together. We had opened doors chained and locked long ago in our hearts and minds, and it was only possible to unlock those doors and crack them open to see how our wounded younger versions of ourselves had been doing after being locked away so long. The fresh air, light, understanding, and forgiveness helped to heal. We know it is a life-long process, but we have made progress. We faced inner demons, ghosts, and monsters that quietly and secretly had some power over us—unbeknownst to us—in the form of a pervasive and insidious colonized whiteness that had tainted our ways of thinking about ourselves and others...it impacted our ways of being in the world. It was in facing them that we re-claimed and gained strength and power. We needed each other for this journey and rather than a prescribed research project, our common goal was wanting to challenge racism as it has impacted us and figure out a process to do that work. We each grew in ways that utterly and completely surprised us all.*

Towards the end of our time working together on this project, four of us attended a Gloria Anzaldúa conference, and it was at an event at a gallery that the pieces of our

shared puzzle fit together. At a gallery, two of us took the same photo of one of Anzaldúa's many quotes in the exhibit, which we both felt perfectly described our process:

To be healed we must be dismembered, pulled apart. The healing occurs in disintegration, in the demolition of the ego as the self's only authority. By connecting with our wounding, the imaginal journey makes it worthwhile. Healing images bring back the pieces, heal *las rajaduras*. (the cracks/gashes)

What we had gradually, gently, and willingly done was “connect with our wounding.” Unknowingly, we had been on the journey Anzaldúa, like Ikeda, write about and describe as an internal process of “human revolution.” Scholars at the conference analyzed Anzaldúa's ideas and theorized them; we had actually embarked on that journey, supported by each other while also digging deep within. We were not just talking about ideas; we did the deep work—rigorously—alone and together--recognizing the journey is life-long. We had turned internal poison into healing medicine.

#### **4.7. Concluding thoughts: Our stories changed us and each other**

While many theories abound, few research protocols exist that provide a map on practical approaches to de-construct how colonized thinking patterns rooted in racist ideologies impact our onto-epistemological understanding of ourselves, others, and the world. This collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry has been our work to document a collaborative journey and what the process was, challenges we faced, and how the process impacted us.

In summary, the central findings in relation to the process of this research include: 1) the depth of internal pain caused by the process; 2) the importance of being willing to be vulnerable with ourselves and each other; 3) the nature of the power

dynamics within the group; and 4) the cathartic and transformative power of the process. The use of counter-narratives and counter-storytelling came from Critical Race Studies, and Delgado (1989) asserts the power in “the use of stories in the struggle for racial reform” (p. 2415). Initially, we wondered how we can create anti-racism curriculum. Our discussions lead us to share our stories, which became our curriculum-- a pathway aligned with Delgado’s (1989) ideas: “Stories humanize us. They emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together” (p. 2440). That is what happened with us. Telling, re-living, and re-storying our lives humanized us all.

We did not begin this trek with the theoretical concepts and academic verbiage rolling around our heads or dripping from our tongues; however, we quickly realized we all had powerful stories to tell. We had unwittingly formed what Olson and Craig (2001) call a knowledge community, where “it is possible for individuals’ narrative authority to be articulated, examined, and confirmed, expanded, or revised in light of others’ experience and others’ reflections and responses to our experiences” (p. 670). This process that organically emerged through our shared inquiry to understand racism and its impact on our lives evolved gradually, since we first had to develop bonds of trust. This trust grew as we recognized that we had become “a supportive, trustworthy set of equally vulnerable colleagues...[who could] provide invaluable support” (Lapadat, 2017, p. 599) as we unearthed uncomfortable memories. We had opened up wounds and we bonded in those moments of shared pain.

Our process of reflective journaling and regular open dialogues served as bridges between us. Anzaldúa (2015) articulates a notion we clearly experienced when she writes:

although all your cultures reject the idea that you can know the other, you believe that besides love, pain might open this closed passage by reaching through the wound to connect. Wounds cause you to shift consciousness --they either open you up to the greater reality blocked by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into *desconocimiento* (ignorance). Like love, pain might trigger compassion--if you're tender with yourself, you can be tender to others. Using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body. (p. 153)

We had connected to each other through our stories of our wounded and confused childhood selves. It was only at the end of the process that we realized the potency and cathartic liberation of our vulnerabilities and honest sharing. And for us, the “changing landscapes of the... narratives produced changed lives, lives significantly different than where the roots of this narrative inquiry began” (Craig et al., 2018, p. 638). Our stories changed us and each other.

Each of us learned and grew unexpectedly through this process. We had not expected that so many answers would be revealed to us through a deep internal dive into the social interactions in our families early on in our lives. Though we each come from very different cultural backgrounds, it was undeniable to us that seemingly innocent familial interactions served to instill within us seeds of whiteness that troubled our sensibilities for many years. Our key findings: 1) ways in which racism is passed down through families; 2) the impact of whiteness on our sense of self; and 3) the painful and healing aspects of the process to face racism within ourselves each served to help us illuminate and clarify internal confusion about racism that had plagued us all for years.

Reflective writing was critical in this process because it gave “us the time, space, and strategies to more fully realize our complexity” (Kaufka, 2009, p. 146)—especially when reflecting on how we developed our racialized identities. What is also essential to this research is the emphasis on “positioning of the researcher by placing the critical examination of race directly in the hands of the white teacher [researchers] themselves and allowing them to control their own data analysis and representation” (Pennington & Brock, 2012, p. 246). Since this work is about uncovering personal experiences that contributed to the researchers’ racial identity development, controlling our data and what is shared is important.

Another key premise of our research is that every aspect of our being is “culturally informed” (Lugones, 2003). It is precisely for this reason that this work is critical at this juncture in history—to provide a space and process for deep self-reflection and dialogues about racism, which is pervasive and invasive, yet rarely examined. This research seeks to uncover, explore, and refine a process that can support people to recognize, name, acknowledge and dismantle ways that racism has impacted our identities, with the hope that it can be applied for future use in teacher education and teacher development.

This research will add to existing knowledge in two significant ways. The first is that it provides a novel approach for examining racial identity development and its link to primary social interactions. The approach we co-developed challenges research that has traditionally included power dynamics based on positionality within the Academy, as well as gender and race dynamics. This is important to acknowledge since it is “in

creating and enacting pedagogies for change, educators often find ourselves recreating structures of oppression” (Murad, 2011, p. 39). This process has been co-created by the undergraduates and graduate co-researchers. Secondly, this research sought to provide insights into internal and systemic racism’s impact on identity formation and how to challenge racism from within.

The process simply includes gathering 4-6 people who want to explore how racism (or other such oppressive -ism) has impacted their identities. Ideally, the individuals would meet in a neutral, private setting once a week or twice a month for about 1.5 hours per session. The group members will get to know each other intimately—possibly by beginning to share the deep-rooted reason why they wanted to engage in this kind of work in the first place. Between meetings, each person will journal and respond to the questions the group co-creates. Refining and clarifying this process became part of our research because we experienced the potency of the process.

Through this journey, we faced a difficult fact: our beloved families and especially our mothers taught us early on to develop mistrust for those different from us, but we neither blame them, nor ourselves. We could name, acknowledge, and **be** with uncomfortable and distant memories that we have all carried with us far too long. On one level, what we came to understand corroborates the work of Fivush (2008), whose research reveals that “stories we create with others through socially shared interpretations and evaluations of our personal past constitute our very being” (p. 55). While those unexamined stories may “constitute our very being,” we also have the power and agency to shift them. The storied identities given to us at a young age by our

families could be re-visited, re-storied, re-imagined, and re-configured. It was through our emotional labor together that we came to this huge realization, which was a core finding of this study: this journey gave us a pathway to forgive ourselves and our loved ones. Through this forgiveness, we free ourselves to live in more deeply informed ways. While we recognize structural, systemic, and societal inequities and injustices, and we began our journey hoping to don armor and battle the “demon” of racism, we ultimately found the poisonous roots within us.

This healing process provided a way for us to claim our agency and take a stand against an ideology that had colonized our ways of thinking and being in the world. Instead of claiming victimhood, we uncovered, named and dis-armed racism from within. Like Anzaldúa, Ikeda (2017) insists that the keys to profound and meaningful social changes begin within us when he writes that “the same power that moves the universe exists within our lives. Each individual has immense potential, and a great change in the inner dimension of one individual’s life has the power to touch others’ lives and transform society” (p. 3). Our collaborative auto-ethnographic narrative inquiry provided us with a way to resist racism and open an internal path for an ideology that honors and respects ourselves and others. We—and the world—are forever changed in invisible, but significant ways, and like the grape plants, our efforts will be to reproduce an ideology of resistance through self-reflection, compassionate dialogue, forgiveness, and respect.

## 5. QUALITIES OF SOKA EDUCATORS: THE PRAXIS OF SOKA EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN BRAZIL

### **Synopsis**

This paper uses narrative inquiry as a method of research to engage with self-identified Soka educators who apply principles of Soka education in two contexts in Brazil: 1) at the ECE-12 Brazil Soka School and 2) through Soka Education in Action, a network of volunteers who conduct professional development on Soka educational philosophy in public schools. This “value-creating” approach to education is rooted in a culture of care that seeks to foster students to become global citizens who recognize their roles as agents of societal change. This paper focuses on clarifying the quintessential qualities of Soka educators.

### **5.1. Introduction**

This article explores how Soka educational philosophy is developing in São Paulo, Brazil—formally through the efforts of Soka educators at the Brazil Soka School (*Escola Soka do Brasil*, BSS) and informally through the Department of Soka Education in Action (SEA, formerly known as the Makiguchi Project in Action), a network of retired volunteers who conduct professional development activities with public school teachers. In simplest terms, the word “Soka” is a Japanese neologism meaning “value-creation” (Goulah, 2015; Goulah & Ito, 2012; Ikeda, 2009a); thus, Soka education is a broad umbrella term used to describe ways this value-creating educational philosophy is applied in a wide-range of educational contexts in São Paulo. On a deeper level, what is Soka educational philosophy? What does it mean to be a “Soka” educator? What do self-identified Brazilian Soka educators consider as the quintessential qualities of Soka educators? Using narrative inquiry as a research tool, I will explore these key questions that sit at the heart of this empirical research study, which was conducted in São Paulo in December of 2018.

For readers who are unfamiliar with Soka educational philosophy, it is fitting to provide brief historical background of its genesis, core ideas, as well as main points of this educational philosophy. The initial ideas of Soka education first emerged in the heart of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), a life-long teacher, principal, and reflective educational researcher whose “value-creating pedagogy has become a spirit of educating, an ethos, or conceptual foundation rather than defined methodology” (Goulah & Urbain, 2013, p. 309). This ethos places the child’s lifelong happiness and well-being as the main focus of education; essentially, Makiguchi “denounced the force-feeding of knowledge far removed from the realities of the child’s everyday living” (Ikeda, 2010, p. 9) -- insisting, much like John Dewey (1938), that education is connected to life experiences. Japan’s educational system was heavily influenced by its government, which had become ultra-nationalistic in order to prepare young people to embrace the primacy of the emperor and the rule of the state above all else (Bethel, 1973/1994; Garrison, Hickman & Ikeda, 2014; Ikeda, 2010/2013); thus, Soka education was born out of resistance to the dehumanizing ideas rampant in pre-WWII Japan.

While Makiguchi first articulated ideas about Soka education, the educational proposals and ideas of the contemporary Japanese philosopher and writer Daisaku Ikeda (1928-) currently provide the impetus for how Soka education is put into practice. According to Ikeda (2010), “the ultimate goal of Soka, or value-creating, education is to foster people of character who continuously strive for the ‘greatest good’ of peace, who are committed to protecting the sanctity of life, and who are capable of creating value under even the most difficult circumstances” (p. 246). No prescriptive formulas or

“how-to” guidelines are provided by either Makiguchi or Ikeda because Soka educational philosophy is most definitely not about programmatic or curricular implementation; yet substantive writings and ideas about Soka educational ideas and philosophical underpinnings provide rich soil for educators to engage with in order to create ways to educate youth, with the hope that together they will transform society and create a peaceful world.

## **5.2. Literature Review**

This literature review highlights scholarly research about the core ideas of Soka education, as well as gaps in the literature, along with a substantive review on the methodology used to conduct this research, narrative inquiry. Included within the literature review is the conceptual framework. The canon of humanistic and moral philosophical ideas in education is broad and deep—spanning centuries and civilizations in the East and West—from Confucius in China (He, 2016; Spring, 2008) to Protagoras in Greece (Kato, 2014), including the voices of countless distinguished educators and scholars. Goulah and Gebert (2009) position Makiguchi genealogically within the history of education in the humanist tradition that has maintained the centrality of learners in the educative process, showing “the heritage of pedagogical theory that he [Makiguchi] traces back to Montaigne (1533–1592), Comenius (1592–1670), Rousseau (1712–1778) and Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Herbart (1776–1841) and Froebel (1782–1852)” (p. 119). Makiguchi’s ideas align with humanistic educators in history.

In that same tradition, educators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Dewey (1859-1952), Tagore (1861-1941), DuBois (1868-1963), Freire (1921-1997) and Montessori (1870-

1952) are also considered humanistic educators (Hansen, 2007; Platz & Arellano, 2011). The tomes the aforementioned scholars penned are foundational ideas which continue to remind us of the importance of centering our efforts in education on the growth and development of the human being. Makiguchi and Ikeda's ideas that comprise contemporary Soka educational philosophy could be situated within this academic genealogy, but it is essential to clarify what distinguishes Soka educational philosophy—especially as applied to schooling—from the others that fall within a broad umbrella of “humanistic education.”

The Japanese term most often used to describe Soka education is *ningen kyoiku*, which translated means “human education.” According to Goulah (2013a), a linguist and Ikeda scholar, “literally ‘human education,’ but more frequently translated into English as ‘humanistic’ education or even ‘humane’ education, *ningen kyoiku* is Ikeda’s formula—both in and outside the context of schooling—for becoming ‘fully human’ in the richest, truest sense of the term” (p. 1). This, then, is a key aspect of Soka education within the wider humanistic views of education: it seeks to employ education as a means to support the growth of learners to become “fully human.” Thus, I will refer to Soka as “human” education rather than “humanistic” education.

While this empirical research is about the praxis of Soka educational philosophy and how teachers come to internalize and embody these ideas, it is nonetheless essential to elaborate on three pillars of Soka educational philosophy that make it distinctive; these components are 1) a deep respect for children and an emphasis on their lifelong

happiness; 2) a focus on fostering students to become global citizens; and 3) recognition of the central roles of teachers.

*Emphasis and reorientation of education on lifelong happiness of children*

In the foreword to *Tsuneshaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944): Educational Philosophy in Context*, Ikeda (2009a) explains that Makiguchi developed his ideas

about Soka education in the following way:

...not through academic efforts made in the quiet and relative leisure of the study. Rather, they were born of the back-and-forth, the interplay between theory and practice under a multitude of pressures. Makiguchi struggled against constraining circumstances and the iniquitous intrusions of authority even as he grappled with the question of how best to establish a firm foundation for the lifelong happiness of children. (pp. 2-3)

Ikeda recognizes that Makiguchi, as an educational practitioner, single-mindedly sought to develop a practical and pragmatic educational system where the needs and “lifelong happiness” of the children were central to all decisions made in education—rather than the economic, political, and military needs of the government (Goulah & Gebert, 2009; Goulah & Ito, 2012; Saito, 1989). Reclaiming the central and essential position of children’s happiness at the heart of the entire educational process is a significant shift in how education is viewed from the perspective of Soka educational philosophy.

Similarly, for educators today, many of whom are so absorbed in the “busy-ness” of ensuring that accountability standards are met have completely forgotten this very basic, yet central idea about the purpose of education. Ikeda (2001) highlights this point when he quotes directly from Makiguchi’s 1930 work called *Soka kyoiku-gaku takei (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy)*: “What then is the purpose of national education? Rather than devise complex theoretical interpretations, it is better to start by

looking to the lovely child who sits on your knee and ask yourself: What can I do to assure that this child will be able to lead the happiest life possible?” (p. 10). The simple phrase “What practice can I do?....” reflects the notion of teacher agency as another important component of Soka educational philosophy. Ikeda (2010) again emphasizes “that education be reoriented to its prime objective, namely, the lifelong happiness of learners” (p. 49). Imagine the potency and seismic shifts if each decision about every aspect of a school was made with that point maintaining a central place, so that the key question is constantly: What can we do to ensure each child’s lifelong happiness?

While the overarching focus in Soka education is the child’s lifelong happiness, one point needs to be clarified. It is not the kind of happiness that might approximate the image of spoiled children who are able to be indulged and get whatever they want. That approach, actually, would not lead to a child’s lifelong happiness, but rather lifelong entitlement and excessive self-centeredness. Rather, Ikeda (2010/2013) explains Makiguchi’s view in this way: “His conception of happiness transcended a narrowly self-centered personal happiness with no regard for the well-being of others, but embraced a social aspect, the ability to coexist harmoniously with others in society” (p. 211). This expanded understanding of happiness to extend beyond one’s life to include the well-being of others in society is a central aspect of Soka educational philosophy.

#### *Education for global citizenship*

A primary document of the Tokyo-based Soka Gakuen Foundation (2009), the administrative organization responsible for Soka schools, succinctly states the following:

First, at the heart of the Soka education system lies humanistic education, the purpose of which is to foster individuals who are able to secure happiness for

both themselves and for others. Second, Soka education upholds the goal of fostering global citizens who will contribute to the creation of peace within the international community. Third, Soka education aims to raise creative individuals capable of recognizing the needs of society and implementing healthy values into their environment. (p. 11)

The mandate of Soka schools is clear: to foster global citizens, with the ultimate goal being for students to make their own contributions in life towards creating a more peaceful and just world.

According to Ikeda (2010), Makiguchi “cherished a vision of fostering people who could be described as true global citizens—individuals fully able to transcend self-seeking egotism and elevate their way of life to one linked to all humanity” (p. 20).

Ikeda’s lifelong goal has been to actualize that vision. For Ikeda, the role of education to foster students as global citizens requires that the students develop a deep understanding about the profound sanctity of life. The philosophical undergirding that holds the potential to educate students with an understanding of the interconnectedness between their lives and all of humanity is central to the ethos of Soka educational philosophy, and teachers are key to this process. Education’s role to create peace is thus a central pillar of Soka educational philosophy, while linking peace to global citizenship.

Ikeda’s views about global citizenship are sprinkled widely throughout his writings. In a speech delivered to the University of Bologna in 1994, Ikeda (2010/2013) focuses on the life of Leonardo da Vinci, explaining how he was an exemplar of global citizenship this way:

One lesson we might learn from Leonardo is the importance of self-mastery. Utterly free and independent, he was not only liberated from the strictures of religion and ethics, but was also unconstrained by bonds to nation, family,

friends, or acquaintances. He was a citizen of the world, untouchable and unsurpassed. (p. 34)

Further, in a dialogue with Garrison and Hickman that focused on Dewey, Ikeda (2014) was insistent that having the mindset of “global citizenship” does not mean speaking many languages or traveling the globe; rather for Ikeda, global citizens are people who “while firmly rooted in their local communities, think about things from a global perspective and take actions for world peace” (p. 146). For Ikeda, becoming a global citizen centers on an expansive mindset.

Ikeda’s views on education as it is linked to global citizenship were most concisely expressed in a talk entitled “Education Toward Global Citizenship” given in 1994 at Columbia University’s Teachers College. At that time, Ikeda explained that the following are essential elements of global citizenship:

- The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living.
- The courage not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from those encounters with them.
- The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places. (pp. 112-113)

This, then, is the clearest and most succinct way to recognize what is needed to become a global citizen. For Ikeda, education plays a key role in supporting students to become global citizens, and this is precisely why Ikeda seeks to promote Soka education—as a vehicle to peace based on an approach to education that seeks to foster wisdom, courage and compassion. Such ideas about education may be considered lofty and abstract. It is not exactly clear how such an educational philosophy can be applied and put into practice within a school setting; however, teachers play a critical role in such a process.

### *Centrality of teachers*

The emphasis of the significant roles of teachers caring for students originally began with Makiguchi, who was a living example of how to show genuine care: providing lunches for poor children; greeting children with warm water to warm their hands on cold winter days; and visiting student's homes (Gebert & Joffe, 2007; Goulah, 2015; Ikeda, 2006). In an article written by Makiguchi (1936/2015), he explicitly conveys his ideas about caring for students' growth and development when he writes that "if teachers fully embodied the spirit of one who is a servant of chrysanthemums, determined to bring beautiful flowers to bloom, education would succeed without fail" (p. 245). This notion of "being a servant of chrysanthemums" embodies a metaphor of teachers' unconditional and absolute belief in students' capacity to grow and develop, while patiently providing whatever is necessary for such growth.

In this same article, Makiguchi provides another apt metaphor to illustrate the importance of a teacher's attitude and why teachers and students must collaborate together in a harmonious relationship. Makiguchi (1936/2015) explains the role and attitude of teachers in this way:

Teachers must confine themselves to providing, as it were, the musical accompaniment of song in the active 'dance' of the children. Under no circumstances should teachers be the main performers dancing to the accompaniment of the students' singing. Should a teacher end up both singing and dancing on stage while the children watch the performance as audience, this would represent an utter failure. (p. 248)

The teachers' attitude, then, to cultivate the students' growth and development is paramount as a pillar of Soka educational philosophy. Again, this research focuses on

how self-identified Soka educators make meaning of their roles and how to help other teachers develop those qualities.

Sonia Nieto (2012) recognizes a critical idea in Ikeda's Soka educational philosophy. It is "[when] he insists that teachers have a responsibility to develop strong bonds with their students because, for him, human interaction is an essential part of teaching and learning" (p. 155). The contemporary focus on teacher-student relationships has shifted more towards accountability, and Nieto acknowledges the need to re-center education on relationships. In the end, Nieto (2012) sees Soka education as "a breath of fresh air in a field decaying from self-interest, money, and cynicism" (p. 156). Soka educational philosophy provides a hopeful alternative to neoliberal policies.

Throughout Ikeda's writings, he also elaborates on the potency of teacher-student relationships. For example, Ikeda (2010) makes it very clear that teachers' roles in education are paramount, when he writes "I firmly believe that every young person has the power within him or her to change the world. It is the role of those who teach to believe in that power, to encourage and release it" (p. 151). For Ikeda, the agentic potentiality within each young person is waiting to be unleashed; it is the role of the teacher—based on the teacher's belief in and relationship with students--that serves as the leavening element for students' development. In a dialogue on Dewey with Garrison and Hickman, Ikeda (2014) elsewhere uses the metaphor of diamonds being polished by other diamonds to illustrate the importance of teacher-student relationships and why they must be at the heart of education.

From the age of 65, Ikeda began a 30-volume work, called *The New Human Revolution*, in which he recounts his life's work; volumes 15, 17, 23 and 24 are most related to education (Goulah & Ito, 2012). Specifically, volume 24 has a chapter entitled "Humanistic Education," and since it relates to this research, it is important to quote two sections of that chapter. In November 1974, the "Humanistic Education Study Group" was formed and held its first symposium at Tokyo's Soka Junior and Senior High School. The teachers who attended developed 5 principles for educators, which Ikeda (2013) outlined; they are:

- (1) Respect for the sanctity of life;
- (2) Faith in the diverse richness of human potential;
- (3) An emphasis on the mutually interactive and inspirational relationship between educators and students;
- (4) A shared aim among educators and students to continually create value and strive for self-transformation; and
- (5) A firm grasp of the abilities of students and appropriate guidance. (p. 212)

The teachers developed these principles after first studying more deeply about Soka educational philosophy and recognizing exactly what qualities they hoped to foster in students. Much like the questions in this research, they then pondered what qualities teachers most urgently needed.

In the following year—March 1975—2000 educators from throughout Japan gathered for a meeting with the theme: "Youthful Educators Engaged in a Movement for Humanistic Education," and at the conclusion of that meeting, they wrote a declaration.

Ikeda (2013) shared key points of their declaration:

- (1) Believing that the personal revolution of educators is the first step in education, we pledge to overcome egoism and arrogance.
- (2) We will exhibit faith in the potential of every child and student, never lose hope and always extend a helping hand.

(3) We will share our teaching experiences, and earnestly study to improve our abilities as educators. (p. 217)

It is important to quote these sections at length, since they are so closely tied to this research, which was conducted in Brazil--around the world from where this declaration emerged more than 45 years earlier. How do self-identified Soka educators in Brazil, who live in a different culture, make meaning of what it means to be a Soka educator?

### *Gaps in the literature*

The academic scholarly articles on Soka educational philosophy published to date focus on a wide range of Soka-related scholarship. For example, there are studies of educators linked to Soka schools in Asia (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014; Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016; Nagashima, 2012); research by Ikeda scholars who utilize their knowledge of Japanese language and culture to bring Ikeda's educational ideas to a wider Western audience in the Academy (Gebert, 2009; Goulah & Ito, 2012; Inukai, 2013); links between global citizenship education and Soka education (Guajardo & Reiser, 2016; Sharma, 2011, 2018); and Soka educational philosophy and its connection to peace education (Goulah & Urbain, 2013). These articles and this robust research greatly expand academic scholarship on Soka educational philosophy and ideas.

Additionally, articles have been published on: Soka educational philosophy and how it is tied to ideas of Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda (Goulah & Gebert, 2009; Inukai & Goulah, 2018; Takeuchi, 2004); links between Soka educational philosophy, democracy, and leadership (He, 2016; Heffron, 2018); and ways language education and translation are tied to Ikeda's educational philosophy (Gebert, 2012; Goulah, 2012; Obelleiro,

2012). While scholarly articles on Soka education as applied in Western schools have been published (Bradford & Shields, 2017; Gebert & Joffe, 2007; Joffe, Goulah & Gebert, 2009), there is a clear gap in the literature based on empirical research about how Soka education is applied and practiced systematically outside of Asia, and particularly, in Brazil.

The only scholarly article written specifically about Soka education in Brazil was published nearly 20 years ago, and it is entitled *Makiguchi Project in Action* (Silva, 2000); it focuses on the same network of retired educators researched for this article, now called the “Soka Education in Action.” However, no academic research has formally explored Soka educators in Brazil at the Brazil Soka School, while also including volunteers who conduct professional development in Brazilian public schools; therefore, the research in this article fills a significant gap in the literature on Soka educators outside of Asia and specifically, in Brazil.

It is also important to note that while there has been narrative inquiry research conducted internationally (Craig, Zou & Curtis, 2018; Howe & Arimoto, 2014; Mattos, 2009; Nagashima, 2012), there is a void in the literature about the use of narrative inquiry on how Soka educational philosophy is applied in educational settings in the global South, and particularly, in Brazil. Herein, this research fills this gap.

### **5.3. Soka education as a conceptual framework**

The following conceptual ideas of Soka educational philosophy undergird this research. These are the primary “root” theoretical ideas of Soka education that substantiate and provide theoretical explanations that support the pillars of Soka

education in practice. They are: 1) Makiguchi's theory of value; 2) dependent origination 3) the mutual possession of the ten worlds; and 4) "human revolution."

While many of these theoretical ideas are from Eastern philosophies linked to Buddhism, they are explained in secular language since Soka education is completely secular, as it is applied at the Brazil Soka School (BSS) and through Soka Education in Action (SEA - the name officially changed from Makiguchi Project in Action in August of 2018 according to its director, Sônia Kato). To better understand the importance of these theoretical ideas, it is helpful to first consider common analogies that might shed light on the very purpose of a conceptual framework.

For example, most of us can enjoy the use of appliances and lights without knowing about laws of electricity; many people drive cars without understanding chemical properties of internal combustion; we use computers and phones completely ignorant of the operating systems that run them; or most of us live our lives daily completely oblivious to the complex inner biological processes keeping us alive. A portion of the work of the scholar, however, is to seek to understand the theories at the root of many complex processes. It is for this reason that in this section, I will explore the aforementioned theoretical concepts to explain the theories behind the "workings" of Soka education.

### *Makiguchi's theory of value*

The theoretical and conceptual ideas that Makiguchi developed about education, based on years of experiences as an educator, were that "one's capacity to lead a genuinely happy life lies in one's capacity to create value—specifically values of

aesthetic or sensory *beauty*, individual *gain*, and social *good*—in and from any circumstances.” (Goulah, 2015, p. 254). For Makiguchi, who studied, taught, and wrote about human geography, the challenge as an educator was how to work with students, based on these core ideas, all of which are tied to personal well-being, while maintaining a focus on the collective well-being for all. The word “value” can have multiple meanings, but for Makiguchi and Ikeda, “value” connotes any actions that ultimately contributes to greater growth for oneself and the collective well-being of others.

Connected to the theoretical notion of “creating value,” Ikeda’s views on Soka education center on the relationship between knowledge and wisdom, as well as the very purpose of education and its end goal. In an address to students in 1974, Ikeda (2010) was clear when he told students that the knowledge of oneself is most important and that he felt strongly that students needed “to understand that your mission is to acquire the wisdom that will enable you to use all forms of power for the sake of the happiness and peace of humankind” (p. 208). Ikeda (2006) further elaborates on this point when he shared similar sentiments to students in an address more than 35 years later:

Knowledge alone cannot give rise to value. It is only when knowledge is guided by wisdom that value—defined by the father of Soka education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, as beauty, benefit and goodness—is created. The font of wisdom is found in the following elements: an overarching sense of purpose, a powerful sense of responsibility and finally, the compassionate desire to contribute to the welfare of humankind. (p. 173)

Makiguchi’s theory came from his studies of Kantian philosophy, but he further developed those ideas, asserting that “human beings are distinguished by the capacity to create value in the form of beauty, gain, and good. That is, through one’s interactions with one’s environment, people can bring ever more beauty, comfort, and justice into the

world” (Ikeda, 2009a, p. 113). The starting point is within the human heart to transform knowledge to wisdom so that all people can benefit from our collective knowledge.

This educational theory of value undergirds the pillars of Soka education, particularly because Makiguchi views his theory of value, consisting of “beauty, gain and good” as those quintessential values human beings create through interacting with others and the world (Goulah, 2015; Goulah & Urbain, 2013; Makiguchi, 1903/2002). This theory rooted in action calls for teachers and students to look critically at our world and constantly ask ourselves what we can do within our own environments to create more “beauty, comfort and good in the form of justice?” The answers lie within us and the challenge is to dig within to find the wisdom to create those values.

#### *Dependent origination*

The term “dependent origination” is a central theoretical construct in Soka educational philosophy because of the notion that everything in life—from the smallest cell within our beings to the most distant stars in our galaxies are connected (Goulah, 2010a, 2010b; Obelleiro, 2012; Sakurai, 2010). In a speech delivered at Harvard University in 1991, Ikeda (2010/2013) explained that “all things are linked in an intricate web of causation and connection, and nothing, whether in the realm of human affairs or natural phenomena, can exist or occur solely of its own accord...[because of] a level of interrelatedness that is uniquely dynamic, holistic and generated from within” (p. 195). An understanding and belief in this key theoretical concept holds the potential to dramatically shift an educator’s sense of responsibility and locus of control, which is why it is such an important theoretical construct in this research. Based on the ideas of

dependent origination, the agency is always within each of us, and as educators who recognize this important point, a great sense of agency and responsibility is kept alive.

“Dependent origination” is a Sanskrit word, *pratitya-samutpada* (Gebert, 2012), and it connotes a direct, invisible, and unbreakable interconnection within everything in the universe. In a dialogue with Vincent Harding (2016) that focused on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ikeda explains the concept of dependent origination this way:

Self and other, the individual and society, human beings and nature, human beings and the planet Earth, humanity and the universe—all these dichotomies arise and develop in a dynamic relationship of mutual influence and interaction. Pursuing and committing to a way of life based on the harmonious coexistence recognized in this view of humanity, the world and the universe fosters global citizenship. (p. 221).

The idea of dependent origination, then, is the theoretical construct behind the idea of global citizenship, a pillar in Soka education. Developing and sustaining an awareness of this view as an educator can dramatically shift how educators see students and the learning process—since the teacher and student are so deeply connected, according to this perspective. The teacher’s enormous capacity to influence students to take action to create a more just and peaceful world comes from this core idea of dependent origination.

It might be helpful to visualize an apple tree as a metaphor for Soka educational philosophy as a conceptual framework. The Soka conceptual ideas are the invisible roots, and the resulting apples hold within them the seeds for these ideas to spread. Teachers are like the arborists or gardeners who care for the trees, knowing that the seeds in the fruit will reproduce the very ideas nourished by the tree’s roots. In addition to dependent origination, the idea of the mutual possession of the ten worlds is also key.

### *Mutual possession of ten worlds*

Closely linked to the theoretical construct of dependent origination is the idea of the “mutual possession of the ten worlds.” The reason this idea is considered a key theoretical construct is because a central focus of Soka educational philosophy is to believe in, support, and find ways to develop students’ potentiality. This can only be achieved by teachers continually remembering that children are in developmental processes of growth and believing in each child’s capacity to blossom in their own unique ways. However, when teachers are confronted with the daily and often moment-to-moment challenges that are a natural part of child development, what kind of ideas or foundational beliefs can support them to continue to believe in children’s unlimited potentiality?

The concept in Soka educational philosophy of the “mutual possession of the ten worlds” is part of what Ikeda (2010/2013) connects to character formation, which contributes to “human wholeness or completion” (p. 204). In a speech given in 1993 at Claremont McKenna College, Ikeda (2010/2013) described in detail his understanding of the ten worlds, or ten realms, which warrants this lengthy quote:

From the least to the most desirable they are: the world of hell, a condition submerged in suffering; the world of hunger, a state in which body and mind are engulfed in the raging flames of desire; the world of animality, in which one fears the strong and abuses the weak; the world of anger, characterized by the constant compulsion to surpass and dominate others; the world of humanity, a tranquil state marked by the ability to make reasoned judgements; the world of rapture, a state filled with joy; the world of learning, a condition of aspiration to enlightenment; the world of absorption, where one perceives unaided the true nature of phenomena; the world of Bodhisattva, a state of compassion in which one seeks to save all people from suffering; and finally the world of Buddhahood, a state of human completeness and perfect freedom. (p. 205-6)

Based on this idea—of inner hell on the one extreme and a sense of complete inner peace and a union with cosmic divinity on the other extreme—Ikeda further explains that each of the ten worlds contains within it the other nine. In a flash, any of us can instantaneously move between these worlds, and Ikeda explains that by understanding this concept, we can develop the capacity to have a much deeper understanding of ourselves and others. For educators, this is especially true since each student is grappling with their own complex challenges, as educators do, too. An understanding of this concept also helps educators develop what Schwab (1954) called “his best-beloved self” (p. 65). The idea of the mutual possession of the ten worlds acknowledges and embraces the full extent of our humanity—with all of our flaws and in our full grandeur.

Understanding the concept of the mutual possession of the ten worlds helps teachers expand both their understanding of and compassion for their students. For example, if a student is acting out in class—as represented by the world of animality or anger--the teacher can recognize that this is a temporary state the child is in and challenge him/herself to believe in the child enough to know that child also has the other nine worlds within. For the educator, this kind of theoretical understanding can help in developing self-mastery and re-focus the teacher’s mind to a place of compassion for the student, rather than engaging with the student from the world of anger. Furthermore, this concept supports teachers in fully believing in students’ immense potentiality.

### *Human revolution*

In simplest terms, the concept of “human revolution” is a deep internal shift in how we understand ourselves and our lives, but it comes from the idea that knowledge in

and of itself may or may not be used to improve life for humanity. Human revolution is an inner process that allows us to bring forth wisdom from knowledge. Ikeda shared that his mentor, Josei Toda, a Japanese educator who was also jailed with Makiguchi as a “thought criminal” during World War II for resisting Japan’s military government, believed that modern man was deluded to confuse knowledge for wisdom since knowledge led to the creation of nuclear weapons, which indiscriminately killed thousands of innocent people during World War II (Unger & Ikeda, 2016). The challenge, then, is to recognize that knowledge may be used to improve the condition of humankind or to cause further widespread annihilation. Ikeda insists we need wisdom so the knowledge we develop is used to support human growth and peace, rather than further destruction.

Ikeda (2013/2010) further clarifies that wisdom emerges through a process of human revolution, which he refers to as “the inner spiritual transformation of each individual” (p. 152). In an address to the University of Havana in 1996, Ikeda tied his ideas about human revolution to those of José Martí, as well as Walt Whitman, when he shared about the importance of expanding our inner lives in order to develop a genuine respect for the “sanctity of life.” At that time, Ikeda (2013/2010) said, that “the process of human revolution, bringing forth the inner sun, is the motive force that can enhance solidarity among people, lead to the prosperity of society, and create peace for humankind” (p. 125). According to Ikeda, there is a clear and direct link between the inner spiritual work on the individual level and peace on a global level (Goulah, 2010c; Nagashima, 2012; Sherman, 2016). For Soka educators, this is crucial to understand as a

key theoretical concept—since Ikeda is suggesting that teachers can so profoundly impact their students. This process begins with teachers’ inner spiritual “human revolution,” which can ultimately lead to creating a peaceful world, but such a process requires much self-reflection and the humble spirit to continue to learn and grow.

Ikeda’s theoretical notion of human revolution is a concept very similar to core ideas of Martin Buber. For example, Avnon (1998) explains how Buber recognizes the incontrovertible link between an inner transformation and greater social changes when he writes, “profound, effective revolutions are reflections of ontological turning points and are manifested in deeds of singular individuals whose personal ‘turnings’ towards being challenge conventional ontology and create new forms of relation to being” (p. 100). Further, Avnon (1998) writes that “Buber considered change of attitude to the nature of being to be the hidden, but nonetheless decisive, factor determining one’s perception of reality” (p. 152). Much like Ikeda, Buber recognizes that a profound internal spiritual shift within a single person and their understanding of themselves in relation to others and the cosmos has a profound impact on ontology, which ultimately shifts everything in the universe. It is for this reason that human revolution is a central theoretical concept of Soka education; it suggests teachers need deeply reflect on themselves and the profound impact their inner world has on their students.

Again, the conceptual framework that undergirds Soka educational philosophy consists of the four theoretical/conceptual ideas of: “theory of value,” dependent origination, mutual possession of ten world, and human revolution. A common thread within these philosophical constructs that forms the core of Soka educational philosophy

is the connection between human agency and action, with the focus on students' lifelong well-being and ultimately recognizing a shared responsibility to make substantive transformations to create a more peaceful and just world. These theoretical constructs, then, are the root system of the educational processes that drive Soka education in action, the focus of this research.

#### **5.4. Methodology**

##### *Overview of Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative inquiry was utilized in this research to better understand how practicing self-identified Soka educators in Brazil make meaning of their experiences and identities as Soka educators. Dewey is the progressive educator whose ideas are most closely associated with narrative inquiry--possibly because of his conviction that education is much more expansive than the narrow cognitive functions often associated with schooling. In Article II of "My Pedagogic Creed," Dewey (1897) famously proclaimed that "education, therefore is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 22). The educative aspects of living espoused by Dewey served as the impetus for a philosophical shift in how to educate and the role of schools; that shift simultaneously birthed many ideas in how to study education, one of which is narrative inquiry.

Xu and Connelly (2010) argue that "the key dimensions in Dewey's analysis of experience are temporality (past, present, future) and personal-social" (p. 360); and Clandinin and Connelly further extended these ideas by adding the component of *place* to Dewey's construct (as cited in Xu & Connelly, 2010)-- "to generate what they call a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, i.e., the life space" (p. 361). Temporality,

person-social, and life-space, then, are the three central components that comprise narrative inquiry.

With the dramatic change Dewey suggested in terms of seeing education linked to the lived experiences of students, a new way to research education beyond the traditional scientific and positivistic perspective was needed. Much like Dewey's educational philosophy revolutionized how we view education, Elliott Eisner (1988) suggests that "method influences how we think and what we are permitted to feel" (p. 19)--urging researchers to consider a fresh methodological approach to study education. Eisner (1988) further insists of the importance of researchers going "back to the schools, not to conduct commando raids, but to work with teachers as colleagues in a common quest and through such collaboration to rediscover the qualities, the complexities, and the richness of life in classrooms" (p. 19). Narrative inquiry, then, is a research method that places the researcher side by side with educators to make meaning of experiences and does not view teachers as "subjects" to be studied; rather narrative inquiry is based on respectful, reciprocal relationships in which the researcher and educators are able to learn and make meaning together.

#### *Key concepts in narrative inquiry*

This study uses narrative inquiry as its method of research, which is not simply research based on people's narratives; it is both a way to conduct research, much like a research "lens," as well as a tool of analysis. Defining narrative inquiry is equally as challenging as it is to define Soka education because both are dynamic processes that challenge scholars to provide simple definitions. However, the two scholars most linked

to generating the ideas of narrative inquiry are Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000), who began their research in the 1980s by connecting with a philosopher named Mark Johnson. At that time, Clandinin and Connelly began theorizing about teachers' *personal practical knowledge* and how teachers use images, or metaphors, to describe their experiences.

Fenstermacher (1994) explains the central ideas that emerged in relation to narrative inquiry are “the notions of story, image, narrative, narrative unity, and embodied knowledge [which] are all central to the Connelly and Clandinin research program” (p. 11). A central component of narrative inquiry as a methodology for scholarly research is its emphasis on the collaborative and relational spirit, which collapses power dynamics and is grounded in an air of respect and trust. For Connelly and Clandinin (1990), educators and researchers are constantly “engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories” (p. 4). This is a distinctive quality of this research.

In a foundational article on narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) provide clarity on the method, distinguishing some nuanced differences; for example, they write of how they call “the phenomenon ‘story’ and the inquiry ‘narrative.’ Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 29). The process and form of narrative inquiry, then is fluid, dynamic, dialogical and collaborative--as part of me, as the researcher has intertwined my stories with the stories of the teachers interviewed; in the process of sharing the teachers' stories, a “new story” has emerged, which is then further

reconstructed and re-storied as you the reader interact with it (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In the context of this research, I am studying the phenomenon of “self-identified Soka educators in Brazil,” which is the “Soka educator story,” and the “story” I co-created through my visits with and interviews of Soka educators, which was my inquiry, is called “the narrative.”

Narrative inquiry, then, is a dynamic relational process replete with inquiry tools to support researchers in conducting the research, as well as to aid in writing narratives to describe the educative experiences. Such terms connected to narrative inquiry include *burrowing* (digging deeper to link emotions to stories), *broadening* (widening the scope of stories), *storying-restorying* (recreating new stories with fresh perspectives), and *fictionalization* (using pseudonyms or story compilations to honor confidentiality) (Ciuffetelli Parker & Craig, 2017; Craig, Zou, & Curtis, 2018; Craig, You & Oh, 2014). Cheryl Craig (1999, 2003, 2007) built upon the foundational ideas of narrative inquiry first theorized by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) by providing examples that shine a light on the complex experiences of teachers in schools; these types of narratives are: *sacred stories* (which are never questioned), *cover stories* (that hide the expected plotline), *teacher stories* (the narratives teachers tell), *stories of teachers* (stories tell about teachers), *school stories* (stories told from the school’s view), *stories of school* (what others say about the school), *parallel stories* (stories studied simultaneously), and *story constellations* (overlying multiple stories, which together tell a narrative from various tellers).

Narrative inquiry, as a form of qualitative research, includes a mutuality that distinguishes it from ethnography, for example; Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that “what emerges from this mutual relationship are new stories of teachers and learners as curriculum makers, stories that hold new possibilities for both researchers and teachers and for those who read their stories” (p. 12). This, then, is another key aspect of narrative inquiry that makes it such a suitable method to use to research about Soka education: the notion of teachers as *curriculum makers*.

#### *Teachers as curriculum makers*

A central construct linked to narrative inquiry was first theorized by Clandinin and Connelly (1992) in a paper naming that idea: “Teacher as Curriculum Maker.” At its core, this means that “the teacher is an integral part of the curriculum constructed and enacted in the classroom” (p. 363). This perspective counters a utilitarian view of teachers, which considers teachers as “curriculum implementers.” Clandinin and Connelly (1992) counter the traditional notion of teachers as conduits or cogs in a mechanistic school “apparatus” tied to the business-model view that “curriculum has been seen as an instrument of school reform and teachers as mediators between the curriculum and intended outcomes” (p. 367). Clandinin and Connelly primarily draw from and reinterpret the ideas of Ralph Tyler and Joseph Schwab, by including the important aspect of teacher agency.

Craig and Ross (2008) wrote an extensive chapter on how the ideas of “teachers as curriculum maker” have taken root and been further theorized since Clandinin and Connelly’s 1992 article. With regards to teacher development, Craig and Ross (2008)

“adopt Schwab’s view that human capacities and incapacities can be developed” (p. 283). While some teachers may see teaching as a “calling,” developing skills in teaching, according to Schwab, is a capacity that can be further developed and nurtured. The key point, however, is how researchers in education view teachers. The metaphor of “teachers as curriculum makers” centers narratives on teachers’ lived experiences and holds them up.

Schwab (1983) is clear about respecting, acknowledging and honoring teachers’ knowledge, saying: “teachers practice an art” (p. 245) in which countless critical decisions are made daily. Teachers use their practical knowledge and agency in their behaviors and approaches in moment-by-moment decisions; Schwab insists that teachers do not simply work in an assembly line as workers who are told what to do and how to do it.

It is for this very reason that narrative inquiry is a dialogical and collaborative approach and is a research method that honors and includes teachers’ voices as being central. Scholars of narrative inquiry, then, insist on the primacy of viewing teachers as curriculum makers who are positioned at the heart of the formal educative process. The notion of valuing teachers’ epistemology and practical knowledge as a central component in education, while recognizing educators’ aim and purpose is to “liberate, not to captivate, the student” (Schwab, 1954, p. 65) perfectly aligns with the use of narrative inquiry as a means and form to make meaning of teachers’ experiences.

## **5.5. Data**

The data section of this article begins with providing necessary historical context that serves as a background for how and why Soka education developed in Brazil. I then provide a brief description of participants and include vignettes with quotes that reflect the most cogent or salient points participants made that I felt reflected the essence of their thoughts at the time I interviewed them. Each person's story is like a living, breathing "entity" they have entrusted to me, and I want to give those stories the honor and respect they deserve. It is my hope that these images and stories provide a rich space to enter into and consider the ideas, thoughts, and hearts of those who shared them. What sense do these educators make about their experiences as Soka educators? In what ways might their views of themselves as Soka educators be distinct from other approaches to education and ways to teach? For this research, the participants were selected through a process of purposeful selection. (Maxwell, 2013).

The sampling for this study is small and purposeful, due to the narrow focus on how Soka education is being put into practice in Brazil. I contacted the administrative staff at both the Brazil Soka School (BSS) and the SEA before arriving in Brazil, and I asked for their initial recommendations. As I spent time at both sites, I began to interact with educators, which allowed for a snowball effect (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) that expanded the people with whom I had the opportunity to interact. Based on interviews and focus groups conducted at both sites, I chose to focus on the interview of 6 educators and 1 focus group for this narrative inquiry--considering diversity of age, experience, background, and varying levels of previous knowledge of Soka education.

I primarily used the software program Dedoose, as a support for data analysis, to help recognize themes as they emerged and were identified for the data analysis of field notes, memos, focus groups, and transcripts from interviews conducted both in the field (while in Brazil) and upon my return. The data analysis also involved going through the data on multiple occasions to glean the patterns that emerged.

For this paper, I focus on a total of 10 self-identified Soka educators—3 from the focus group at Soka Education in Action (SEA), the founder of SEA and former principal of *Escola Soka do Brasil* – Brazil Soka School (BSS), as well as 6 current educators at BSS. Primarily, I engage the tools of the methodology of narrative inquiry, using their voices and stories, my observations, and interviews, which all function to triangulate the data in order to confirm findings. Also, once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I continued to connect with the participants in order to further triangulate the data and ensure fidelity of their stories. Maxwell (2013) explains that member checking includes “systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying” (p. 126), which has been integral to this study. All of the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, except for one, and I personally translated 8 of the 10 interviews from Portuguese to English. While more interviews and focus groups were also conducted, this paper only includes the voices of those participants indicated in Table 2 on page 189, which summarizes pertinent information about the participants. Future articles will include the voices of those participants who were not included in this paper, using various approaches of analysis in narrative inquiry.

Table 2				
<i>Summary of Information on Participants (pseudonyms are used)</i>				
Pseudonym	Age	Connection to research	Previous experience(s)	Gender
Delia	85	First director of Education Coordinating Group & 1st principal of BSS	Principal at BSS from 2001-2006 & 2007-2008	F
Adelisa	65	Focus Group – Soka Education in Action	Special Ed, art, and literacy teacher for 5 years; worked on Literacy Project 1994-2001 & with SEA 2001-2018	F
Olimipia	62	Focus Group – Soka Education in Action	Retired office worker; Volunteer Leader of SEA	F
Maria	56	Focus Group – Soka Education in Action	Former teacher; Volunteer with SEA since 2002.	F
Marcia	37	Administrator & former teacher at BSS; studied at Soka University of America for BA & MA	Taught ESL at Tokyo Soka Jr. High & High School in Japan	F
Antonio	28	Geography and Environmental Systems IB teachers at BSS	Has been working in education since he was 19	M
Lidia	34	Physics teacher at BSS	8 years as a teacher at another school	F
David	37	Chemistry teacher at BSS	8 years as a teacher at another school	M
Mauricio	33	PE teacher at BSS	Began teaching career at BSS in 2009	M
Valeria	35	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at BSS	12 years as a teacher at another school	F

## 5.6. History of Soka Education in Action (SEA): A contextual understanding

The Department of Soka Education in Action (SEA), is a network of retired volunteers throughout Brazil who provide monthly professional development activities in public schools over the course of a school year, with the goal to share essential principles of Soka educational philosophy through using arts-based and/or gardening activities that teachers can replicate with their students. SEA is one of four education-related programs that seek to widely share ideas of Soka educational philosophy throughout Brazil that are part of the *Coordenadoria Educacional*, (“the *Coordenadoria*”), an Educators Coordinating Group focusing on diffusing principles of Soka educational philosophy to support teachers, students, and families.

Based on interviews and information from both their website and a brochure, I learned that the other three projects are: 1) DEPEDUC—the Department of Studies and Practices in the Science of Education, which focuses on conducting and disseminating research on Soka education; 2) DEPEHUS – The Department of Humanistic Soka Education, which focuses on literacy development of youth and adults; and 3) DEPOHPE, the Department of Humanistic Orientation for Parents and Students, which provides support to teachers, parents, and children who may be facing difficult situations and seeking humanistic solutions based on principles of Soka educational philosophy.

While conducting research in Brazil, I spent approximately five full days becoming familiar with the programs and the volunteers who support the *Coordenadoria*. Even though I attended several meetings and met with many volunteers, this section of the research focuses on an interview with the first leader of the

*Coordenadoria*, a woman named Delia. This section also includes information from a focus group with 3 women, Maria, Adelisa, and Olimpia, who volunteered to take leadership roles in the SEA Project. Also, I attended an activity at a public school with Olimpia and I witnessed how the SEA is first introduced at a public school, which was similar to an activity I observed when I conducted research in Brazil in 2015.

The SEA volunteers throughout Brazil conduct various activities in schools, but the informal Soka educators for this research were focused in the metropolitan São Paulo area. SEA, which was previously referred to as the Makiguchi Project in Action, began in 1994 at Caetano de Campos Elementary and Secondary State School in São Paulo (Silva, 2000), and at that time, the retired volunteers who worked with the teachers focused on gardening and craft activities. However, the roots of SEA go further back to adult literacy programs in São Paulo, MOBREAL (*Movimento Brasileiro Alfabetização*—Brazilian Movement for Literacy), which operated during the 1970s and 1980s (Lopes-Correa, 1976).

A 1975 UNESCO report on MOBREAL, indicates that one-third of Brazil's population was illiterate according to the 1970 census, which resulted in the federal government passing legislation to provide widespread funding for literacy classes throughout Brazil. The law was passed because the UNESCO report (1975) reveals that only literate adults were able to obtain voter registration cards and be granted the right to vote; yet those who “present a certificate of literacy by MOBREAL are entered on the electoral register without difficulty” (p.11). Gadotti (1994) makes it very clear that “in Brazil, the alphabetization programs financed by the federal program, like MOBREAL

have ignored Paulo Freire’s method, in spite of their using some of his techniques” (p. 124). While Freire’s ideas linked literacy to liberation through consciousness-raising, the way MOBRAL was implemented was not based on the philosophy Freire outlines in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2012); however, MOBRAL did co-opt many of Freire’s successful literacy techniques.

For example, chapter 3 of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* goes into great details on a dialogical-based approach to literacy that involves teachers engaging with students to develop generative themes. Interestingly, Lopes-Correa (1976) explains MOBRAL’s specific techniques that also include developing generative themes as an approach to teach literacy, but the ideological and political ideas of Freire are not mentioned at all. While it is beyond the scope of this research, it is pertinent to recognize that many Brazilian students/scholars have written theses and dissertations about MOBRAL--questioning whether its intent was to “liberate” Brazilians (as a Freirian perspective would suggest) or to maintain the status quo. It is, however, important to acknowledge that there is a clear link between the emergence of Soka educational philosophy in Brazil and the high rates of illiteracy that prompted the Brazilian federal government to take action and create MOBRAL. Freire’s ideas, like Makiguchi’s and Ikeda’s center on humanizing students and finding educative ways to support teachers and students to seek grassroots and human-centered solutions to political quagmires.

Details of the Brazilian federally-funded adult literacy program, MOBRAL, are told through the story of one of the program’s supervisors, a woman named Delia Hiramoto (pseudonym). I first met Delia in 2015, and at that time, she shared the

following story with me, which she repeated when I visited with her again 3 years later in 2018; I also heard others recount this same story.

Delia is a short Japanese-Brazilian woman who is both petite in stature and unusually strong in her constitution. Delia exudes strength and conviction, and though she celebrated her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday during the time of this research, she presents herself as a woman with whom you would not want to mess. She speaks with pride and confidence about her role as a pioneer of Soka education in Brazil who overcame much criticism and numerous obstacles in her efforts to ensure that the principles of Soka educational philosophy be put into practice and take root in Brazil. Delia worked with the literacy project, MOBREAL, and she later developed the Makiguchi Project in Action, which is now called Soka Education in Action (SEA). Finally, in 2001, she secured permission from the Soka Gakuen in Tokyo, and she opened the Brazil Soka School; she served as its principal from 2001-2006 and 2007-2008. Delia's story recounts the very earliest roots of the founding of SEA and the Brazil Soka School (BSS).

#### *Defecation as Dissidence*

Delia's graphic story is illustrative of how some Brazilians found ways to take action to protest inhumane conditions. Regardless of rules—even during the dictatorial military rules in the 1960s and 1970s--many Brazilians creatively expressed their views and frustrations with personal or social injustices. I often heard stories how protests were interwoven and embedded viscerally through song and dance. Delia's story provides a show of bodily protest.

**Vicki:** Can you share with me some of the history of how Soka education started in Brazil?

**Delia:** In the 1970s and 1980s, MOBREAL was a literacy program for adults. I was a supervisor in that program for four years. This literacy program was done in 400 hours. They didn't have bathrooms, paper, coffee--nothing...the facilities were filthy, dirty and substandard. This one teacher wrote 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' and repeatedly told the students to copy, copy, copy. I would watch this going on each evening. No one could stand it. It was terrible. Students worked hard, came to class exhausted, dirty, illiterate, and had to copy endlessly over the course of 400 hours from 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. every night! It's like teaching donkeys to carry bricks. And I said, 'Ah, so that's how it's going to be ...' No coffee, no bathrooms--nothing. It was so dirty. The students came from work--smelly--oil rig workers, construction workers--and they came directly from work. There were 40 students in one class. The teacher went crazy one night. She told them, 'Copy, copy, copy' (what she had written on the board). She wasn't teaching anything.

One day, there was a lot of chaos and confusion at the school. A student got on top of the teacher's desk and pooped, and he told her, 'Eat, eat, eat!' That was the teacher who always said, 'Copy, copy, copy.' It was an adult student and he told her, 'Eat, eat, eat' after he pooped on top of her desk. I could not stand it. I quit. I ran out of there. Soon after that, I went to the Ministry of Education. At that time, I made the determination to start a literacy project for 40 hours. From 1983-1988, I trained 5 volunteer teachers to do a 40-hour literacy program. From a 400-hour literacy program, I reduced it down to 40 hours. In 1988, we graduated 200 students in 40 hours. Ten nights--four hours a night--for them to learn how to read and write.

Delia went on to share how the drastically modified literacy program she co-created with other educators was much more successful than they could have imagined. Students were grateful that it did not require the same amount of time, and she won the praise of school officials who saw their great success.

Delia's story recounts how the earliest roots of Soka educational philosophy initially took root in Brazil because of a corporeal act of defiance by an adult student, which served to inspire and motivate her to take action. A confluence of factors merged:

- 1) Delia witnessed firsthand the dehumanizing aspects of literacy education at that time in Brazil. Even though the core ideas of MOBREAL were rooted in Freirian techniques,

in practice, they were very dehumanizing. 2) Ikeda visited Brazil in 1984, and at that time, he asked her to be in charge of the “*Coordenadoria*,” the Education Department;” based on this, she felt empowered and emboldened to push forward with the many ideas she had about how to share Soka educational philosophy in Brazil. 3) After experiencing success with the 40-hour adult literacy program, Delia organized “hundreds” of seminars to study Soka educational philosophy, and their main focus was Makiguchi’s book “Education for Creative Living,” which was Bethel’s English translation that was translated into Portuguese and published in 1994 (Silva, 2000).

In the course of organizing seminars that included in-depth studies of Makiguchi’s ideas about education, the Makiguchi Project in Action (now called “Soka Education in Action”) was formed as a vehicle to share those ideas so that teachers in public schools could benefit from applying ideas from Makiguchi and Ikeda to their teaching practices. Delia described it this way: “We went into other schools. We touched their [teachers’] hearts and won their trust and that way, we could do the project in other schools. Lots of schools requested we come to their school. We took origami, gardening, and arts projects.” This same model continues to this day.

This was how Soka Education in Action as it is put into practice in Brazil today began: based on righteous anger and outrage about the ways adult students were being treated, Delia determined to create value by considering other ways to achieve the same goal (adult literacy). She enlisted other educators in her efforts, and together, they engaged in deep study about Soka education. Their study and dialogue led to the question of how can we—in our current circumstances—apply these ideas to educating

children? This period of intense study of Makiguchi's ideas happened as Brazil emerged from 20 years under dictatorial rule. The principles of the project "Soka Education in Action" initiated by Delia and a small group of volunteers continue to thrive today.

*The "golden girls" focus group – Soka Education in Action*

Since this research consists of exploring ways Soka educators who work in the Brazil Soka School ("formal" Soka education) and in "third spaces" through professional development at public schools ("informal" Soka education), my time was spent in both spaces. A very obvious distinction between the two spaces was the age of the educators. The vast majority of teachers and staff at the Brazil Soka School were relatively young (mostly in their 20s, 30s, and 40s), as compared to the retired volunteer educators at the Coordenadoria (mostly in their 50s, 60s, 70s). At the Coordenadoria, I conducted a focus group with Adelisa, Olimpia, and Maria, all of whom had been volunteering with the Soka Education in Action Program for 20-30 years. Each of them shared about the volunteer work they do with such enthusiasm, emotion, and passion—emphasizing how impactful they believe the work they are doing is for the public-school teachers who participate, as well as for the volunteers from SEA.

For example, Maria explains how she internalized so many ideas about Soka educational philosophy, based on her study and work in the community. She says:

I'm not just a Soka educator when I go to the schools and do the activities, but I've incorporated the ideas in my life. I'm a Soka educator with my children, with my family, with my neighbors. So, everything I do and how I treat others, how I share with others--even how I show how...even with my sons, who are grown now...I feel very satisfied about how I raised them and what I did to apply those ideas with them. And it's connected to what I learned about Soka education. So, I see the results. If I go to the store or talk with someone--to have

this empathy or compassion and wisdom--it's about applying these ideas and living them in how we are involved with others.

Olimpia and Adelisa nodded vigorously as Maria spoke, and they periodically interjected their similar views. The women in the focus group—despite their age—were energetic, enthusiastic, and shared unbridled passion about the volunteer work they do. This notion of internalizing ideas about Soka educational philosophy was echoed by many of the educators I met.

*Adelisa: Challenging physical limitations to share Soka educational philosophy*

Adelisa was one of the 3 women who was in the focus group I held at the *Coordenadoria*. In 2015, I conducted research as part of my master's degree thesis in Brazil --wondering how Soka schools and Freirean popular education programs maintain fidelity to their core principles and values. At that time, I was able to go to a public school in São Paulo when they had their first school-wide teachers' orientation to the Makiguchi Project in Action (now Soka Education in Action). Even though it was not my focus of study at the time, I witnessed the following event.

Adelisa was the presenter that day in 2015; she is a petite Brazilian woman of Japanese descent who appears to be in her 60s. She has bangs and a “page-boy” style haircut that is shoulder-length. Her big smile lights up her face as her eyes shine just above her high cheekbones. As I watched her present that day in 2015 when she began the orientation, I could not help but notice that her hands had bulging knuckles and she had difficulty moving her fingers--symptoms of crippling rheumatoid arthritis. What struck me was how she did not allow her physical challenges to stop her from conducting the brief workshop that day. When I saw her again in 2018, she was walking

with a limp and a cane; and yet, she attended all of the activities at the *Coordenadoria* while I was there. Her determined spirit moved me, as I saw her struggling to walk up a hill to get to the Metro when she left the *Coordenadoria*.

I remembered three years earlier--on that June afternoon in 2015. It was the end of the school day, and as the teachers walked into the large classroom, they did not hide their frustration and unhappiness about a late afternoon schoolwide meeting—a familiar and universal feeling shared by educators everywhere. Some were particularly vocal and clear about their displeasure to have this extra afternoon meeting. Other volunteers were there with Adelisa, but she was in charge of the introductory activity and meeting.

She talked about Makiguchi and how he was a Japanese humanistic educator who died in prison, protesting Japan's military government before and during World War II. His ideas, she explained, touched her heart, and she was at the school with other volunteers to explain some of Makiguchi's educational ideas and to do an activity with them. She shared that a focus of his ideas was the lifelong happiness of each child, and as teachers, our challenge is how to keep that in mind, while also recognizing that each child has immense potential within. She suggested that the teachers needed to consider children's well-being while also being required to teach the national curriculum.

At that point, she shared with the teachers that everyone would be making a "Bahiano" rag doll. Strips of cloth had been precut and placed inside a plastic bag by other volunteers; each teacher was given a bag, and Adelisa gave instructions, while she asked another volunteer to demonstrate how to tie the pieces of cloth. Each doll had a head, arms, legs, dress and scarf, and it was clear that the teachers were enjoying the

process. Once everyone in the room had made a doll, Adelisa instructed them to turn to a neighbor sitting next to them, and they were to exchange dolls. The energy in the room changed dramatically, as everyone exchanged dolls and admired the ones their neighbor had made.

Adelisa got their attention, and engaged the teachers to discuss the process they just experienced and how everything took a turn when they exchanged their dolls. What lessons could we learn from this? What happens—both when we give and receive—and when we validate the person in front of us? Every single teacher had been engaged in the doll-making process and was engaged in the discussion. One teacher opened up that she had been feeling like she was literally drowning because of all the pressures from teaching, but that simple activity and interactions with her colleagues strangely renewed some kind of hope within her. In a small, but significant way, every teacher in that room had experienced some kind of shift within themselves.

Through this simple activity, they were able to see themselves and others with a different lens. Many had struggled to create the doll, and then, they had the experience of exchanging with someone else. Many educative life lessons could be explored from this simple activity. The teachers then had many questions for Adelisa. What exactly is the “project” they do? What other kinds of activities would they be doing? How does it relate to their roles as teachers? How often would they come and for how long? She patiently answered their questions:

This ‘project’ (SEA) is organized by a network of local volunteers who want to share the Soka educational ideas of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Daisaku Ikeda. The team of volunteers, consists of 5-7 (mostly) women, who come to the school once a month throughout the school year and do activities with the teachers for 1

½ - 2 hours—for 8 sessions in the course of the school year. The activities they do serve to spark dialogue and consider ideas about teaching; oftentimes, they are also activities they could do with their own students, like creating a terrarium, and they have suggestions of ways to include the ideas in their curriculum.

Adelisa asked, “Are there any more questions?” A teacher raised her hand and asked, “When will you all come back?” The energy in the room as the teachers left shifted dramatically from barely one hour before when they reluctantly shuffled in at first.

Witnessing this teacher professional development activity in 2015 that had been planned, organized and conducted by a group of local volunteers peaked my interest, and when I decided to further my education and work towards a doctoral degree, I decided to go back to Brazil and study both formal and informal Soka education in Brazil, in order to begin to understand what are the qualities of Soka educators and how, as a teacher educator, I can articulate what those qualities are, while also seeking out ways to foster those qualities in teachers.

*Adelisa’s views: Developing teachers’ hearts is paramount*

During our time in the focus group, Adelisa was able to fully articulate her views about what she considered to be the quintessential qualities of a Soka educator. Her ruminations deserve to be included in their entirety:

When I was a teacher, I had a way of seeing students that each of them was someone with potential. My worry was how to pass the curricular knowledge to the student. When I learned about Soka education and I was no longer a classroom teacher, I saw that the educative action was for the teacher to visualize the student to help that student develop into a child...a human being... who will become happy. It’s not just that you’re my student and I need to do my part to teach the class. When we can feel that the teacher helps each student change and help each child overcome whatever difficulty...the teacher can only help the students overcome their problems when the teacher worries about the human being she/he is responsible for and that she/he is caring for the life of this human being.

Adelisa is articulating a significant epistemological shift in her understanding of her role as an educator who sees her role going far beyond curricular implementation and as the one who is the “holder” of knowledge and skills that must be conveyed and transferred to the children she teaches. Rather, she came to see her role grounded in deep and meaningful care for students’ lives.

Adelisa, who was one of the volunteers who initially worked with Delia, shared:

And on the other side, Soka education and the pedagogy of Makiguchi shows us this--that we have to think about the happiness of the student. Another thing that was really rooted in me is that I needed to believe in the potential of the student and cultivate this potential for the good of the student and for society. So, something I treasure and truly believe in that is part of the educative story of Makiguchi--as volunteers who do this work, we have to really advance the conditions of each one. If the teacher has problems and is not centering his/her heart [on the child’s happiness], it won’t work. So, one of the main things I talk about when we go into the schools is to motivate and help the teachers recognize that they are the most important ones in the lives of the children. Separate from that point--that the teacher plays the most important part in students’ lives--is not what we teach to the teachers, but in truth, it’s what we want is to help them move their hearts because when teachers have this kind of heart and see children in this way, there really is not a technique or anything.

Adelisa clarifies three very important aspects of Soka educational philosophy in action:

1) the power of teachers to claim their agency and take action in the midst of their circumstances; 2) how essential it is for teachers to reflect on their hearts and develop genuine care and concern for their students, along with a recognition of students’ immense potential; and 3) the importance of teachers centering their work on their students’ development beyond their own personal issues.

She concluded:

This is what makes the students feel confidence, respect and appreciation for the teacher. We help the teachers create possibilities to have this kind of connection

with students. I think the most important thing...the most important quality is the person as a Soka educator is to have this kind of heart--the kind of heart that sees each student in this way: I am caring for this child's life and this child must become happy in their lifetime.

In Adelisa's words, it is very clear to recognize a teacher who has internalized central ideas of Soka educational philosophy and whose embodied knowledge is expressed in words. She goes back again and again to this point: it is the heart of the educator that is so vital in the educative process for students. This clear, unapologetic and fiercely determined spirit to support students to contribute to their becoming happy in this lifetime is a pillar of Soka educational philosophy.

For Adelisa, then, her role is to awaken within teachers how important they are in the lives of each child they teach. As she shared, it is not about the technique, but about helping teachers develop the heart to authentically believe in each child's potentiality. As a Soka, or value-creating educator, Adelisa recognizes that her challenge as a volunteer who is sharing ideas about Soka educational philosophy is how to help teachers develop that kind of heart towards their students. The activities the volunteers create and use in Soka Education in Action serve as vehicles and discussion-starters to open up deeper dialogues about core ideas of Soka educational philosophy.

#### *Seeing Soka Education in Action at a school*

Olimpia invited me to accompany her and 3 volunteers to see how they introduce the project to a school; it was the only time I felt seriously concerned about my safety in Brazil. One reason was that the neighborhood where the school was located was on the very fringe of São Paulo. After we exited the last Metro stop, we needed to go further into the neighborhood to reach the school, but we encountered two issues: there were no

taxis around anywhere and we had no cellular service so we could not use a rideshare company like Uber; we were not even sure if there were Uber drivers out there. Olimpia managed to call the teacher who had invited us, and she met us at the Metro station.

We drove for 15-20 minutes, and one thing I noticed was there were absolutely no shops anywhere, which is unusual in urban areas of Brazil—to see small corner stores or shops sprinkled throughout the neighborhoods is very common, but in this area, there were none. I also noticed a lot of boarded up homes, which again, is not very common. When we arrived, I was surprised to see an Olympic-size pool directly behind the school. The assistant principal gave us a tour, and we learned that this school is one of only a handful of “cells,” which are schools linked to a recreation center, library, university, and social service facility. Physically, the facility was impressive—with a large auditorium, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a community garden, and various offices to house the different entities that support the community members. Since it was the first day of summer break, the pool was packed and children were running around everywhere. We met in one of the rooms connected to the library, and I was surprised that some youth were openly smoking marijuana right outside of our open window. The teachers shared that many of the boarded-up houses were drug houses and that this was their biggest challenge and issue they had to face.

The teachers were open, receptive and excited to learn about the Soka Education in Action’s activities and ideas, and an agreement was made to begin the monthly professional development activities when school re-opens for the new school year after Carnival in February. Olimpia was concerned about making sure there are enough

volunteers in the community to support the project at this site. When it was time to leave, the teachers told us we could take a bus that runs through the neighborhood back to the Metro station; one of the teachers walked us to the gate that surrounds the facility to wait for the bus, which was across the street. She stayed with us until the bus came and told us to stay in the fenced area of the facility and not to wait across the street for our own safety; she made sure to stay with us and repeated that warning several times. She was clearly concerned we would step out of the gate of the facility and be in danger if we waited at the bus stop just across the street.

When the bus arrived, we got on in the front, and 3 little boys got on the bus through the back door; they were no older than 7 years old, and the bus driver told them they could get on if they sat in the back of the bus. Unaccompanied, these 3 little boys took a bus and I imagine they spent the day in São Paulo. As the bus filled up with each stop, I lost sight of them, but the image of the 3 young boys by themselves sitting at the back of the bus stayed with me. While I acknowledged within myself some doubts about the impact of such a project as Soka Education in Action in a school setting such as the one we had visited, I remembered the complete conviction Olimpia, Adelisa, and Maria shared about the success of the Soka Education in Action, as they had expressed their views to me when we met:

**Adelisa:** Well for me, for example, so many times I wanted to quit working with this project, but for me to see the results of a teacher making a difference with students this renews me to continue because in education you don't see the immediate results. Sometimes a teacher might see progress through grades, but teachers can't see day to day progress.

**Vicki:** So, have you all seen this?

**Everyone:** Yes, we have all seen this!

**Adelisa:** We see this. For example, we went back to a school two years later because a teacher left a school, but remained in contact with me. One teacher said, ‘I will never forget what you all taught me in relation to seeing negative things and turning them into something positive.’ I cried that day. It was five years since I had seen that teacher and she told me that. She did not have that perspective before, but she learned a new way to see things. I think we are only going to be able to make a difference if we can transmit to teachers about creating value. If the teachers see the results.

**Vicki:** So, what you are saying is that it makes a change in the teachers’ heart?

**Adelisa:** The school directors can tell the difference. More than that, the academic dean can see the difference. But what I think is this; that who sees the difference the most are the students. This is because teachers’ interactions with the students are different after they apply these principles.

**Vicki:** So, you all are doing Soka teacher education in your own way?

**Everyone:** Yes, that is it!

Through a follow-up communication with Olimpia, who has taken on a leadership role in the Soka Education Action Project, she shared with me about more details of the Soka Education in Action. In São Paulo, there are currently 30 teams, with a total of 210 volunteers. In all of Brazil, there is a total of 48 teams, with 336 volunteers—in 20 cities throughout Brazil in various schools. In the training since they first began in 1994 with only one team, SEA has supported over 900 schools, 12,286 teachers were trained, with their impact reaching 284,728 students who benefitted from their workshop activities. In February of 2019, the *Coordenadoria* celebrated 35 years of spreading Soka educational philosophy in Brazil. Throughout Brazil, each locality has a similar format, but topics offered in the professional development depend on the creativity of local volunteers; their commonality is a focus on principles of Soka educational philosophy.

For instance, while I was conducting this research, I met a volunteer from SEA who lived in one of the northernmost cities in Brazil, Boa Vista, on the border of

Venezuela. Since Venezuela recently experienced serious political turmoil, hundreds of thousands (70,000) Venezuelans fled their country and entered Brazil through her town of 580,000. As a local SEA leader in her community, she mobilized the other volunteers and they worked with teachers in the refugee camps to support the Brazilian teachers in the refugee camps, since teachers did not know Spanish and the children did not know Portuguese. This was an example of how local SEA volunteers organized themselves to “create value” under the circumstances of having refugee camps spring up in their city practically overnight. They immediately took action to find ways to support the teachers at the camps so the teachers in the camps could feel supported in their work with the refugee children arriving in their city—with myriad challenges. This was a concrete example of informal Soka education in action and creating value in dire circumstances.

### **5.7. The Brazil Soka School: Contextual background**

The Brazil Soka School (*Colégio Soka do Brasil – BSS*) emerged from the work of Delia and the literacy project she developed with other volunteer educators in the early 1980s. Together with others, Delia studied Makiguchi’s writings deeply, trying to apply his humanistic principles of education to their work. On a personal level, Delia took her father to visit Japan 4 times before he died in 1983. At the time of our interview in 2018, she had visited Japan 32 times—with the spirit to learn from and respond to Daisaku Ikeda and plant the ideas of Soka educational philosophy she had learned from him and Makiguchi--in Brazil.

This spirit to journey to Japan in order to seek out and try to capture the spirit and heart of Ikeda’s ideas was echoed by others I met. For example, on my first day at BSS,

Marcia, a young Venezuelan woman who worked at BSS on the administrative team, as well as an English teacher, shared that a group of 24 staff members from BSS would be travelling to Japan in January of 2019 for a training meeting to learn more about Soka education. I felt this same attitude--this spirit to seek out and learn more, with a humble attitude--from many of the BSS educators I met. The school had requested that all of the teachers be able to go, but they had to limit that trip to 24 staff members, which included teachers, administrators, administrative support personnel, and kitchen staff.

While BSS is linked to the Tokyo-based administrative offices of Soka Gakuen, it is clear that the school has autonomy in how to apply Soka educational principles in their local context. The school decided to incorporate and offer IB (International Baccalaureate) for all upper grade students, as well as becoming part of a UNESCO school network, in order to work towards the sustainable development goals established by the United Nations. While all upper grade students take IB classes, the official IB tests are not mandatory. All of these efforts are seen by the school as tools to support their bigger objective of fostering students as global citizens.

Data about the school's enrollment and staff are in tables 3 & 4 on page 208. As of April 2019, the school has a total of 422 PK-12 grade students, with a total number of staff persons numbering 52. All of the high school students have a scholarship that reduces their fees by 50%, and other students receive financial scholarship assistance on a case by case basis. Staff members who have children who attend BSS are not charged school fees.

Brazil Soka School attendance 2019			
Level	Female	Male	Total
ECE (2-5 years old)	22	28	50
Elementary School	90	70	160
Junior High School	60	78	138
High School	39	35	74
Total	211	211	422

Brazil Soka School Staff	
Teachers (including all administrative staff)	41
Adjunct	3
Assistants	7
Interns	1
Total	52

*My initial observations*

On my first day in São Paulo, a warm summer afternoon in December, I learned how to ride the Metro system and take buses so that I could navigate my month-long visit in Brazil independently. When I first walked into BSS’s new school building that was barely 2 years old, I was struck by how fresh, open and modern the building felt, in comparison to the smaller, cramped and old building I had visited just 3 years before. As I walked down the busy street in São Paulo, my mind flashed back to the groundbreaking ceremony I attended when I was in Brazil in 2015 conducting research on Soka education as part of my master’s degree thesis. What I remembered from that day was an electrical feeling of excitement in the air that the new school would be built on that ground where we had gathered. Ikeda, the school’s founder, sent his eldest son from Japan to represent him there for that occasion, and everyone was shining with anticipation and excitement that Brazil would soon have a ECE-12 Soka school—the first and only such Soka school outside of Asia.

I noted several interesting things during my first 15 minutes at BSS, as I waited in the large open-aired lobby for Marcia to come downstairs. First of all, there were 2 men in the front who served as “greeters” for everyone who walked in. They each had walkie-talkies, and it was clear that they also served to provide security. To the left of the lobby, as you walk in, there are 3 turnstiles, much like the ones in modern subway stations—where you can only gain entrance if someone has the official ID or badge to let you in. I greeted one of the gentlemen and said I had an appointment with Marcia; he used his badge to let me in through the turnstile. Once in the lobby, two receptionists were at the front desk, and again, I greeted them and shared that I had an appointment; after greeting me, one of them asked that I wait in the lobby.

On the other side of the large lobby and to the right of the reception desk, 3 huge pieces of Japanese calligraphy greeted all students, staff and guests when they entered the building, along with smaller plaques next to them. A plaque explained that the calligraphy was a gift from Ikeda, the school’s founder, and the words written on them were mottoes for the students and staff to center on: integrity, wisdom, and hope. Another engraved plaque just to the left of the calligraphy stated that the BSS was founded because of thousands of selfless donors who contributed to making this school a reality; their invisible presence was acknowledged. For students and staff that I visited with both formally and informally, the heartfelt and ever-present presence of selfless donors committed to Soka education is a poignant example of a collective sacred story many people I met shared.

I walked back across the lobby to a chair and waited for Marcia. After exchanging greetings, since we had only met via Skype before, she took me on a brief tour and proudly told me about so many of the energy-efficient aspects of the construction, such as the elevator that actually generates energy for the building, along with rainwater collection sites from the school's roof. After the tour, we met together in a conference room, along with 2 other administrators, and I shared the nature of my research—wanting to explore how teachers understand and describe exactly what it means to be a Soka educator, with the hope that I could one day work with other educators to help them develop those qualities.

Their faces lit up, and they explained that they, too, need to answer those very questions for themselves—especially since they are such a new school and in a formative stage. I asked them which teachers they might recommend I speak with to discuss these ideas—suggesting that I could also have small focus groups, some interviews, and also meet with teachers and visit during lunch. Since it was the last month of their school year and they were busy, I wanted to be respectful of their time. I told them I could be there 3 days a week all day, in order to be able to get to know the teachers and learn as much from them as I could. After talking, we realized it would be very simple for the computer teacher to send out a google form to the whole staff and ask them 3 simple questions about what they felt were the most important qualities of a Soka educator. This email came from the school's administrators, and so, from the beginning, everyone was able to feel they could provide input since they all knew I was on campus to conduct research.

Without planning or realizing it, this research became a modified form of participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) because the school leaders were able to immediately take action and find a way—through using google docs—to invite everyone to give their input about the essential qualities of Soka educators and how we can develop them. Marcia was my main point of contact at the school, and she said she would arrange for me to meet with the teachers, based on their availability. During those times when I was not meeting with teachers, she asked that I stay in the school’s library. I was invited to have school snacks and lunches downstairs with everyone else—in the morning, around noon, and in the afternoon. I soon realized that I was fully “living alongside” my research participants—in narrative inquiry terms.

The nutritious snacks and meals were freshly made by the school’s cooks, and fresh fruit was included at every meal. At the end of the year during the final professional development for the staff, the lunchroom staff and servers were included, since a core belief of the school is that everyone—cooks, cleaning personnel, receptionists, paraprofessional staff—everyone—is a Soka educator and plays an important role in educating the students. A central unique aspect of Soka schools that I visited in the past—3 in Japan and the Soka University of America—all share this key point: the dining space is open and shared by all staff and students to eat and socialize together, eating healthy, well-prepared food. In Brazil, I was told that donors make contributions to ensure students have snacks in the morning and afternoon at no extra expense. During snack and meal times, the cafeteria was always abuzz with lively conversations and laughter, with students and staff all eating together.

During one of the first meals, I met a student about whom I came to learn quite a bit. He was one of the older students, and that was because when the school opened, he wanted very much to be able to attend—even if it meant he would repeat a year of school and be the oldest student. It also meant he would be one of the few “home-stay” students who left their families to study at the school and live with a family who volunteered to open their homes for a Soka student to stay while studying at the school. Over time, as I got to know this young man, he shared that he battled depression, but that he was so very grateful to the staff and the teachers for reaching out to him at one of the lowest points in his life.

I wanted to interview and visit with a broad range of teachers—some who were familiar with the ideas and philosophy of Soka education before teaching at BSS, and some who were new and did not know anything about Soka education. I was most interested in their ideas about what constitutes a Soka educator. What does that mean and how can we foster or train teachers to become “Soka” educators in the future?

### **5.8. Narratives of BSS Educators**

*Marcia on becoming a Soka educator: There is no recipe*

Marcia is a young, thin Venezuelan woman in her mid-30s who has large brown eyes and straight dark brown hair just below her shoulders. She always had a big smile on her face and her phone in her hand or back pocket. She shared that all of the teachers and administrators communicate regularly using “What’s App,” so her phone was always with her. Whenever we were together, she greeted each of her colleagues in the morning with a smile, a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and she always kneeled down to

greet younger children or speak with them. I am highlighting Marcia because of her unique positionality of having experienced Soka education as an undergraduate at Soka University of America (SUA), teaching ESL at both Soka Tokyo Jr. High and High School in Japan, and now working at BSS as a teacher and administrator. The multiplicity of her perspectives, along with her etic (outsider) and emic (outsider) positionality, meant her views could provide a wide frame of reference.

In speaking with Marcia, her first thoughts about being a Soka educator centered on 3 points: the importance of self-reflection, dialogues, and having an appreciative heart. She had heard an Ikeda scholar, Jason Goulah, once speak about the link between the concept of “human revolution” and Soka education; for her, this notion of being reflective and developing an appreciative heart are part of that internal battle called “human revolution,” which she considered essential for Soka educators. But what weighed most heavily on her mind was that in our casual talks with students during lunch, she heard almost all of the high school students share their concern and anxiety about “surviving IB” and having the weight on them of being the school’s pioneers to challenge IB in English. This tension—between having rigorous academics in a school that emphasized supporting students with care—was something Marcia grappled with both as a teacher and administrator. How does being a “Soka educator” align with working in a school that has a goal of meeting high international academic standards? While this was not a central focus for this research, it is important to acknowledge.

Marcia did share her own challenges in thinking about what it means to be a Soka educator. She shares that for her, Soka is:

about relationships and not so much about pedagogy...I think it describes how I feel about my experience at SUA and [working at a Soka school in Japan] at Gakuen. So, I think that the basis is definitely understanding the heart...actually the heart of the philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda. I would say, you know. And I think that takes different shapes in different places. I remember when—because I was part of the first class of SUA and the first student festival we organized, the theme was ‘defining Soka’ because I think it’s something that has to come from within that community of students and teachers because we don’t have this recipe, you know of ‘what it means.’ It’s sort of like part of discovering what it means is part of Soka.

This point I heard Marcia stress is critical: there is no recipe, which makes it very challenging to describe Soka education. What she does make clear, however is this: 1) it is important to seek to understand the heart of the philosophy of the school’s founder, Ikeda; and 2) Soka education will have different meanings in different cultural contexts. However, the connecting links are doing internal reflection and conducting dialogues-- necessary for educators and students’ development to become “fully human.”

Part of this, Marcia later shares, comes from a place within where a teacher focuses on the students’ well-being beyond the teachers’ own interests. She explains she is not fully “there” yet:

**Marcia:** I have my own examples of the kind of educator I would like to be from the skills part, right—as a ‘general’ educator, and then I have examples of a ‘Soka’ educator and for example, when I think of a Soka educator, one of the people that comes to mind is a Japanese teacher I had when I had study abroad in Japan [which is part of SUA’s undergraduate required experiences]. That man would come to school—to the language school...like one time he even came with a fever and there was NO hesitation. There was no holding back from that role of being there for us.

**Vicki:** So that was part of it—‘I am here for you?’

**Marcia:** And like there’s nothing more important than you in my life. That was how he made us feel. You could feel that it was his own connection with the Founder—how he felt that ‘you are all the students of the Founder’ and so, I’m going to take care of you like he would—something like that. I don’t think I’m there yet (laughs).

Marcia highlights two key qualities of Soka educators in the aforementioned exchange when she 1) focuses on the spirit of being completely and fully present for students and their well-being—above everything else and 2) reinforces how important it is to seek to maintain an attitude and spirit that aligns with the Founder’s and the founding spirit of Soka educational philosophy. We continue to talk.

**Vicki:** That’s being real.

**Marcia:** I want to be like that.

**Vicki:** So how do you think a person gets ‘there?’

**Marcia:** You know, I think it’s breaking through your selfishness. At the same time, it makes me think about what you were sharing – about how it is important to take care of ourselves as a person so that we can also be there for them. So, it’s about finding that balance. But definitely, I think someone—like you think of the students beyond their life at school. You have your heart on that. That’s something I really like—that I really aim to do but I don’t think I’m to that point.

This notion of “breaking our ego” or “breaking through your selfishness” is a concept I heard other Soka teachers share—during my 2015 and 2018 interviews. Based on Makiguchi and Ikeda’s writings (Bethel, 1989; Ikeda, 2010), and what educators have shared with me, this idea of teachers being fully present for their students and letting go of their personal egos in order to center themselves on the needs and lifelong well-being of the students is a recurring theme in Soka educational philosophy.

*Antonio and Lidia: Applying Soka principles in our “living laboratory”*

Antonio’s life story serves as an exemplar to students at BSS because he attended public schools his entire life. A recurring story I often heard throughout Brazil was about the huge inequities in education. Any family that is financially able to do so sends their children to private schools. It is commonly felt among middle- and upper-class families that the level of education in public schools is sub-standard, and as a result, it is

nearly impossible for students who go to public schools to pass the national college entrance exam, the “*Vestibular*.” Students must pass the “*Vestibular*” and earn a certain score in order to gain admittance to the best public, fully-funded universities. It is very unusual for a young man, like Antonio, to go to public schools his whole life and be admitted to a public university, where all fees are paid by the government. He was eager to share concrete examples of what he believes it means to be a “Soka educator.”

During the time of this research in December, the school year was coming to a close and everyone was preparing for their summer break. At the end of the school year, schools in Brazil offer students an opportunity to re-take exams and try to get passing grades so they can be promoted to the next level, a process called “*recuperação*,” or “recovery period.” Antonio shared how he supported a struggling student at that time, and after he helped the student organize a schedule and prioritize what to study and when, he reflected on that in this way:

After I did this (with him), I thought that this is what the school’s Founder would have done. I felt good about what I did. I consider myself to be a Soka educator because in various moments when I think about something or say something to the students or in my classes, I put myself in the place of the school’s Founder (Ikeda). I ask: would the school’s Founder have done this or would he have said this, or would he have conducted class like this? This is what I always do--self-reflect on the way I am acting as an educator.

This is another recurring theme Antonio shared that I often heard: to be a Soka educator means to study and constantly reflect on the spirit and heart of Soka educational philosophy—as currently expressed by Ikeda and to reflect on the ways one’s actions match those ideals.

Since Antonio had worked at other Brazilian schools—where the standard practice is to have 40 students in classrooms, he felt that by the Brazil Soka School constructing classrooms to ensure no more than 15 students would be in each class, the environment at BSS is much more conducive to putting such an idea as caring for each student into action more easily than it would be in a Brazilian public school setting. Another structural aspect in BSS that is related to being able to apply ideas about Soka educational philosophy in the school is that 2 guidance counselors work on staff to support the teachers and students, which is not common in Brazil. Even though BSS is a private school and has the IB curriculum for high school students, the school also accepts students from a wide range of backgrounds. For example, many teachers shared that several students at the school come from low income families, have varying levels of emotional problems, or are on the Autism spectrum.

One of the teachers who often interacted with Antonio was Lidia, the physics teacher, and it became very clear that they have a close professional and collegial friendship. Lidia has been working at BSS since it opened in 2016, but before she started teaching there, she had never heard of Soka education. Lidia has a bubbly personality, even though she describes herself as sometimes looking and acting a bit strict. After she was hired, she started asking more questions about Soka education, and at the beginning of the 2018 school year, the teachers had a weekly meeting where they studied Ikeda's Portuguese translation of the book entitled *Soka Education*. Each week, a different teacher summarized a chapter, and she was responsible for the book's last

chapter. While everyone else had prepared slide shows, she decided to just speak from her heart about what she learned. This is how she described that time:

I told them that I was very confused still, but I know this is something very important. Because I know Soka education is not something separate from our reality—that it is something we live and that I’m still learning to be a Soka educator. Today, I have the consciousness that I no longer feel anxious at all about this—thinking this is precisely what it is. Here, our school is our laboratory. I made this analogy because this is my area of teaching. So, this school is our laboratory; here is where we learn about Soka education, and we learn when we are in our classrooms with our students, we learn day by day. Something that is very important to me is this: who is teaching me the most? My students.

Lidia had a huge realization, and several teachers who had been at that meeting shared with me that moment when Lidia emotionally shared her feelings about being a Soka educator. For her, the Brazil Soka School is where teachers and students learn and grow together—trying new ideas, discovering ways to create value and exploring how teachers can support students to become the protagonists of their learning.

For Lidia, she struggles with how to apply Soka education to her curriculum, physics, and she is working to find ways to apply principles of Soka education in her daily interactions with her students. What she has found helpful is to maintain her own internal “checklist” to remind herself about what she feels is most important as a Soka educator—to be sensitive and attentive to students’ needs and especially to remember to believe in each students’ potential. Lidia continues coming back to the laboratory metaphor—recognizing that as a Soka educator, she and others are all learning and growing as they try new approaches day by day.

Another key point Lidia emphasized several times is the nature of close relationships at BSS, and she feels part of this is intentionally embedded in the school.

She shared that when the staff and students eat together, for example, this helps everyone form closer relationships. Lidia also shared that in another school she worked, the assistant principal, her supervisor, made a very racist comment and shared that a young student was not able to learn something because of her dark skin color. While Lidia was horrified to hear that, she struggled with how to deal with it. She shared that at BSS there is a shared philosophy to believe in students' unlimited potential, and that having that central shared belief system was something she really valued. For someone who knew nothing about Soka education, Lidia's comments to me at the end of our visit summarize many important ideas about the essence of Soka education:

The most important thing about Soka education is that it is based on the principle that the student needs to be happy in what he/she is studying and learning. The idea that all of the knowledge or all the time, the student will be using that knowledge to generate value, in relation to the students' own life, or the student will use that knowledge in some form so that as an individual she/he can help society grow. Also, that the student needs to feel responsible and have the consciousness that he/she has a very important role in society.

In simple and straightforward language, Lidia articulates many of the ideas Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda express in Soka educational philosophy about the purpose of education.

Antonio had shared the story of Lidia talking about the school being a living laboratory with me, and he explained that, "It's not just an academic or philosophic topic. It is a practice; it is a methodology." Antonio is a geography and IB Environmental Systems teacher, and he was animated to share several examples as to how he sees being a Soka educator means to directly apply Soka principles while also including the national Brazilian curricular mandates, along with those of IB and UNESCO's sustainable development goals.

For example, in Brazil, an international water forum was held in May of 2018. Antonio wanted the students to understand the significance of this international event and together with the students, they created a “Mini World Water Forum” in which students worked in groups to represent several countries, as well as Brazil, to better understand the challenges each country faces around water. This project gave students the opportunity to take issues about water and connect those issues to what is happening in other places in the world, while also helping them understand an international event hosted by Brazil—all based on a natural resource in their environment.

The previous example, as well as the following one, show how Antonio planned lessons to foster students as global citizens. When the school held a cultural show, Antonio saw this as an opportunity for students to combine learning about the history of Soka educational philosophy by learning about Makiguchi together with contemporary environmental issues. The following lesson is described in Antonio’s words:

On the floor, the students created a crime scene--like an outline of a person on the floor of a crime scene and the students wrote stories in little squares—about Chernobyl and Fukushima—about disasters that have happened in our world that show this kind of lack of harmony between human beings and nature. And when talking about the future, they talked about themselves and their roles as Soka students with regards to all these challenges. It was like in a laboratory that has an instrument that teaches about waves—a wave machine. You hit this apparatus and create a wave and then it goes back. So, the students explained that such a relationship that they had with Makiguchi was as if Makiguchi hit that apparatus and started the wave and that wave went out into the world and returned to their lives.

What is fascinating about the lesson Antonio describes is how it embodies the forward-thinking ideas Makiguchi sought to develop, in which students engage with their contextual reality in such a way as to conceive how they could take action to address

those issues. In this way, teachers and students became active agents who imaginatively sought solutions to serious environmental issues, while also recognizing direct links to Makiguchi and his ideas.

Antonio continued describing his lesson on fostering global citizens:

And in this way, they took these actions, and created a booklet that looked like a tree on the sustainable development goals. Every goal was from one of the UN's sustainable development goals (SDG), which they wrote down and behind each 'window' of the SDG on the 'tree,' they could open it up and there was a message written about each objective. In the end, everyone had a small 'tree' made by the students and every leaf of the tree, the students had written how—as a Soka student—I could transform these questions/problems that are occurring in the world.

This detailed description of the activities Antonio did with his students include many elements of Soka, or “value-creating” education in action. These examples further illustrate qualities of being a Soka educator Antonio embodies, which include creatively linking the ideas of Soka education to his curriculum; they are summarized here: 1) A focus on fostering students to become citizens of the world was embedded within both activities; 2) Students and teachers used their agency to create value by conceptualizing complex ideas in ways that students could grasp; 3) These activities served as approaches that opened the possibility for students to develop “imaginative empathy” (Ikeda, 2010) for the problems and sufferings of others who were impacted by environmental disasters; and 4) As students created solutions for some of these issues, they became the protagonists of their learning.

Finally, every year Antonio has his students read Ikeda's annual Peace Proposals that Ikeda submits to the United Nations every year on January 26—from 1983 until the present current year, 2019 (Goulah, 2010a; Urbain, 2010, 2014). In this way, Antonio

feels he helps the students learn about the writings of Ikeda, especially as they relate to his subject area. For him, this is a way his students can understand some of the many issues the school's Founder is passionate about, and specifically how Ikeda's goal is to link education with creating a more peaceful world. Antonio's fervent wish was clearly to bring ideas of Makiguchi and Ikeda to life for students and connect them to students' lived realities. Antonio's exuberance about applying Soka educational principles within his classroom was contagious. I often saw him excitedly sharing ideas with his colleagues at lunch and in the teacher's lounge. For Antonio, the most important quality of a Soka educator is to creatively engage with and inspire students--supporting students through pedagogy and care to be the ones who transform society far into the future.

*David: Soka education as a tool of transformation*

David is BSS's chemistry teacher, and upon first meeting him, it is clear that he works out and is a body builder. His large physique is matched only by his big grin when he greets everyone. Each year, the graduating middle school students select a teacher to address their class at commencement; in 2018, they selected David. Since I was visiting during that time, I attended the commencement ceremony, and towards the end of David's speech, he tried very, very hard, but he could not contain his tears and emotions that he felt for his students. This gentle giant of a teacher openly wept tears of joy as he shared how much he had watched the students grow and develop and how proud he was to be part of that process as one of their teachers.

Like Antonio, David grew up very poor, and he, too serves as a strong role model for the students because of his difficult childhood—which included him challenging

dyslexia as a young child. Also, like Antonio, David had experienced and lived a life in which education transformed him. For that reason, both Antonio and David had complete conviction in the power of education to transform lives. David's father abandoned their family when he was very young, and his chemistry teacher became a model and father figure to him; he believes that is why he became a chemistry teacher. Before beginning work at BSS, he knew nothing about Soka education, but he quickly realized that due to his background from attending and working at 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist schools, he shared similar humanistic beliefs about education that Soka educational philosophy espouses.

David's understanding about what it means to be a Soka educator is based on an internal belief system and mindset. He shares his thoughts about first coming to BSS:

I finally felt myself at home. I felt like, 'Here I am!' I identified with the school, and started delving into Soka education, and then I began seeking the meaning of that [Soka education]. As I said before, Soka education seems to have been seeking the essence of education, which has been lost in the remote past, though a few people still practice it. Be that through experience, be that through a life story, be that through a differentiated spiritual preparation, as it is the case of a few Adventists, a few Catholics, a few Spiritists, it does not matter your religious beliefs, as long as one is willing to view the student beyond the mere role of a student or the amount that he/she pays to the school, but as a human being, that is the essence, it is what this student has within that you can transform. I tell you I arrived here believing I knew what Soka education was. But I didn't. I'm still learning it.

Again, David knew nothing about Soka educational philosophy before working at BSS, yet he already held strongly anchored beliefs about both the transformative power of education, as well as the importance of centering the entire educational process on students as developing human beings and not pigeon-holing them merely as "students."

These two points are key. Another central point is that Soka educational philosophy is applicable to people from all faiths.

**Vicki:** Do you call yourself a Soka educator? Why?

**David:** Everyone who is here represents Soka education, even though one is not sufficiently prepared for that. All of us are Soka educators, for we have accepted this challenge. The second reason is that my own view of education has always been close to the humanistic idea in which you think the student--no matter the academic background—has great potential, and that the student has something meaningful to offer. Actually, it goes beyond that, the teacher must see the student who is there to develop, to grow. I am a chemistry teacher... It's not only the content, but rather the transformation of that person, in order that he/she can view the world in a different way, in a more humane--a way that seeks dignity for everyone around. Because of these 2 reasons I consider myself a Soka educator.

What David says is extremely significant because again, this is a teacher, like Lidia, who knew nothing about Soka education or its principles before he started working at BSS.

Yes, he did some research on his own, and he already shared some foundational beliefs similar to Soka educational philosophy grounded in a humanistic philosophy, but what is significant is that he came to truly take responsibility in his role as a Soka educator.

Further, David explains the concept of “human revolution” in his own words, saying:

**David:** People who are dedicated to studying and changing themselves, are better qualified to become a Soka educator who can help transform others. That is why experience is fundamental.

**Vicki:** I agree, and believe the same. The teacher must work on his/her inner side. How was this process for you, to get to tell yourself, ‘I am this; This is me.’

**David:** More than a process, I see it as a searching, in the sense that you see that as having a great relevance for society. I have seen my life being transformed by education... When you see education as this tool, this is the first point to be a Soka educator. And when you realize that that is real, you start pursuing that education, because you need to be ready to put it into action.

David recognizes the potency of education as a tool for transformation, and for him, the subject area does not matter. Rather, it is about the teacher—the teacher’s attitude towards students, the teacher’s beliefs in students and their own potential to grow, learn, and change, and the awareness that everyone together is in a process of growth.

David’s passion for Soka education is clear when he says, “You have the content, and provide the student with that. Soka education goes beyond; it changes destinies, stories, it’s not only about imparting knowledge. It’s to help students achieve their goals when they may not know that yet.” The discussion continued, as we wondered about the essence of Soka educators.

It’s the way you see your student. A Soka educator must see the student in a way that he/she should be seen as having potential. That’s the way education should be. All educators should have that kind of perspective towards the student. I feel sad when I see a teacher overestimating his/her own abilities, for I think all my students should exceed myself. . . . Teachers must understand that the student is a human being; students’ lives are stories to be told, so each gap you fill in a student’s life is what matters.

David grasps key concepts in Soka educational philosophy, especially in that it holds the potential to be a tool of transformation for educators who embrace a perspective to see, acknowledge and believe in each child’s tremendous potentiality. Part of this perspective links back to what Marcia shared: teachers being able to do the inner work, which frees them to let go of their own egos to want their students to far surpass them.

### **5.9. Discussion on findings and themes that emerged**

I will focus on the findings from this research and the key themes that emerged—first by simply listing them, and then by going into more details and elaborating on how they are connected and interrelated. Based on numerous dialogues, interviews, and

observations in São Paulo that serve as the foundation for this research, several themes emerge about the most essential qualities of Soka educators—in both the work of educators through Soka Education in Action and at the Brazil Soka School. The quintessential qualities that consistently appeared as I listened to self-identified Soka educators describe how they make meaning of what it means to be a Soka educator can be distilled down to the following: reflective, selfless, mindful, compassionate/empathetic, seekers, and agentic people.

Two central points need to be highlighted about figure 3 on page 229 that shows how these qualities of Soka educators are connected. The first is that at the center of the chart is “relational” or “dialogical” knowing. When considering any epistemology, it is important to consider how that epistemology emerges. In the case of Soka educators, it is clear that this process is grounded in relationality and dialogues. The educators are constantly engaged in relationships with ideas, the spirit of the school’s founder, Ikeda, other educators, books, articles, the students, and the world around them. All of these elements are interconnected and inform the educators’ epistemology. Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, and Minarik (1993) explain that

More similar to Clandinin and Connelly’s notion of personal practical knowledge that is narrative knowing (embodied in persons; embracing moral, emotional, and aesthetic senses; and enacted in situation), the concept of knowing through relationship, or relational knowing, involves both the instantiation and the reflection on what is currently known. (p. 9)

This research has made it clear that relational knowing is an essential component that opens the way for Soka educators to put theoretical ideas grounded in Soka educational philosophy into action. A key feature of relational knowing is the dialogical aspect of it,

in that the educators, as well as students, are constantly learning and growing, both through relationally knowing ideas and each other--through dialogues. For this reason, the center of the diagram consists of relational-dialogical knowing. The second key point about this chart is that all of the qualities of Soka educators that emerged in the course of this research are interrelated to one another, much like a web. There is not a simple flow chart or stepping stone process; rather each quality is informed by or strengthened by the other qualities. This chart provides a visual of how they are all connected and interrelated.

One way to think of this chart is to consider the analogy of a grain of sand in a pearl that over time and through a process becomes a pearl. I attempt—through this chart—to explain such a process—as it relates to the growth and development as a teacher develops an identity as a Soka educator. McEwan (2011) suggests that “in the history of teaching as method is the recognition that the soul or mind is not passive. In effect, the soul undergoes it [sic] own internal dynamic of growth and change through its interactions with the world” (p. 134). The chart in figure 3 attempts to delineate the process so many self-identified Soka educators described to me, which seemed to be exactly what McEwan describes—a movement in the soul. While anyone can enter such a process at any point, I will provide an example of the main components of the chart beginning with learning about or studying about Soka education.

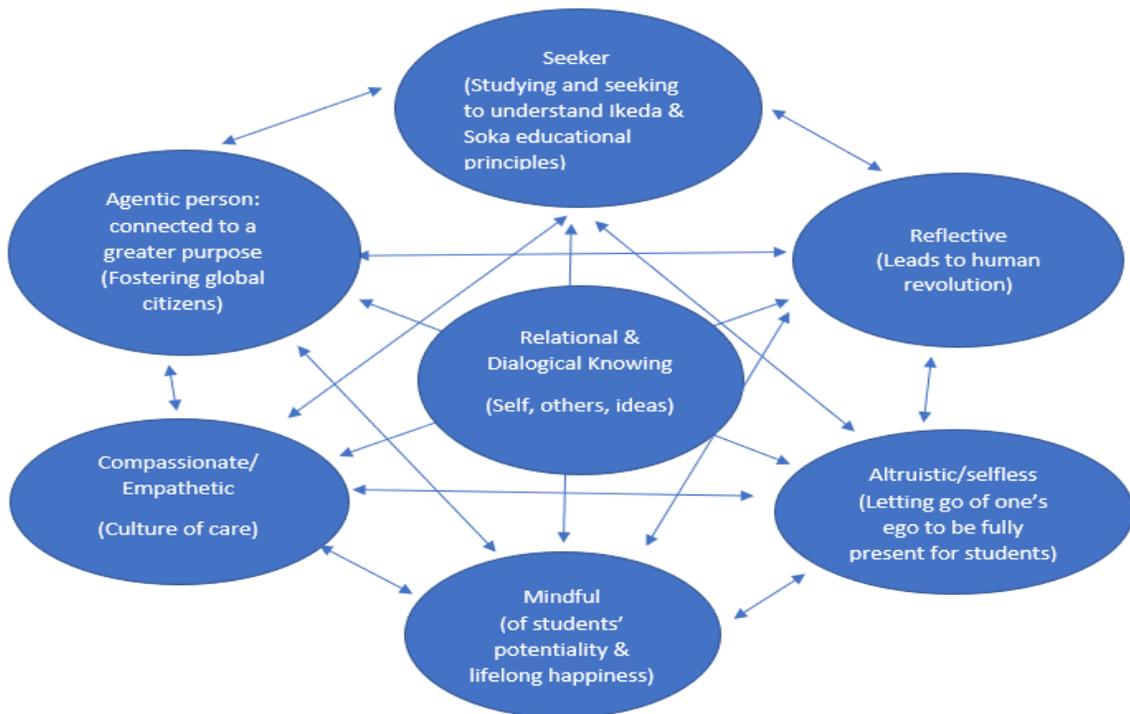
For example, through hearing about or studying ideas on Soka educational philosophy, a teacher self-reflects on his/her own beliefs about education and students, and through an inner process of human revolution, that teacher becomes more altruistic.

This deep self-reflection, grounded in dialogue and study, shifts teachers to think of students' well-being as the paramount concern. This creates a mindset in which the teacher becomes mindful that each student has tremendous potential waiting to be developed and nurtured, through the teacher's support. Based on a relational knowing of the student, coupled with a recognition of that students' immense potential, the teacher's mindset may shift to compassion or empathy for the student, and for the teacher to consider whatever obstacles might be hindering the students from developing their potential. Based on compassion or empathy for the student, the teacher claims his/her agency and takes action to show care for that student.

The action to show care is rooted in a mindset of recognizing the importance of supporting students' growth and development to realize their agentic potential towards becoming global citizens and supporting others in their growth and development. When students feel deeply valued and cared for, they often shift within themselves and seek to support others. The qualities of Soka educators shown in this chart represent a cycle of growth in which teachers recognize their agency as central to supporting students' development. Each component of the chart is linked to and supports every other component. While this is represented on a flat plane, a spiraling 3-D image is more aligned with the essence of what the chart seeks to convey, since the movement is from within teachers and then outward into the world.

It is important to acknowledge that relational and dialogical knowing can be used to create value, or on the other end of the spectrum, it can be used to generate hateful ideas and rhetoric. For example, it seems clear that White supremacist ideology, as well

as ideas spread in Germany under Hitler were both developed and spread through relational and dialogical knowing. It is for this reason that a key component of this chart is the importance of studying the ideas and principles of Soka educational philosophy—originally espoused by Makiguchi and Toda, and currently expanded by Ikeda.



*Figure 3 - Qualities of Soka Educators: Seeker, Reflective, Selfless, Mindful, Compassionate/Empathetic, Agentic Person*

Several, if not all, of the educators I spoke with were clear to point out that the process of developing an identity as a Soka educator oftentimes is built upon a teacher identity that is already somewhat developed. In other words, it is helpful if a teacher has

foundational teaching skills that can serve as an anchor for their identity—in terms of mastering content knowledge and familiarity with some of the “technical” skills of teaching, such as lesson planning and classroom management. The more experienced teachers especially felt that it helped if teachers had some kind of teaching foundation. However, others shared that due to their unique circumstances, they simultaneously developed a teacher identity as they came to see themselves as Soka educators. While scholars such as Borich (1999) and Grossman (1990) developed frameworks to describe teacher identity development, this research seeks to provide a perspective on how teachers develop identities as Soka educators and what the quintessential qualities are of Soka educators.

It is important to recognize that having an identity as a “Soka educator” can best be understood by considering one’s position on a spectrum—from “not me at all” to “yes, that is definitely who I am.” A few educators shared that they felt they were “in the process” of becoming a Soka educator, and through burrowing down into their stories, it seems that they had an ideal of the qualities of a Soka educator and while they were working on becoming that ideal, they felt as if they often fell short.

The older, “more seasoned” or “more experienced” educators shared much more confidence in proclaiming, “Yes! I am a Soka educator,” while simultaneously admitting they still had much to learn. These views on a spectrum came from either 1) a commitment that is grounded in teachers working hard to actualize their ideal of becoming a Soka educator or 2) educators recognizing that they had truly internalized many of these core beliefs and qualities based on years of studying and seeing the results

from applying Soka educational philosophy. The latter position was more commonly expressed by the older volunteers at SEA who had been working for many years to share the principles of Soka educational philosophy with teachers in public schools. I will now go into more detail about each of these qualities. Interestingly, several of the educators at BSS who initially knew nothing about Soka educational philosophy before getting a position at BSS shared that they felt they already were Soka educators and were happy to learn about a philosophy and approach to education that matched many of the humanistic principles that they had come to develop over time.

#### *Self-reflective educators*

For each educator with whom I visited, the path to learning about and ultimately embracing Soka educational philosophy was subjective and personal. The pattern that emerged, however, is that the educators I spoke with shared experiencing a certain level of cognitive dissonance (Cooper, 2007) at some point, in which ideas of humanistic attitudes at the heart of Soka educational philosophy provided an alternative to some of the dehumanizing educational practices they witnessed or experienced.

To learn about Soka educational philosophy that centered on students and their well-being served as cognitive or spiritual irritants, like sand in an oyster, that pushed them to reflect on some negative educational experiences and the possibility of enacting more humanistic practices. For example, Antonio shared that “at the other schools, I felt students were treated as if they were numbers. And so, in other schools, students were not seen as individuals.” This sentiment was shared often, so when ideas about treating students as precious individuals with unique needs was shared, teachers acknowledged

that they began to reflect on their views about education and how they felt students should be treated.

Being reflective also emerged as teachers shared that they reflected on their own behavior in the classroom and how they treated students or reacted to certain situations. For example, Lidia shared “A lot of teachers think, ‘I’ve been teaching for 10 years; do you think I don’t know what I’m doing?’ No, I self-reflect. It’s the students who are helping us grow and reflect on ourselves.” An interesting aspect of Soka educational philosophy is that teachers, staff, and students are all aware of some of the key principles, specifically that education based on Soka philosophy is about fostering students to become global citizens who can create more humanistic societies, based on a shared vision to help each other develop in a caring environment. Since this is an expressly shared vision of the school, students often feel empowered to speak openly if they feel this is not happening. In this way, a teacher might be challenged, which can naturally lead to self-reflection on what their inner attitude is towards their students.

Ultimately, being self-reflective can lead to growth and an internal shift in one’s inner attitude or mindset, which correlates with “growth mindset” views espoused by Dweck (2006). The theoretical concept of human revolution (Ikeda, 2013/2010) is closely tied to Dweck’s ideas about a growth mindset, and both of these concepts include time spent self-reflecting on one’s inner attitudes and how they can either be self-defeating or spur growth.

### *Selfless spirit of Soka educators*

For a Soka educator, being selfless simply means that the center of one's efforts and focus of one's attention is not the teacher, nor the needs of the school; rather the entire focus is on "altruistic action, taking action to benefit others" (Wider & Ikeda, 2014, p. 159), specifically to take action to benefit the students. The school's PE teacher, Mario, shared many ideas with me, and due to the need to limit the scope of this article, I did not highlight him in the narrative vignettes. However, some points he made concisely convey key principles of Soka educational philosophy. For example, he explains:

the essence is that the student is the focus. I think that this is what value creation is about. When I have the student as the main focus, I'm able to have attitudes just like Makiguchi had—for the students to develop their greatest potential.

Mario clearly connects foundational ideas about value creation education and the need for teachers to selflessly place students at the heart and center of the process.

Central to this point is something that another educator shared, Valeria, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. Her views show how self-reflection is connected to letting go of our egos as educators to focus on the students' needs and well-being, which is also linked to finding ways to help students develop their potentiality. Again, while she is not one of the teachers in an earlier vignette, her responses echo similar views of other educators in this research. She said:

This is something else that I think is different about Soka educators: when we get home, we think to ourselves, how was that class today? What could I have done better to connect with each one of my students? And if I'm not able to do that, how can I communicate with them? So, for me, I worry about this a lot.

From the perspective of Soka educational philosophy, it is inconceivable that students are ever seen as “failures” who “just don’t get it.” The challenge is always for the educator to persist and creatively challenge fresh approaches to connect with students and patiently persevere to work with students, with a “never give up spirit” to find a way to reach and teach them.

*A mindful approach that focuses on students’ potentiality*

The term “mindful” in this context refers to educators being cognizant of each student’s unlimited and unique potentiality, which includes a focused awareness of obstacles and challenges students might be facing that prevent them from achieving that potentiality. Over and over, the self-identified Soka educators shared how important it is that teachers are aware of students and their needs, as well as their own, but that their focus as a teacher is always on the students. Most of the activities conducted by the Soka Education in Action volunteers sought to awaken within public school teachers how important it is for them to acknowledge and seek to develop each student’s unique potentiality. Being mindful of each student’s potentiality involves maintaining a long-term view of students and their life-long happiness.

The growth mindset of an educator to be mindful of students’ unique talents, dispositions, and potentialities requires a philosophical foundation about the purpose of education and the role of educators in that process. Soka educational philosophy is validated through writings of Makiguchi, Ikeda, and scholars which provide study material, and also, through models of Soka educational practices. In this way, educators can recognize that these ideas go far beyond theory and can be applied within both

classroom settings and in whole schools (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). This is a huge challenge for educators.

It is through study, dialogues, and self-reflection that educators maintain this mindfulness about how vitally important it is to nurture students to bring out their potential, rather than being influenced or distracted by students' negative attitudes or behaviors. This mindful approach to focus on students' lifelong happiness and supporting them in developing their potentiality especially applies to issues around student discipline.

*Anchored in care: Developing empathy and compassion*

In both writings and practice, Soka educational philosophy is grounded in an ethos of care. This is a foundational idea in Soka educational philosophy, especially as it is put into practice. The example most often provided at the BSS is of the teachers, students, cleaning staff, administrators—everyone—eating all meals and snacks together in order to strengthen relationships on all levels in the school. Similarly, in SEA, every activity I witnessed or that was shared with me also focused on activities that centered on cultivating an ethos of care and having that be the predominant mindset that permeated teachers' classrooms and in the case of BSS, the school. These examples prove what Agne (1999) has found true to be about caring and teachers: “caring acts as leavening because a small amount may serve to cause expansion in each person encountered by it or engaged with it” (p. 179). An ethos of care permeated the spaces where educators sought to apply Soka educational philosophy and put it into action.

The emphasis of a culture of care impacts how discipline issues are resolved, and this is closely linked to considering how to develop students' potentiality and their lifelong happiness. A situation several teachers shared from BSS was about a couple of students who broke some school rules. While the details of the infraction were not shared with me, it was very clear that this was a serious issue that any other school would have immediately suspended or expelled the students. After pondering the issue and discussing how to discipline the students, the administrators decided the students would be removed from their classes, but they would be supervised while working in the library and helping with the younger children for several days.

Through this kind of disciplinary action, along with working closely with the school's counselors, it was clear to all students, that the misbehaving students were being denied privileges to be in their classrooms, and they were also restricted in what they were allowed to do in the school. After a week of this, the students who had broken the school rule visited with a teacher and shared their realization that what they had done could have done serious harm to the young children in the building, acknowledging the seriousness of their actions. In this way, the administrators and staff were able to "create value" for those students, recognizing that solely being punitive may or may not create such an awareness on the student's part about their behavior. Another key component of a culture of care is connected to the ways the students, teachers, and staff emphasize respect. Based on this ethos of a culture of care and respect, many teachers and students shared that they all learn from each other on a daily basis.

*Agency: Taking action based on a sense of purpose connected to the greater good*

Ultimately, the essential aim of Soka educational philosophy is for teachers and students to develop a level of consciousness imbued with “imaginative empathy” (Ikeda, 2010), and who believe in each person’s unique capacity to work towards creating a more just world—especially for those in more marginalized or vulnerable situations. Soka educational philosophy is linked to creating social changes by fostering creativity and compassion within students—based on students having educational experiences in which they are able to experience, engage, grow and learn through interactions with their teachers, classmates and their community. Teachers’ roles in this process of fostering students to become global citizens is paramount.

While teachers and staff focus on creating a classroom and/or school environment that emphasize the value of all students and their potential to make substantive changes in our world, efforts are also made to raise awareness about human rights issues, environmental issues, peace and disarmament issues, and development issues in order to broaden students’ understanding of their roles as global citizens (Ikeda, 2010/2013) who are connected to people and problems both in their own communities and also, around the world. It is vital for educators to model for students what it means to be an agentic person who finds ways to take meaningful actions that create value.

*Seekers: Educators who are lifelong learners and seek to study and grow*

Almost all of the educators interviewed for this research expressed the need and desire to study and learn more in order to maintain a fresh spirit in their work and to keep their intentions and hearts connected to the founding spirit. This effort to

continuously study, learn and grow while challenging to put the ideas of Soka educational philosophy into practice served as a mechanism to help the educators maintain a clear focus on the significance of their work. In many ways, the spirit to study buttressed all of the other areas and functioned to support the educators to maintain a fresh spirit to persevere in their work amidst tremendous challenges.

Having a seeking spirit to study is essential to maintain the founding spirit of the school, and this is achieved by educators challenging themselves to have the same spirit as the school's Founder and to create value in all circumstances. Through study and seeking to more deeply understand principles of Soka educational philosophy, educators can maintain a creative and fresh approach to all they do. Ikeda (2009c) often emphasizes the importance of studying, for example, saying: "the humanistic path of value creation means that we continue studying and challenging ourselves to the end of our days" (p. 105), and again, Ikeda (2005) writes that "when we stop learning, we stop advancing and growing. It is shameful to neglect learning. I hope you will keep studying throughout your lives" (p. 291). This encouragement to continue seeking out knowledge and learning is paramount for Soka educators in order to maintain a fresh perspective and deepen their understanding of Soka educational philosophy, while also strengthening their resolve to continue learning and growing as an educator and person.

*The convergence of themes of Soka educational philosophy and narrative inquiry*

While narrative inquiry was utilized primarily as a tool of research for this study, it is noteworthy to acknowledge a finding of this research that highlights the significant ways that Soka educational philosophy and key ideas from narrative inquiry are so

inextricably linked. Specifically, I want to highlight the terms from narrative inquiry that are clearly visible in Soka educational philosophy as it is put into action in Brazil: *teachers as curriculum makers* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008), the notion of the “*best loved self*” (Clandinin, 2015; Craig, 2013; Schwab, 1954) and the role of *knowledge communities* (Olson & Craig, 2001) as fertile soil for relational/dialogical knowing. The Venn diagram in figure 4 illustrates how Soka educational philosophy and narrative inquiry are each unique, while also converging.

When Clandinin and Connelly (1992) introduced the concept of curriculum makers, as opposed to curriculum implementers, they wanted researchers to honor and hold up teachers’ stories of their lived experiences in the classroom—recognizing teacher agency in the curriculum as the main ingredient in the educative process. The idea from Soka educational philosophy that further expands and extends the “teacher as curriculum maker” is this: “teachers and students as curriculum makers.” This is theme that permeates narratives of the Soka educators in this research when, for example, Antonio goes into great details about the projects he developed with students at BSS to learn about the Mini World Water Forum or the school’s cultural festival. In both instances, students together with teachers functioned as curriculum makers.

The ideas of both students and teachers as curriculum makers was articulated by Lidia when she shared:

The idea that all of the knowledge or all the time, the student will be using that knowledge to generate value, in relation to the students’ own life, or the student will use that knowledge in some form so that as an individual she/he can help society grow.

The idea that students and teachers who come to embrace and internalize Soka educational philosophy will apply these ideas “beyond the walls of the school” was mentioned often—both at the Brazil Soka School and from the volunteers at Soka Education in Action. When Maria shared about how she has internalized ideas from Soka educational philosophy, we see how her embodied knowledge of Soka drives her as a curriculum maker in every area of her life—far beyond formal schools.

Schwab’s (1954) idea of the *best loved self* closely aligns with many of the qualities of Soka educators that emerged in this research, specifically with regards to teachers being empathetic and showing compassion for their students. While Schwab’s focus was on teachers developing their best loved selves, Soka educational philosophy extends that notion to teachers working with students to more fully develop their best-loved selves and recognizing that the concept of the “mutual possession of ten worlds” applies equally to students and teachers. In essence, a goal of Soka educational philosophy is for teachers and students to do the kind of reflective internal work in order to fully develop their highest potential, which might be called one’s “best loved self.”

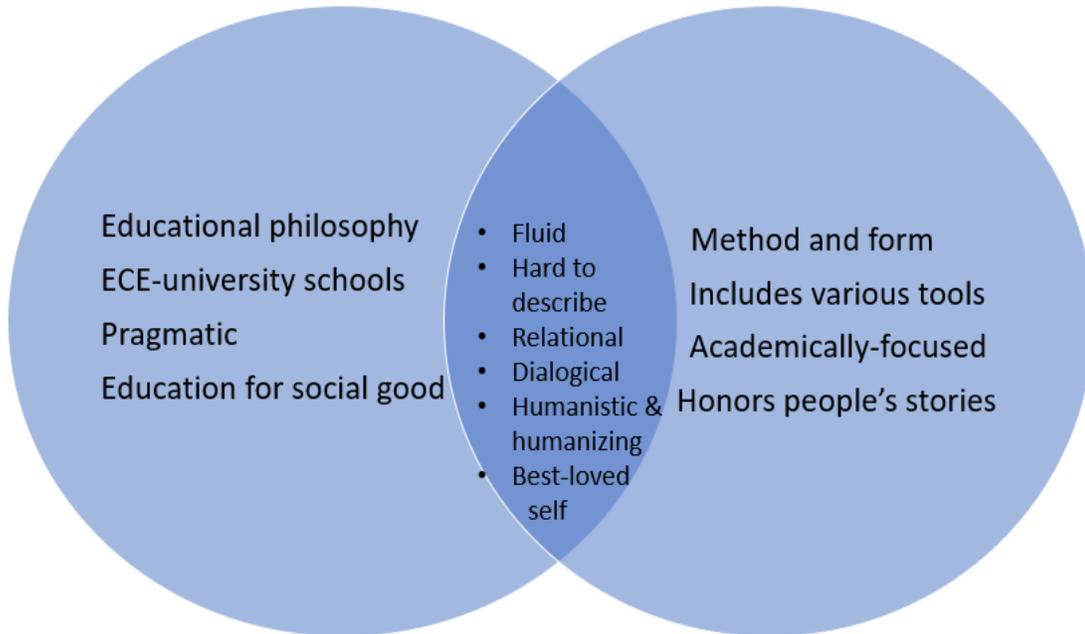
The idea of developing students’ potentiality was shared often in teachers’ narratives. Adelisa, one of the volunteers through SEA succinctly explains:

Another thing that was really rooted in me is that I needed to believe in the potential of the student and cultivate this potential for the good of the student and for society. So, something I treasure and truly believe in that is part of the educative story of Makiguchi--as volunteers who do this work, we have to really advance the conditions of each one.

Much like the idea of teachers as curriculum makers extending to students, we see in Adélisa's voice how developing one's best loved self applies equally to fostering that view in students.

Finally, relational/dialogic knowing is at the heart of both Soka educational philosophy and narrative inquiry. This is the point where the greatest convergence is palpable. Narrative inquiry is anchored in mutuality and dialogue where trust and shared understandings of complex educational phenomenon can emerge through dialogue. Schools need to create spaces for such dialogues to occur, as was the case of BSS, through sharing meals and snacks together. Several teachers shared that the book study on *Soka Education* also provided a venue for relational/dialogic knowing to bloom. Soka educational philosophy is the font from which dynamic relationships in schools are honored and celebrated; these relational ways of knowing birth knowledge co-created in a respectful and nurturing environment grounded in a shared vision to create a more just and humane world for all.

# Soka Education & Narrative Inquiry



*Figure 4 – Venn diagram comparing Soka educational philosophy and narrative inquiry*

## **5.10. Closing Thoughts**

The research puzzle at the heart of this article was to engage with self-identified Soka educators who formally and informally apply principles of Soka educational philosophy in Brazil, and together with them, to clarify the essential qualities of Soka educators. As a researcher conducting narrative inquiry, I was intrigued to discover how the questions functioned as “nutcrackers,” and I was surprised by the emotions that emerged in talks with several teachers. Many educators teared up as they shared their experiences; many became very philosophical and wanted to dig deeper into both questions and doubts. Some spoke with such confidence and certainty about the work

they do and its immeasurable impact—on themselves, as well as the educators, families and students with whom they interact. Based on what I learned, Soka educational philosophy is, without a doubt, transformative education in action.

Overall, as I look over the horizon of the research I conducted in Brazil, I am left awe-struck. The older women who work tirelessly providing regular volunteer professional development in the most marginalized public schools in Brazil continue to burn with a fire inside themselves—absolutely confident that their efforts are making substantive changes in the teachers’ lives with whom they work, and through those teachers—to the students as well.

The younger teachers at the Brazil Soka School exude a palpable enthusiasm, along with a passionate commitment to support their students. Based on the many dialogues, observations, and research conducted, I recognize that Soka educational philosophy’s greatest potential and contribution to the larger world of education is in creating a substantive “multiplication impact,” wherein teachers embrace and share with students a clear vision and understanding of human beings as the transformative changemakers who will create a more peaceful and just world—in spite of all odds. This gradual, yet certain approach is grounded in educators deeply internalizing a belief system in the power within each human being to develop within themselves and others their “best loved self” who can all unite together for the greater good of all people.

Challenges I felt all the educators grappled with came from many directions. On the one hand, they felt the pressure of national Brazilian curricular standards, which are now becoming national “competencies.” Though the verbiage may change, the grammar

of Brazilian schooling continues to influence many of the school's decisions (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). For example, students' schedules are still packed with many subjects taught throughout the week in the form of a complicated puzzle that a sole administrator is tasked to organize. This means that teachers' schedules are similarly complex with multiple classes, levels and subjects that demand a level of planning that can only be considered nightmarish.

In addition to the challenges of Brazil's educational demands the school must fulfill, the other pressure at the BSS comes from demanding expectations of teachers. On the one hand, teachers felt such appreciation for the healthy meals and snacks they ate every day at BSS, as well as the opportunity to be part of a school that works so hard to support students and staff. On the other hand, the workload and expectations for the teachers sometimes seemed extremely demanding. While it might be argued that this is a universal condition for educators—to be overworked and underpaid—Soka schools could be an exemplar by finding ways to problem-solve together with teachers to show how a school can provide human education for both teachers and students. During informal discussions, teachers let me know that the salary at the school was generous compared to other private schools, which meant that they did not have to work at 2-3 schools and could just focus their energies on the students at the BSS.

The “cell school” I visited in São Paulo with SEA volunteers was a physical representation of a city's sincere efforts to support an underserved neighborhood with a facility that held the potential to lift up the students and families in that area. But, much like the ideas of critical race theorists (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005), who argue that laws

change, but situations don't because underlying systemic issues are not addressed, the "cell school" showed that facilities alone do not remedy educational woes. The underlying systemic causes within human hearts that link racism, classism and poverty must be addressed. Soka educational philosophy provides an approach to transform education in order to "interrupt" the dominant hegemony, and this is what is needed to bring about substantive and deeper changes in education and society.

The educators in the Soka educational process are the key players in the continued success of the Soka educational endeavor, and understanding and further developing their qualities and dispositions are foundational in order for Soka educational philosophy to further grow and expand. It is for this reason that the qualities of self-identified Soka educators in this study—of being seekers, reflective, altruistic/selfless, mindful, compassionate/empathetic, and agentic people—all centered on relational and dialogical knowing; these qualities are the most important elements to ensure the multiplication impact of Soka education far into the future.

In the course of my research, I met three other Brazilian educators who had started private schools based on principles of Soka educational philosophy. I spent half a day with one of them, and she shared that one of the assistant principals who had worked with her for years made a proposal to start a pilot public school in São Paulo based on the principles of Soka educational philosophy she had learned while working at that private school. While I was not able to visit with that person, I was struck by the fact that a public school in Brazil was going to be opened and aligned with Soka

principles that resonate with so many educators—based on a culture of care, believing in the potentiality of all students, and fostering students to become global citizens.

Ultimately, then, it is the praxis of Soka educational philosophy that holds the greatest potential and relevance to support students in the US and around the globe. This research provides a blueprint from theory to action to help educators better understand how to apply the ideas and ethos of Soka education in schools through more deeply studying about Soka educational philosophy and those who put it into action. Conducting this kind of research on Soka education using narrative inquiry perfectly aligns with key values at the heart of Soka education, specifically around the importance of valuing relationships, the centrality of dialogues, along with the long-term aim of creating a more peaceful world through education.

The pride of having the only Soka ECE-12<sup>th</sup> grade school outside of Asia is keenly felt by many Brazilians I met. As one Brazilian scholar, Pereira (2008) writes, “Ikeda himself has always reinforced the idea of Brazil as the fountain, the pioneer, the model, the ‘monarch’...and the farthest country from Japan but the closest to his heart” (p. 108). This close bond is physically manifested in the Brazil Soka School because many Brazilian people have that spirit to challenge injustices—just as Makiguchi did. For the school’s pioneers to persevere amid a 20-year dictatorial rule, while constantly studying and seeking ways to learn from Ikeda in order to spread humanistic educational ideals of Soka educational philosophy, is the very reason Brazil now serves as a great exemplar for how human education can be shared widely throughout Brazilian society and beyond, to other countries around the world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The three articles comprising this dissertation are tied together by the following threads: personal agency as resistance to injustices, Soka educational philosophy, the importance of the in-between spaces of liminality, and the potency of narratives and narrative-type research. Each piece stands on its own in a unique way, but a careful reading and examination of each of the articles contains strong elements of each thread. I will elaborate on how these threads inform and are woven within the articles.

### **6.1. Personal agency as resistance to injustices**

The first article, the autoethnographic piece, recounts how injustices impacted me ontologically and epistemologically from a very young age. Through the lens of my childhood self, I revisited numerous personal and societal injustices, while simultaneously seeking to resist them and fight back. At the earliest stages of childhood, my anger was my agency, and it was very (in)effective and mostly frustrating for the younger version of me, as well as my family. As I grew older, my agency was my intellect, which I used by seeking refuge into books, studying, and seeking other ways of being. These were the tools at my disposal and how I resisted injustices--actions I knew would upset the status quo of my youthful world. As I grew into adulthood, my resistance appeared as rebellion against my family's religion and embracing views that challenged the hegemony surrounding me—many ideas I embraced through my university studies. Past my husband's death at the hands of police officers, I used my agency as a form of resistance by maintaining my sanity and dignity through my

spiritual faith--striving to raise my children to get beyond our shared tragedy, while also working as a teacher who sought to apply Soka educational ideas.

The second article, the collaborative autoethnographic piece, centers on discovering how to excavate racism and whiteness that had impacted me and the students with whom I worked. The “weapons of resistance” that emerged were self-reflection and dialogue in an environment imbued with trust and where power dynamics in the relationships were levelled. When I first stepped foot on Texas A&M’s campus, I could not fathom how I could connect with the sea of youth in my midst, especially since it is a conservative predominantly White institution (PWI). I used my agency to take a risk and co-create “anti-racism curriculum,” without a clear outcome in mind, yet certain I needed to create value and challenge the injustice of pervasive racism. At first glance, my agency to resist injustices seemed to be external, but in the course of our work together, we discovered they were within ourselves. Our agency was to face those internalized views that sabotaged our capacities to fully embrace ourselves and others—liberating ourselves from negative notions we had so tightly gripped, unbeknownst to us.

The third article on Brazil Soka School and Soka Education in Action exemplifies using education as resistance to a wide-range of societal issues. Through the voices of the educators I interviewed in Brazil, I provide numerous examples of educators using their agency of radically caring for students as a form of resistance to more punitive approaches to discipline commonly used in schools. Also, the way the school is structured at BSS—small classrooms to ensure small teacher-student classes; common eating areas with healthy food for students and all staff; and environmental

considerations embedded in the school's construction all show resistance to more traditional approaches to many aspects of contemporary education.

Finally, by teachers' structuring lessons to ensure students learn about environmental issues, human rights issues, aspects of peace and development, students and teachers use curriculum as a form of resistance to environmental degradation, human rights and development abuses, as well as seeking to develop a culture of peace. All of these factors exemplify teachers and students using their agency as a form of resistance to injustices—especially teachers deeply caring for students' well-being, growth and development—which can be viewed as non-traditional forms of resistance to an educational system that oftentimes de-values students' lives.

## **6.2. Soka educational philosophy**

While I spent the first 25 years of my life unaware of Soka educational philosophy, I can now see how the bumpy path of my young life lead me to embrace it. I was already a certified teacher who had wholeheartedly embraced ideas of education as a form of resistance by such scholars/writers as Ivan Illich (1926-2002), Paulo Freire (1921-1997), and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and, also with ideas rooted in humanistic approaches to education and life, based on the ideas of Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Carl Rogers (1902-1987), Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). For me, the ideas of Soka educational philosophy brought ideas of humanistic philosophy and resistance together in a way I could apply them to my life, as both a mother and educator. Soka educational philosophy has been the keel to keep my life afloat as a teacher, and I have

grown to value and appreciate it even more as I continue applying Soka educational ideas to my teaching practice; this sense of respect has expanded even more so from seeing Soka education in action in Brazil.

The collaborative autoethnographic piece embodies Soka educational philosophy as a pedagogy (way of teaching), ontology (way of being), epistemology (way of understanding knowledge), and possibly, even as an approach to research. The original ideas of Soka espoused by Makiguchi in the 1930s focused on his ideas in which he “theorized value as constituting the tripartite values of beauty, individual gain, and social good, and argued that a value-creating life is socially integrated, contributive, and thereby, fundamentally happy” (Goulah, 2012, p. 1000). Ikeda’s extended ideas about Soka education further emphasize the importance of dialogue and self-reflection in education, two of the central elements of this paper.

The approach to research in this collaborative autoethnographic piece can be seen as a de-colonizing method, and shares key theoretical aspects of Soka educational philosophy—dependent origination, human revolution, and Makiguchi’s theory of value—including beauty, gain, and good. As applied to this research, as we excavated how internalized racism impacted us, we were also able to create a shift in our relationships with our families and everyone around us—beginning first within ourselves. Linked to dependent origination is the second idea--human revolution, which Ikeda (2010/2015) succinctly explains is an inner shift within a single individual that ripples out and impacts all those whose lives are connected to that person—their family, community, and larger society.

Again, as we dug within, while also dialoging about our process, we created shifts within ourselves that influenced others as we changed how we saw ourselves and those around us. Makiguchi's ideas about value creation tied to creating value through beauty, gain, and good is connected to this research in that the work we did helped our own lives, while also providing a roadmap to others who may want to excavate within themselves how White supremacist ideology and racism has impacted them—creating value for ourselves and others. While not the original intention of this paper, this paper serves as an example of how ideas at the heart of Soka educational philosophy can also serve as a de-colonizing tool to conduct research—as outlined above and throughout that article.

In terms of Soka educational philosophy and the research conducted in Brazil, which is the subject of the third article, that research sought to provide concrete examples—using teachers' narratives in their own words—to show what Soka educational philosophy looks like when put into practice within a school ecology based on principles of Soka education, along with examples of professional development conducted in public schools by volunteers. While it is very challenging to fully describe the many moving parts of both the Brazil Soka School and the Soka Education in Action project, I chose to focus on how the educators I interviewed understand, make meaning of, and describe essential qualities of Soka educators, using the schools' settings as a backdrop to provide context.

### **6.3. Hybridity as a transformative space**

The first article, my autoethnographic piece is replete with examples of both physical and emotional spaces of liminality, and how the uniqueness of such spaces played such vital parts in my growth and development. As a young child who simultaneously was othered and othered others because of my Jewishness, I lived ambiguity and hybridity in the deep South. It was part of my consciousness that I did not even know. It was only through this doctoral journey that I realized there are words and concepts to describe the (un)comfortable world of being neither this nor that. There is also great power in that positionality because of the potential it offers me to have insights and deeper understanding of aspects of myself, as well as others. Also, I experienced the challenges of writing an auto-ethnographic piece, which I noticed pulled me into an internal liminal space often left unexplored, unexamined, and locked away.

The second article, the collaborative autoethnographic article exemplified how liminality and the cracks in spaces allow for light to shine through unexpected places. It is the in-between space of liminality that provides space for cohesion, flexibility, light, and air; liminal spaces allow for a dynamism. In regards to the research in the second article, no one received grades or money for the work in which we were engaged, and yet we were all part of a brick and mortar research university as students. Much of the work occurred within and between ourselves as we journaled and through our discussions together—spaces in a university both within and outside the boundaries of formal education. Finally, the subject matter of our research, excavating internalized

racism, is a liminal subject area neither situated in official academia (except perhaps sociology), nor the work of psychology, nor religions, yet very much part of all of them.

In the third article, Brazil Soka School and Soka Education in Action embody liminality in several ways. First, both are the only places outside of Asia where formal efforts are in place to systematically spread ideas and put Soka educational philosophy into action in ECE-12<sup>th</sup> grade schools. Brazil, itself, is a liminal place with its rich variety of African, European, Indigenous, and Asian influences—especially with São Paulo being a liminal “in-between” place between the East and the West with such a large Japanese-Brazilian population. While Brazil Soka School is a private school, due to Makiguchi’s initial determined spirit that schools need to function in a space beyond government control, it also offers generous scholarships to ensure students from all backgrounds can attend, so it can more closely maintain fidelity to its mission connected to creating a more just world. The school’s curriculum, while mandated to align with national Brazilian standards by law, is also imbued with peace, environmental, human rights, and development education taught through creative teacher initiatives and IB courses in high school. Initiatives of SEA occur in the liminal space of after school professional development.

#### **6.4. The potency of narratives**

Each of the three articles in this dissertation center on storied lives, and the narratives told are the vehicles for both the way this research has been conducted, as well as the forms the articles take. Narrative inquiry, as both a method and form, played a central role in all three articles. The first autoethnographic article gave me the

platform to dig deep within myself and become the subject of my own research. Though uncomfortable and difficult, I felt it necessary to explore those many hidden stories that contributed to making me the person I am today and honestly face myself and the world in order to fear less. This section of my dissertation also helped me to better understand how I developed my identity as a Soka educator before I embarked on a journey to ask others about their identities. To be authentic, I felt I needed to spend time exploring and sharing my narrative truths at this stage of my life—as challenging as that was for me.

The second article, a collaborative autoethnography that examined the impact of racism and whiteness on our identities, provided a robust, yet safe, platform for my fellow researchers and I to examine and reveal aspects of ourselves to others and discover our commonalities, as well as differences. Each time we gathered, the narratives spilled out of us, and as we struggled to put them together in a manageable and respectful form, we found how many of us shared narrative truths, but in different flavors that came from our very unique families, as women from Vietnamese, Peruvian, Jewish, and White backgrounds.

The third article, consisting of the research conducted at Brazil Soka School and Soka Education in Action came through many narratives—through interviews, focus groups, graduations, meals together, and in various meetings and gatherings. Brazilians in general tend to be animated storytellers, and the opportunity to listen to their stories as they sought to actualize Soka educational philosophy in their unique environments was humbling and awe-inspiring. The educators with whom I visited and spent time with

generously shared their narrative truths of how they came to learn about and make meaning of what it means to be a Soka educator.

### **6.5. Closing thoughts**

In 1973, Ikeda addressed students for the first entrance ceremony at the Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High Schools, and at that time, he said, “in comparison with the wide world, the Soka schools may be as small as a poppy seed, but if our students remain true to this ideal [of the school’s principles]... our impact will ultimately be felt all over the globe” (Unger & Ikeda, 2016, p. 87). Ultimately, Ikeda is confident that even if Soka schools are the size of a poppy seed in relation to the world, the impact of educators and students in various contexts seeking to actualize Soka educational philosophy will reverberate throughout the world and the multiplication impact will be felt far beyond the school grounds.

The stories teachers and students share can serve as great models of hope, perseverance, courage, and creativity. In an era when standardized accountability measures, harsh punitive practices, and neoliberal economic policies have a hegemonic hold on our world, great hope emerges when we hear stories of Soka education in action in Brazil. The Brazilian educators’ powerful narratives paint a tapestry of perseverance grounded in radical care and abundant confidence in the potential of each student.

The inner work of the teacher is an essential aspect of the education process, which reverberates outwards—to students and beyond the walls of the school to create a more just world for everyone. The inner lives of teachers and their internal orientation towards their students’ lifelong well-being is most important. Ikeda (2010) describes

a famous episode involving Socrates, in which his influence on youth is described as being like an electric ray that stings those who touch it. He explains that he can electrify others because he is electrified himself. Similarly, teachers must constantly be creative if they are to evoke creativity in their students. This is an essential quality for educators. Most important is the teacher's attitude. (p. 88)

Ultimately, it starts within the teacher's heart and moves outward from there to support the greater good for their students, and ultimately all people--through a process of study, deep inner reflection, compassion/empathy, selflessness, mindfulness, and claiming one's agency. The time is ripe for a new era in education to begin based on lessons learned from seeing how Soka educational philosophy is intentionally put into action, especially in Brazil.

While ideas about education proposed by Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest that societal inequalities are reproduced in schools, the question must arise as to how we can interrupt this reproductive process, in which educators can be complicit in reproducing societal injustices. The research in this dissertation shows that Soka educational philosophy contains within it the tremendous potential of a multiplication impact to make shifts in society—beginning with teachers and moving outwards to students as current and future change agents. In line with this way of understanding the articles in this dissertation, we can see how the “poison,” or negative aspects in education, can be transformed into “medicine” to create a more just and peaceful world. Just as I came to recognize that I internalized aspects of racism as a child, which impacted many areas of my life, I now see that affirming ideas based on Soka educational philosophy can also be internalized and inform educators' practices, orientation and interactions with students. In very different contexts, this research has shown that Soka educational philosophy is a

foundationally transformative approach to education that is certain to multiply and expand far into the future.

Finally, I would like to compare Soka educational philosophy to a unique metaphor, kombucha, a fermented tea--because of the way kombucha multiplies itself. The friend with whom I stayed in Brazil taught me how to make kombucha, which is a rather expensive bottled health drink when bought in the US. While I will not go into the minute details on how to make kombucha, the key analogy has to do with how the process begins, and that is with a substance called a “soby.” This can also be compared to a sourdough bread starter which is needed to make sourdough bread. All of the ingredients must come together under precise conditions, in order to create a soby, which serves as the reproductive mechanism to continuously make more kombucha teas. A soby looks like a pancake-like flexible piece of plastic, and each time we wanted to make a new batch of kombucha, we simply boiled tea with sugar, added it to the soby and let it sit undisturbed for 7-10 days in a dark cabinet at room temperature. At the end of the 7-10 days, we had a large jar of fresh kombucha, and the process was repeated, so that we continuously had fresh kombucha.

How is the process of making kombucha like Soka educational philosophy? The work of self-identified Soka educators in Brazil serve as exemplars of how to apply key principles of Soka educational philosophy in school settings. The way Soka education is practiced in contemporary Brazil is like the soby of the kombucha, which functions to ensure the tea is continuously reproduced. Similarly, Soka education in Brazil is like a soby--a platform from which an endless stream of capable students and educators will

emerge to have positive impacts on the world. The ultimate aim and goal of Soka educational philosophy is for each of the students to become protagonists in their own lives and work towards creating a more peaceful and just world for everyone, based on their unique talents, ideas, and circumstances. As educators, we must never give up, but rather, we must push forward with conviction in ourselves and our students to actualize such a vision. Makiguchi and Ikeda—based on the “poison” of war—developed the “medicine” of Soka educational philosophy, which is now spreading widely as more and more educators embrace these ideas about human education grounded in creating value.

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