Creativity and Imagination in Schools: A Reflection on Practice

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I consider how valuing the arts, teaching artfully, thinking reflectively, and re-imagining the shape and scope of the classroom environment are elements of teacher practice critical in fostering creativity and imagination in the classroom. I share personal narratives of both my past school experiences and my son's more recent experiences with school as I address the question, "What might the opportunity to imagine an alternative to today's typical classroom look like, to envision a different perspective, and to do so within an aesthetic worldview?" Maxine Greene's (1978) notion of "wide-awakeness" underpins my response.

When I was six I saw a magnificent picture in a book about the jungle,
called True Stories … In those days I thought a lot about jungle adventures,
and eventually managed to make my first drawing, using a
colored pencil … I showed the grown-ups my masterpiece, and I asked
them if my drawing scared them. They answered,
"Why be scared of a hat?"
My drawing was not a picture of hat.
It was a boa constrictor digesting an elephant.
(de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, pp. 1–2)

How often does a child offer a piece of his or her creative work to the world only to be met with a lack of understanding, interest, or curiosity? What might happen if instead grown-ups say, "What an interesting

drawing! Tell me about it."? How might the child's creativity and imagination be kindled further? How might the adult's? Often in schools, children create projects and crafts that follow templates or structures carefully prescribed by the teacher. How does such schoolwork engage the teacher's or the children's minds, spirits, and imagination? What might need to be different in classrooms in order for the environment and pedagogy to be such that they foster a sense of freedom, support, and safety for both students and teachers to imagine, reimagine, challenge, and create?

In this paper, I consider how valuing the arts, teaching artfully, thinking reflectively, and reimagining the shape and scope of the classroom environment, are elements of teacher practice, and are also critical in fostering creativity and imagination in the classroom. What might the opportunity to imagine an alternative to today's typical classroom look like, to envision a different perspective, and to do so within an aesthetic worldview? How can teachers create classroom environments that support and foster creative and imaginative thinking? How might investing in creativity and imagination in our schools create change and innovation within the schools themselves? Innovation comes from thinking beyond our current confines of reality, in seeing a new, as yet to be created, reality, and striving towards bringing these visions from thoughts inside one's head into action.

Valuing the Arts

> The grown-ups advised me to put away my drawings of boa constrictors, outside or inside, and apply myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar. (de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, p. 2)

Exposure and Immersion

In the elementary school I attended in the 1980s, art was a subject assigned a block of time each week. In my memory, art education was one hour per week, usually on Friday afternoons. Art, like recess and physical education, was also used for reward and punishment, "If you do not behave, you will not be having art (recess, gym) on Friday!" Eisner (1994, 2005) spoke to the commonness of this experience and he called it "educational inequity": the configuration of what subjects are allotted time and how much. The implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1994) is the perception given to students, as a result of this inequity, that because the arts are given less time they are of lower value than core subjects such as math, reading, writing, and science. Eisner (2005) stated,

"[H]ence, students with abilities and interests in the arts are denied the opportunities that students in science, mathematics, or English receive" (p. 83). Eisner (1994) further asserted that there is an "intellectual value" assigned to the arts, "Children who shine in the arts will never shine as brightly as those who are excellent in mathematics; the arts, like the children attracted to them, will remain second-class citizens in the hierarchy of curricular values" (p. 82). This message was certainly the one I received at school. The arts were a time of personal reward for me, yet also one of little consequence. Although, academically, I excelled at school, it was in the times when the arts were given a higher regard that I felt most included, important, and valued as a student.

Moments with Monet.

In 2012, there was an exhibit of Claude Monet's impressionist works in a Las Vegas hotel and so I traveled to this American city to see these famous paintings first hand.

The exhibit was tucked into a far corner of the lobby of my hotel, behind the vast floor space devoted to slot machines and card tables. There in the dimly lit corner was the ticket window for Monet's exhibit. I bought a ticket for $15 US dollars. There was no lineup, no crowd of people, and no fanfare of any kind. Had I not been looking specifically for the exhibit I never would have noticed the sign marking its location. I smiled at the security guard standing at the entrance, holding my breath as I stepped inside, for I was so excited.

The room was smaller than I had expected, with the customary white walls and bright spot lighting of a gallery. It had been divided into three spaces with security guards standing at the entrance to each section. These guards were like Queen's sentries as they made little eye contact, stood at attention, did not engage with me nor did they move from their station for hours.

When I arrived, there were only two other people meandering their way through the exhibit and they exited likely only 10 minutes after I arrived. Their departure, save the guards, left me alone, one on one, with Monet's work, of which there were approximately two dozen paintings. I slowly walked through the exhibit and took my time visiting with each painting. I went far beyond looking at the paintings which, if the space had been crowded, is likely all I would have been able to manage. Because of my access and solitude, I was able to engage with each painting slowly, methodically, and carefully. I studied them as an artist looking at light, brush stroke, and colour. I felt them as an observer, a lover of art, sensing how the moment, the feeling had been captured; I pretended, too, that I was Claude himself, standing in front of the canvas on the easel, looking out at the space before him and back to the canvas in progress. I stepped into the space of the artist. I followed with my finger, mere inches away, several short staccato brush strokes. I squinted at the kaleidoscope

of coloured markings when I was up close to the canvas and marvelled as I stepped three paces back at how quickly and beautifully the image opened up and revealed itself. I was in awe. I became fully immersed in my experience and my awareness that I was in the presence of a master, a man who revolutionized an entire art movement.

After two hours, I sat myself on a square bench in front of my favourite painting of the moment. In my aloneness (the guards were no more present to me than the light fixtures at this point), I allowed the emotion of the experience to flood me and with that the tears grew, escaped my eyelids, and spilled down my face. It was an overwhelming and joyous visit.

I will never forget what I felt when I was afforded the time and space to fully immerse myself in the works of a master artist like Monet. I am reminded, as I reflect on this experience, of Eisner's (2002) words, "Joy is not a term that is used much in the context of education, but if the arts are about anything they are about how they make you feel in their presence… The arts, experienced in the fullness of our emotional life, are about becoming alive" (p. 84). This experience affected me on a number of levels and I am thankful for it. What, I wonder, would classrooms be like if all students were exposed to creativity with this type of full immersion experience: emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually?

Grade 3. While the arts were minimized in my schooling experiences, there were, however, glimpses and moments that countered this prevalent perspective and, as I think back, they stand out to me now.

I remember my Grade 3 year vividly. Mrs. Beamer[1] was not a new teacher, but she was a new teacher to our school. With her came semi-circular desk configurations, silk-screen painting, xylophones, handbells, and a variety of other instruments, and also the Little House on the Prairie book series. I was captivated. Mrs. Beamer was not my favourite teacher; she was, in my memory, demanding and not quick to smile, but she, by far, created my favourite classroom experience because of her inclusion of arts-based practice on a daily basis.

Mrs. Beamer was a tall, slender woman. She wore slacks, glasses, large dangling earrings, and she wore her loose brown curls piled on top of her head. I remember a time when she wanted the students to practice written language skills. For her lesson she brought to class a loaf of white sandwich bread and a jar of peanut butter. The assignment was to write a paragraph explaining how to make a peanut butter sandwich. Once the task was completed successfully (without errors of spelling, grammar, or punctuation), she would make a peanut butter sandwich for that student. Eyeing the jar of peanut butter, I was focused on this

challenge. In previous years at school, I had only done writing in workbooks, filling in the blanks, matching the scrambled word to the actual word, that sort of thing. This assignment, though perhaps not creative in and of itself, was compelling and novel and I remember the class humming with quiet enthusiasm. I was a good student, but in my excitement I rushed through my work in an attempt to reach my final conclusion. I took my paper notebook up to the centre of our half circle where Mrs. Beamer was seated, butter knife in hand, and handed her my work. She looked at it and passed it back to me, without marking it with a pen, and said something along the lines of, "Not ready yet," and sent me back to my seat to figure out for myself where I had gone wrong. I was a little distraught as I was not accustomed to being sent back without mistakes marked for me to correct, but this challenge only made me dig deeper and really think about what I was doing. It was on my third attempt, hot with determination now, that finally I got the "all clear" on my paragraph and Mrs. Beamer made me, just for me, a peanut butter sandwich.

I had never paid so much attention to what I was writing and how I was writing it as I did on that day. Mrs. Beamer had not instructed us on what to say, how to structure our writing, how long it was to be, or how much time we were allowed to take. Using the knowledge and skills we already had, we were all simply to write what we wanted her to do for us, and that was make us a peanut butter sandwich. I was not used to problem solving at school and I relished the experience. I remember going on to write many creative stories in Mrs. Beamer's class and even to having one of my short stories, *Washed Ashore*, a story about a young girl shipwrecked on a deserted island and her determination for survival, published in the school newsletter. Some of the work I remember from Mrs. Beamer's Grade 3 class provided an opportunity for the students to engage creatively, artfully, and imaginatively with assignments. These opportunities led to a greater understanding and appreciation for continued artful, imaginative, and creative expression in other school and curriculum related experiences. Students also discovered in Mrs. Beamer a teacher who was able to foster a learning environment that felt safe to experiment with imaginative thinking and creativity.

Teaching Artfully

That is why I abandoned, at the age of six, a magnificent career as an artist.
I had been discouraged by the failure of my drawing Number One
and of my drawing Number Two. (de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, p. 2)

Mrs. Beamer taught artfully (Eisner, 1994) and "[a]rtistry in teaching is not a common occurrence. It is an ideal" (p. 161). What does teaching artfully mean? One component of artistry in teaching is to provide students with a "climate that welcomes exploration and risk-taking" (p. 162), one that cultivates a playful disposition. I do not remember being praised by Mrs. Beamer for my efforts, persistence, or for completing tasks. I do not think that was her way. However, I do remember her confidence in all of her students., and her creative approach to getting an entire classroom of students with mixed academic levels to think for ourselves and trust in our abilities. Fisher (2004) stated:

> Research by Robert Sternberg (1999) shows that when students are assessed in ways that recognise and value their creative abilities, their academic performance improves. Creativity can rekindle the interest of students who have been turned off by school, and teachers who may be turned off by teaching in a culture of control and compliance. (p. 11)

The process of rekindling an interest in school through creativity was certainly the case for me in Mrs. Beamer's classroom. From Grade 3 on it was those snippets and snapshots of creative expression that kept me "awake" at school.

A second component of teaching artistry is to provide students with artistic experiences. Mrs. Beamer excelled here. When I was in her classroom she taught me how to play a variety of instruments, which we would play together as a class. I was introduced to playing xylophones, glockenspiel, and an autoharp, along with many handheld instruments. Later I learned handbells and participated in many performances. The time I spent learning to play music with my classmates was not extracurricular, and was not reserved for Fridays, but became an integral part of our daily lessons. In Mrs. Beamer's class, I also learned how to paint and make visual art using a variety of techniques to which I was not previously exposed. This immersion was a far cry from the cut-and-paste crafts in previous years and the years that followed. Using the skills and techniques introduced by Mrs. Beamer, I was free to use my imagination and create the pictures in my mind, using multiple media and materials.

Renowned Saskatchewan sculptor, William (Bill) Epp[2], was the artist in residence at my school at that time. His studio was in the last classroom at the farthest end of the senior wing. I remember Mrs. Beamer walking the entire class of students down the length of the school, which was U-shaped and felt like a great journey, to Epp's art room. Here he had a fabric canvas sprawled out on the floor, perhaps as large as 8 by 10 feet, and I watched him walk around the painting in a crouched position systematically splattering paint on the artwork. My class watched him work for a time, we asked him

questions, and then we walked back to our classroom. We were merely there to observe an artist at work and experience this type of creating. Eisner says that to cultivate the type of playful disposition in students that is required to teach artfully, a teacher him/herself must "feel free to innovate, explore, and to play" because there is an element of leading with example. I got to create, imagine, and explore in Mrs. Beamer's classroom and I felt very much alive as a child when I was at school that year. Maxine Greene (1978) refers to the sense of feeling alive and engaged with life as "wide-awakeness" (p. 42).

> Given the kind of teaching intended to enable self-aware persons to reach out for meaning in response to their crucial questions, we assume that *every* person can be moved to cognitive action. Everyone, no matter who he is, can learn to learn… the self-aware teacher, functioning in situations known to be dehumanizing, can give his students a sense of their possibilities as existing persons present to themselves. If he is to motivate them, however, and free them to learn, he must make sure that the learning they undertake is conducted within the vital order built up by their own perceiving and conceiving over time. (p. 163)

I like to think that if Mrs. Beamer had had access to an exhibit of the works of Monet, she would have packed my class up on the bus and given us a day to marvel at his work. How can teachers and students alike experience this wide-awake attitude? How can teaching artfully be cultivated?

Reflecting

Whenever I encountered a grown-up who seemed to me at all enlightened,
I would experiment on him with my drawing Number one,
which I have always kept. I wanted to see if he really understood anything.
But he would always answer, "That's a hat." Then I wouldn't talk
about boa constrictors or jungles or stars. I would put myself on his level
and talk about bridge and golf and politics and neckties.
And my grown-up was glad to know such a reasonable person.
(de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, p. 3)

Thinking back to my visit to the Monet exhibit, I recall it was when I took my seat on the bench and allowed myself some time to reflect on what I was seeing and experiencing that I truly felt engaged with all of my senses. I needed time to process my feelings and my experience, to make sense of it, and to absorb it completely.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) described the need for this reflective time. He described creative types as having vast amounts of internally generated energy, but also a need to balance this energy with required quiet and rest. This controlling of energy output he described as "rhythm of activity followed by idleness or reflection" (p. 58). Csikszentmihalyi noted that "incubation" (p. 79) is the most creative part of the creative process because "thoughts evolve in this gap filled with tension" (p. 103). Providing time and opportunity for reflection is therefore a critical part of creativity, the creative process, and the composition of a creative individual.

In Peter Reynolds children's book, *Ish* (2004), Reynolds tells the story of a little boy, Ramon, who was discouraged in his art making by his older brother. The result of the unconstructive criticism is that Ramon tried repeatedly to make all of his drawings look exactly like what he saw, with each attempt looking worse to him than the one before. Later, he discovered his younger sister, Marisol, had been collecting his discarded and crumpled drawings and hanging them on her wall to create a gallery. Finding himself in the gallery Ramon was given the opportunity to look at and reflect back on his own work, and he "began to see them in a whole new way" (n.p.). With a little time to reflect, and the offering of constructive critique from his sister, who encouraged the "ish" quality of his work, Ramon was once again able to enjoy art making and to express his feelings both through visual art and poetry.

Deepening the aesthetic experience through reflection is deemed to be one of the most important aspects of creativity. As Liptai (2004) stated, "A work of art as stimulus cannot simply be used as a springboard for discussion and then jettisoned; it requires repeated revisiting in order for new and deeper layers of meaning to be discovered" (p. 137). Greene (2001), speaking about aesthetic education, reinforced this stance:

> Education signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out of meanings, a learning to learn … We see [aesthetic education] as integral to the development of persons – to their cognitive, perceptual, emotional, and imaginative development. We see it as part of the human effort (so often forgotten today) to seek a greater coherence in the world. We see it as an effort to move individuals (working together, searching together) to seek a grounding for themselves, so that they may break through the 'cotton wool' of dailyness and passivity and boredom and come awake to the colored, sounding, problematic world. (p. 7)

It is this time to reflect, enabling processes and experiences to sink in and deepen within our consciousness, that invites us to wake up to the world. So, while students

benefit from exposure to the arts as well as opportunities to experience creativity first hand (in creating their own or observing others), they also benefit from time to reflect on these experiences, to think more deeply about them, and then revisit them again after they have had more time to process.

Children grow in the experience of the unpredictable, paradoxical, and uncertain feelings that creative endeavors both cause and provide. As Eisner (2002) stated, affording children time to work with and in the arts can provide this growth opportunity:

> Work in the arts also invites the development of a disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgement free from prescriptive rules and procedures. In the arts, the locus of evaluation is internal, and the so-called subjective side of ourselves has an opportunity to be utilized. In a sense, work in the arts enables us to stop looking over our shoulder and to direct our attention inward to what we believe or feel. Such a disposition is at the root of development of individual autonomy. (p. 10)

In order to grow and develop, as both learners and also as people, students benefit from taking calculated risks and being exposed to the unexpected, particularly when they are given time to reflect on what they have experienced (Fisher, 2004).

Fostering Creativity and Imaginative Thinking

Absurd as it seemed, a thousand miles from all inhabited regions
and in danger of death, I took a scrap of paper and a pen out of my pocket.
But I remembered that I had mostly studied geography, history, arithmetic,
and grammar, and I told the little fellow (rather crossly)
that I didn't know how to draw.
He replied, "That doesn't matter. Draw me a sheep."
(de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, p. 4)

Environment

What type of classroom environment will develop these skills within students of critical thinking, risk taking, and out-of-the-box thinking? As Mrs. Beamer enriched our classroom experiences with continuous exposure to artists, art making, a variety of mediums, daily music education, performance, and story, she developed a safe

environment that was conducive for students to deeply investigate their own depths of imagination and creativity. One of my favourite school memories occurred in Mrs. Beamer's class.

I remember being given a writing assignment. I was to write a report on something of interest to me. It was my choice. I decided to research and write about dolphins. At some point during or after the writing process was complete, I made my cover page for the report. Mrs. Beamer sat on her usual stool in the centre of our semi-circle of desks. It must have been early afternoon in fall or winter as the sun was still low enough in the sky to make an appearance through the row of windows. It spread a beam of light across Mrs. Beamer's burgundy slacks and matching sweater. With precision in her instruction and with her lips drawn closed in concentration, she demonstrated how to brush across the wire screen to make a print (introducing us to silk-screen techniques). I remember she also showed us how to run a thumb across the bristles of a toothbrush coated in paint and how it would spray the paint across the paper and leave a fine mist of splatter marks behind. Watching her with the toothbrush, making a "mess" with the paint, made me feel giddy with excitement inside.

There were two screens available to the class to use and when it was my turn I spread out my 11"x17" white art paper under the screen and placed my cutout of a dolphin on top. I combined the opportunity to create my report cover page with the techniques I was taught. I transformed that blank white page into a scene with a blue dolphin jumping out of water with a sunset in the background. A fine spray of toothbrush-splattered paint surrounded the scene.

It was thrilling to me to see my creation hung to dry at the front of the classroom in a long row with the other children's artwork. Better still was the feeling that I had been given a chance to play with the medium. Making art was about being introduced to an art-making technique, tied to my learning about a subject I was interested in, and given the opportunity to "make a mess," try it out, experiment, and see what I could do with what I had learned. It was a far cry from the craft making I had done in school prior to grade three and I remember, even now, how much I enjoyed the feeling of aliveness that making my own art gave me.

Enabling an environment that fosters creative and imaginative experiences and immersion is illustrated in Mrs. Beamer's openness to experimentation with the art materials and her incorporation of art making in a language arts exercise. Environment is not about being an interior designer and creating pretty spaces. Carter (2007) explained:

> … if we are to embrace the idea of the environment as a significant educator in our early childhood programs, we must expand our thinking beyond the notion of room arrangements and rating scales. We must ask ourselves what values we want to communicate through our environments and how we want children to experience their time in our programs. (p. 22)

While rooms that look nice (organized, uncluttered, and reflecting values we wish to share) typically make us feel good, the notion of environment goes beyond the superficial (though important) design specifications of the room. When teachers set up a space, they are communicating messages to children and families about what they believe to be important and meaningful to them.

Frances was my son Owen's preschool teacher. Her classroom was in a rented basement of a church and consisted of four painted cinderblock walls and a row of windows on one side high up near the ceiling. Had it been empty, it wouldn't have looked like much—cold, echoing, and unoccupied. And yet, Frances created a space down those back stairs in which I loved to spend time. It felt warm and inviting. The tiny tables at snack time were covered with fabric table clothes and each had a small pot of plants or vase of flowers placed in the centre. She had coloured glass, crystal rainbow makers, and seashells hanging in front of the windows. All of her play areas for the children had an area rug covering the floor. Her bookshelves and baskets were organized and tidy, but they were also easily accessible and inviting. Her art materials were readily available in their small wicker baskets (easy to hold for child-sized hands) and they were well stocked with pebbles, ribbons, shells, feathers, and other notions.

It wasn't just the look of the room that captured me. It was the message it conveyed, silently, to me each time I shared in the space. The room itself seemed to say, "Come in. You're welcome here. Come play and explore. This is a safe place. Try some new things!" And these messages were also values that Frances herself shared with the families at the preschool. Her site reflected the feelings she wanted to create for her students and their families.

Environments such as Frances's are conducive to teaching and engaging artfully. Spaces such as hers open up and encourage imaginative and creative responding from students because they feel both safe and also valued. Carter (2007) wrote, "When teachers and parents find themselves in environments that are beautiful, soothing, full of wonder and discovery, they feel intrigued, respected, and eager to spend their days living and learning in this space" (p. 25). Furthermore, Gandini (2005) informed us that

> [w]hen children live in a space, they own, feel, and find their place within it. Connections that take place between time and space happen through the rhythms of everyday life, connections to past events, and new experiences that reach toward the future. (p. 16)

Eisner (2002) described a classroom environment as a teacher:

> The entire environment, to the extent that it is a means for fostering the students' development, is subject to the professional judgement of the teacher and constitutes a form of teaching … [T]he setting itself teaches and is subject to the teacher's design choices. (p. 57)

He further stated that this environment actually creates a cognitive culture where dispositions as well as skills, abilities, and aesthetics are developed.

Children are more likely to pick up a paintbrush and mix blue and green to see what happens if they feel invited to do so. In such experimentation they are reflecting back to the teacher that his/her environment is conducive to fostering development of imagination and creativity.

Play

Just as environment is a teacher of imagination and creativity, play is a pedagogical approach that brings to life imagination and creativity. Play works to enhance language skills, build flexible and divergent thinking, and help children to make sense of the world (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). As there is a link between play and exploration with development of self and connection and understanding of a student's surroundings and environment, there is also a link between play and fostering creativity. What does this connection look like and why does it matter?

Lucas, my youngest son, ran at breakneck speeds along the sidewalk down the street to Kindergarten. He loved school. He loved the activities, the movement, and the social times. It was new and exciting and fun. I remember a morning he had dental surgery and needed to take a couple of painkillers and yet still, after lunch, he was determined that he wanted to spend the afternoon in his classroom.

Then Lucas started Grade 1. The teacher was new and had a particularly full room of students. The desks were smooshed tight together as there was little space in the room. The cupboards were overflowing, the walls were decorated with art, posters, pictures,

word charts, letter charts, schedules, notices, alphabets, numbers, and so on. The room felt busy and crowded. "You'll love her, Mandy. She has an art background like you," the principal said to me before the start of the school year. I was enthusiastic about this teacher, and I was excited about the year Lucas had ahead of him.

And then the stomachaches started. While Lucas is not a child to complain, he was complaining now.

"I don't like school."

"My tummy hurts."

"I want to stay home."

This was not what I had come to expect from Lucas after such an eager start to his formal education. I began asking some questions, paying more attention, and inquiring into what might be happening for Lucas.

There was very little in terms of concrete experiences that appeared to be the cause of Lucas's concern. The small and crowded space, combined with its accompanying lack of mobility and, most importantly, lack of playtime, were impacting Lucas's spirit and, therefore, his ability to engage in a positive way at school. The general sense of discomfort that was created for Lucas required deep and attentive listening on my part to figure out what was upsetting him. Eisner (1994) captured the importance for children of feeling free to play and learn:

> To be able to play with ideas is to be able to feel free to throw them into new combinations, to experiment, and even to 'fail.' It is to be able to de-literalize perception so that fantasy, metaphor, and constructive foolishness may emerge. For it is through play that children eventually discover the limits of their ideas, test their own competencies, and formulate rules that eventually convert play into games. (p. 162)

For Lucas, his classroom environment did not feel good and it did not feel safe. What was missing for Lucas in Grade 1 in terms of play is defined in education as "freedom of choice, personal enjoyment and focus on the activity rather than on its outcome. These three criteria are foundational to the play process in connecting children's development with their learning" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 24). The lack of play in Lucas's program, combined with the restrictive physical

environment, conveyed value-based messages to Lucas about restricted opportunities to exercise his creativity and imagination. Finding himself in an untenable classroom context, Lucas experienced sudden-onset tummy pains.

Conclusion

Since I had never drawn a sheep, I made him one of the only two drawings
I knew how to make – the one of the boa constrictor from outside.
And I was astounded to hear the little fellow answer:
"No! No! I don't want an elephant inside a boa constrictor …
Draw me a sheep."… So then, impatiently, since I was in a hurry
to start work on my engine, I scribbled this drawing, and added,
"This is just the crate. The sheep you want is inside."
But I was amazed to see my young critic's face light up.
"That's just the kind I wanted!"
(de Saint-Exupéry, 2000, pp. 4–6)

As de Saint-Exupéry and his Little Prince inform us, it is altogether too easy to put a child off of taking risks that require use of his or her imagination. As my narrative of Lucas's Grade 1 experience further demonstrates, when we put children off of such imaginative experiences, we not only rob them of rich learning but we also potentially cause harm to them and their development. It is in providing opportunities for expression, immersion, and reflection that students begin to make sense of the world and grow in confidence about their place in it. Teaching artfully guides students and models for them what such freedom of expression and enthusiasm can look like. Similarly, environment and play shape the framework for fostering such values and ideals, and create a space in which "wide-awakeness" can emerge and be nurtured.

Notes

1. Mrs. Beamer is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of this individual. All other names in this paper are real.

2. Please see: http://www.sknac.ca/index.php?page=ArtistDetail&id=246

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