

# LEARNing Landscapes

*Journal*

Understanding Ways  
of Knowing:  
Insights and Illustrations







## Editorial Staff

Publisher: Michael Canuel

Editor: Lynn Butler-Kisber

Managing Editor: Mary Stewart

Copy Editor: David Mitchell

The views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the Editorial Staff or LEARN. It is the responsibility of the authors to ensure that proper standards of scholarship have been followed, including obtaining approval from review boards, where applicable, and ensuring that informed consent has been given from participants involved in any research studies.

Copyright ©2019 LEARN holds the copyright to each article; however, any article may be reproduced without permission, for educational purposes only, provided that the full and accurate bibliographic citation and the following credit line is cited: Copyright (year) by LEARN, [www.learnquebec.ca](http://www.learnquebec.ca); reproduced with permission from the publisher. Any article cited as a reference in any other form should also report the same such citation, following APA or other style manual guidelines for citing electronic publications.

**Comments to the Editor: [landscapes@learnquebec.ca](mailto:landscapes@learnquebec.ca)**



Published in Canada in the second quarter of 2019  
Imprimé au Canada au 2<sup>e</sup> trimestre 2019

ISSN 1913-5688



# Table of Contents

Spring 2019, Vol. 12

- 5 Statement of Purpose
- 6 Review Board (Vol. 12)
- 7-8 Dedication
- 9-18 Editorial
- 19-27 The Journey to a Wider Understanding of Ways of Knowing:  
Knowledge Translation and the Arts  
**Katherine Boydell**
- 29-32 Global Robotics Competition Meets Inclusive Education:  
The Exceptional Journey of Five Resilient Students  
**Simon Parent and Sara Iatauro**
- 33-38 Articulating Ideas and Meaning Through the Use of Comics  
**Nick Sousanis**
- 39-45 The Ormiston Philosophy: A Changing Education Paradigm  
**Luke Sumich**
- 47-62 Black Male Students Negotiate Ways of Knowing Themselves During Digital Storytelling  
**Becky Beucher and Robyn Seglem**
- 63-76 Revisiting and Disrupting Uncritical Diversity Narratives Through Autoethnography and  
Cellphilmimg  
**Casey Burkholder and Ashley Frawley**
- 77-90 Honoring Children’s Ways of Knowing:  
A Story of Trust and Transformation in a Kindergarten Classroom  
**Keely D. Cline, Merlene Gilb, and Michelle Vaught**
- 91-105 Perceptions That Early Learning Teachers Have About Outdoor Play and Nature  
**Beverlie Dietze and Diane Kashin**
- 107-124 Remembering Childhood Play  
**Alexandra Fidyk**

- 125-137 The First Peoples Principles of Learning: An Opportunity for Settler Teacher Self-Inquiry  
**Kelly Hanson**
- 139-153 Understanding Tension-Filled Tenure Track Stories:  
Currere, Autobiographical Scholarship, and Photography  
**Sandra Jack-Malik**
- 155-170 Reflexivity as a Process for Coming Into Knowing  
**Karen McGarry**
- 171-182 Alleviating Anxiety Through the Abecedarian: On Supporting New Doctoral Students  
**Amber Moore**
- 183-203 Working With Avatars and High Schoolers to Teach Qualitative Methods to Undergraduates  
**Kristin M. Murphy**
- 205-221 Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Through Arts-Based Learning: Preservice Teachers Engage  
Emergent Bilinguals  
**Nancy Pauly, Karla V. Kingsley, and Asha Baker**
- 223-238 Creating a Context for Girl of Color Ways of Knowing Through Feminist of Color Playwriting  
**Grace D. Player**
- 239-248 Communities of Knowing: Curriculum Making in/of Community  
**Christie Schultz**
- 249-258 Relief: Observations on Creative Nonfiction as Pedagogy  
**Mark Silverberg**
- 259-270 *Klangfarbenmelodie*: Learner Identity and the Creative Arts  
**Sophia Xiang**
- 271-284 Learners' Identity Through Soundscape Composition: Extending the Pedagogies of Loris  
Malaguzzi With Music  
**Matthew Yanko**
- 285-301 Connecting Classroom to Community Through Photovoice: Pedagogical Implications  
**İnci Yilmazli Trout, Beatrix Perez, and M. Candace Christensen**
- 303-315 Knowing Teaching Poetically  
**Aaron Zimmerman, Linnie Greenlees, Elizabeth Isidro, and Stacey Sneed**

## Statement of Purpose

LEARNing Landscapes™ Journal is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the spring and autumn of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research, and practices in Quebec, and beyond, by welcoming articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work, and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

## Review Board (Vol. 12)

**Avril Aitken**, Bishop's University

**Susann Allnutt**, Education Consultant

**Vera Caine**, University of Alberta

**Simmee Chung**,  
Concordia University of Edmonton

**Kelly Clark/Keefe**,  
University of Vermont

**Patricia Cordeiro**,  
Rhode Island College

**Jean Fillatre**, Education Consultant

**Patti Fraser**, Education Consultant

**Janice Huber**, University of Alberta

**Marcea Ingersoll**,  
St. Thomas University

**Rita Irwin**,  
University of British Columbia

**Warren Linds**, Concordia University

**Ellyn Lyle**, Yorkville University

**Pauline Mesher**, Education Consultant

**Heather Phipps**,  
University of Regina

**Stefinee Pinnegar**,  
Brigham Young University

**Debbie Pushor**,  
University of Saskatchewan

**Hetty Roessingh**,  
University of Calgary

**Sheryl Smith-Gilman**,  
McGill University

**Sandra J. Stone**,  
Northern Arizona University

**Carolyn Sturge Sparkes**,  
Memorial University

**Sean Wiebe**,  
University of Prince Edward Island

## Dedication

The Canadian community of arts-based researchers was sadly and poignantly diminished this past year when it lost two poetic inquirers, Margaret Dobson and Carl Leggo. Both were avid supporters of *LEARNing Landscapes* in which they published and for which they were dedicated, helpful, and educative reviewers. We and the *LEARNing Landscapes* community have been continually appreciative of their enthusiasm and willingness to share their work in the journal and the thoughtful and insightful suggestions they provided for authors over the years.



**Dr. Margaret Dobson** was a former classroom teacher and school leader for the English Montreal School Board. After a stellar career as a practitioner, she began her PhD in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at McGill under the supervision of Professor Teresa Strong-Wilson. In 2015, she completed her outstanding dissertation, “Educating for Meaning: Who Am I Really? Identity and Creativity: Putting Two and Two Together: A Critical Analysis In-Formed by Poetic and Narrative Perspectives.” She continued to write beautiful poetry, support novice poetic inquirers, and most recently was a Guest Editor for a special issue of the *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*.



**Professor Carl Leggo** spent his early years in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and began his career there as an elementary classroom teacher. He continued his studies in education which culminated in a PhD from the University of Alberta. In 1990, he entered academia at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Language and Literacy. During his long and remarkable career there, he touched and changed the lives of many students and colleagues. His reach extended nationally and internationally and his contributions to the field were formally acknowledged in a range of awards as he broke ground in poetic inquiry and nourished and encouraged others to venture into this creative terrain. Carl constantly and thankfully pushed the boundaries of understanding in both education and in life.

It is no coincidence that Margaret and Carl became colleagues after a conference in Montreal at Concordia University. There was a synergy between them based on their work and the deep ethic of care they both shared. They lived their lives poetically and authentically and are sorely missed.

A list of Margaret’s and Carl’s contributions to *LEARNing Landscapes* is found on the next page. Click on the linked title to go directly to the article.

## **Margaret's Articles**

[Identity and Creativity: Putting Two and Two Together](#)

[Spotting the Occasion for Poetry: An Invigorating Process of Finding Out by Finding In](#)

[The Poetics of Self-Study: Getting to the Heart of the Matter](#)

## **Carl's Articles**

[The Curriculum of Desire: Four Poems](#)

[Imagination's Hope: Four Poems](#)

[In Defense of Clichés: Life Writing as Iteration and Interrogation](#)

[A Poem Can: Poetic Encounters](#)

[Yearning for Words, Learning With Words: Poetic Ruminations](#)

[Lifewriting: A Poet's Cautionary Tale](#)



## Editorial

There is nothing new about the ideas that learners are unique and have different propensities for understanding and communicating (Gardner, 1983, 2000; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996). They construct their understanding from previous experiences (Bruner, 1960), personal beliefs and backgrounds (Berger, 1972), and learn best by doing (Dewey, 1916) in meaningful and culturally relevant, inquiry-oriented tasks (Aoki, 1993). Moreover, there is common agreement among educators, artists, and researchers, to name a few, that form mediates understanding (Eisner, 1991; McLuhan, 1964). This suggests that learners should have opportunities to receive information and communicate in a variety of mediums and modalities. There is no better time than now to experience multiple forms of communication and expression, given the current access to sophisticated technology. These basic tenets of knowing/understanding have been documented extensively and discussed and researched by educators for more than a century. Yet, educational practices are slow to catch up on how to integrate these perspectives in ways that will provide the optimal circumstances for engaging, meaningful, inclusive, and differentiated learning in all contexts. Now more than ever it has become imperative for acknowledging and scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) different ways of knowing if educators are to address the ethical, cultural, economic, and social needs of the 21st century. Time is running out as we prepare to enter its third decade.

The impetus for this issue, “Understanding Ways of Knowing: Insights and Illustrations,” came from the need to address the important dimensions of learning outlined above. We hoped to give both researchers and practitioners the space in which to share innovations and illustrate different ways of constructing understanding. We were not disappointed. It is heartening to know that boundaries are being pushed in exciting ways in classroom practices at all levels of education, in research methodologies, in approaches to curriculum, in self-study/reflective work, and in professional development contexts. The contributions in this issue attest to this.

### Invited Commentaries

We are delighted to include in this issue invited commentaries from Auckland, New Zealand; Sydney, Australia; California, United States; and Montreal, Canada. Each of these contributors add to the discussion about different and meaningful ways of developing understanding. The first of these is **Luke Sumich**, Head of [Ormiston Junior College](#) in Auckland. We had the occasion to hear him present about the College at the NEXTschool Initiative at the first NEXTschool Summer Institute in Montreal in 2018. NEXTschool is an initiative to transform secondary education in the English education system in Quebec. In this very interesting follow-up interview, Luke shares how he, with some other committed educators, worked for a year to create a personalized approach to education and then designed the space and curriculum in which to make it happen. They predicated their work on the belief that relationships are the key to student learning. Teachers at Ormiston are responsible for the same 12-14 students over four years and take on the roles of mentor, advisor, and coach for their groups. The curriculum is inquiry oriented, and the students do meaningful projects that integrate the community and involve collaborative

and constructive feedback from peers. The school maintains a designated focus on literacy and numeracy, which is evaluated by standardized tests, so that these data can be used in more traditional ways. Luke points out that the biggest hurdle was convincing parents, who now acknowledge, after almost three years, that their children are very engaged and happy. Ormiston is an example of what is possible in systems-oriented, secondary school change.

**Katherine Boydell** is a Professor of Mental Health at The Black Dog Institute at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. In her commentary, which she formatted as an interview, she recounts how she has incorporated different art forms in her research to make it accessible and understandable for wider audiences. As a former quantitative researcher, she struggled with the discrepancy between what participants shared with her about their isolation and loneliness and what the testing measurements indicated. She decided to pursue a degree in qualitative sociology to study lived experience with a view to social change. She describes how her work naturally led to arts-based and participatory approaches incorporating film, dance, and body mapping. She has shared the “results” in performances and exhibitions to extend the reach of the work, incorporate lived experiences in health and illness, and include the voices of marginalized communities. More recently, she and her colleagues have focused on gaps in the literature in arts-based research and through a funded project have identified ethical challenges which include issues concerning the ownership of the work, “truth,” consent, emotional terrain, and aesthetics. There is no doubt that this current work will contribute to the arts-based research field in important ways and will help to make the case for an increased acceptance of arts-based research in academia.

**Nick Sousanis** is a comics author and an Assistant Professor of Humanities and Liberal Studies at San Francisco State University. His visual art comic form became renowned overnight when he completed “[Unflattening](#)” for his PhD dissertation at Teachers’ College, Columbia University in 2014. It was published by Harvard University Press in 2015. In an engaging interview with him, Nick describes how his art form started when he was introduced to comics as a child. He loved drawing and produced his own comic books, but during his adolescence, he received discouraging messages about the worth of this career path. His talent was never far from the surface, however, and in college he found a receptivity to political comics and discovered the subversive aspects that this work engendered. He set his sights on a doctorate knowing that, “this is the kind of work I can make that can be educational, very sophisticated, complex, and dense, yet doesn’t seem like it.” When asked about how he navigated the hurdles of a comic form dissertation, he indicated that first, he was very determined and second, he enticed two senior professors to supervise him, both of whom were curious and unthreatened by taking risks. The rest was easy. He wanted to bridge the two worlds of art and academia to get feedback from artists and break new ground in academia. He emphasizes the importance of being well versed in the medium in order to have it accepted as research. Finally, he shares compellingly, how he has continued this work in academia, exploring new territory with colleagues by weaving together different art forms in workshop/performances. He ignites engagement and scaffolds students’ work to push their boundaries of thinking and build their confidence in taking risks. In so doing, there is no doubt he is expanding the reach of this important work.

The last commentary is a submission by **Simon Parent**, a PhD student at the Université de Montréal working on the pedagogical uses of computer programming and robotics, and **Sara Iatauro**, a Robotics and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) consultant who works for the English Montreal School Board. She served as the local organizer for the 22nd International Robotics Conference held in Montreal in June 2018. The Conference attracted 4000 elementary, secondary, and higher education attendees from around the world who participated in robotic competitions and performances. This commentary describes with visuals the poignant journey of students from the Centre de formation en entreprise et récupération (CFER) Bellechasse in Saint-Raphael, Quebec. CFER Bellechasse is a learning centre for students, most of whom speak French, and many of whom have learning challenges. The Bellechasse team, ages 16-19, coached by dedicated teachers, were charged with building a robotic device and integrating it into what is called an OnStage competition, a robotic performance designed by the team. The team competed and reached the international finals, which gave them an entry to the Conference. In addition to having their skills recognized and the opportunity to participate in this important event, the team was enriched by meeting and interacting with colleagues worldwide and from many different cultures. They developed communication and collaborative skills, increased their independence, and were validated in the process. It is a testimony to what is possible when students are engaged meaningfully and are learning by doing.

The articles that follow the commentaries in this issue are arranged alphabetically by author, but for the purposes of this editorial, are discussed thematically.

### **Learning Through Natural, Everyday Experiences**

**Alexandra Fidyk**, an Associate Professor at the University of Alberta, posits the connections between childhood experiences of play, place, and tradition, and an outgrowth of adult creativity, experimentation, and psychological stability. In a narrative reflection interspersed with photographs, she takes the reader through her memories of her childhood on a farm in Saskatchewan and the household and farm tasks required of her and her siblings. As well, there were many opportunities for freedom of play. She believes these experiences taught her about responsibility and collaboration and fostered in her curiosity and creativity. She argues that the elements of this childhood lifestyle might just be a remedy for what she calls a “trauma epidemic” in our current society. **Keely D. Cline**, **Merlene Gilb**, and **Michelle Vaught** from Northwest Missouri State University and Saint Louis University share their participatory narrative inquiry about Vaught, a Kindergarten teacher at a local laboratory school. They use the current literature to support the importance of grounding learning in the natural play and everyday experiences, or “rich normality,” of young children, rather than emphasizing a more traditional, primary curriculum. More concretely, they discuss how the passing of the children’s beloved groundhog, a sad, but real-life moment for all, inspired Vaught to use this event to deal with their grief and what came out of it. The experience led a class research trip to the university science department to help make a choice and facilitate the planning for and subsequent naming of the new classroom pet, a gecko. This example shows how using the everyday and following the interests of the children without predetermined outcomes, fosters curiosity, builds relationships, and transforms learning.

## Learning by Doing and Through Artful Approaches in Higher Education

It is much more prevalent to hear about interesting and successful learning by doing in Kindergarten and elementary school classrooms. These contexts seem to lend themselves more easily to inquiry-oriented and arts-based approaches because of the ways time, space, and human resources are allocated. There is more room for curricular flexibility, subject area integration, and building relationships, and the educational stakes are lower. There are examples of meaningful and exciting learning in high schools, colleges, and universities, but the occurrences seem to dwindle exponentially by the time one reaches university. There are probably many reasons for this. The disciplines are more rigidly segregated, teaching is allocated by subject expertise, timetabling is perceived as inflexible, the educational stakes become increasingly higher, and there is the feeling that older students do not “need” this kind of learning. We are fortunate to have received submissions which show how learning in higher education might be transformed. **Nancy Pauly, Karla V. Kingsley,** and **Asha Baker** from the University of New Mexico share how they engaged a cohort of preservice teachers in the preparation and implementation of arts-integrated units with emergent bilingual students. The units were based on culturally relevant children’s literature which were transformed into plays. The authors discuss how the narratives of three preservice teachers and how they each learned one can teach powerfully through art when it is integrated into the curriculum and not treated as an “add on.” As a result of their work, the preservice teachers realized the propensity of the arts to engage and support culturally diverse identities and meaningful learning among their students. Also, in their own “learning by doing,” they experienced firsthand how to integrate multimodal and artful approaches into their teaching and the profound results that these can have. **Kristin M. Murphy** from the University of Massachusetts Boston grouped students in a qualitative methods course with high school students to engage in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project using photovoice, a process which employs photos and critical discussion to examine issues from a participant perspective to inform social action. The university students were prepared for the work by engaging with mixed reality simulations (MRS) using eighth-grade student avatars as participants, coupled with photos they had taken to conduct an analysis with their peers. These simulations helped to acquire some facility with qualitative methodology before they began the YPAR project. The benefit of the MRS was that the process could be paused remotely by the instructor when assistance was needed. The benefit of practicing photovoice with their peers illustrated to the students nuances about research they would not have gleaned from reading a text or hearing a lecture. Murphy concludes that the active and multimodality exercises produced confidence among these novice researchers and powerful learning opportunities. In another study using photovoice, **İnci Yilmazlı Trout, Beatrix Perez,** and **M. Candace Christensen,** from the University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio College, and the University of Texas at San Antonio, respectively, show how one professor changed a traditionally delivered Master of Social Work course on community practice into one where the students in three different classes were assigned to conduct and evaluate photovoice projects with undergraduates on “transforming campus rape culture.” Their results indicated that a photovoice project is well suited to teach community practice in social work. More specifically, the social work students understood more fully the role of a social worker in macro-level practice. The participation with undergraduates in the photovoice process allowed these graduate students to appreciate the importance of hearing the perspectives of participants about a topic

and of engaging in critical thinking with them. **Mark Silverberg**, from Cape Breton University and Ryerson University, shares, in a compelling case study of a Chinese nursing student, Wei Wan, how creative writing and writing workshops can be helpful pedagogical tools for an ESL student. Three approaches that he used in the course, which are known to English teachers and students, but not necessarily to students in other disciplines are, first, automatic writing, stemming from automatism in Surrealism, which involves writing continuously for a designated time without permitting the hand to stop. This eliminates barriers that arise from overthinking and attending too closely to rules which inhibit the flow of writing. The second is encouraging writing about personal experience, which is often denounced in other disciplines. This validates experience and provides space for personal voice. Third, his students participated in peer workshops where peers write, share, and discuss their work in a supportive, small group setting. This provides social and supportive elements to what is usually a solitary task. Overall, Wei describes the “relief” she found in having time and space to explore the personal and emotional areas of her experiences, which would not have been encouraged in a more traditional course context. **Amber Moore** is a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia. Inspired by the work of Carl Leggo, who suggested poetry can be used to foster well-being among preservice teachers, she makes a case for using poetry to explore graduate student anxiety, which has recently been on the rise. Moore uses the poetic form known as abecedarian, or alphabetic sequencing, to create a series of poetic experiences directed at graduate faculty members. She adeptly weaves in poignancy, humour, and seriousness in ways that will make instructors, supervisors, and graduate students stop and take stock.

### Exploring Different Ways of Knowing in School Settings

Authors in this issue have shared some wonderful examples of exploring different ways of knowing with students in various school settings. They provide nuggets about teaching and learning that could be transferred quite easily to other contexts. I could not help but contemplate as I read this work, how, during 12 years of editing *LEARNing Landscapes*, there has been a plethora of examples sharing innovative classroom practices. This history exemplifies just how many interesting things are going on in pockets of schools at many levels and in many places. The thought that remains, however, which might be contemplated during the reading of these pieces, is how innovation can be translated into practices school wide. **Matthew Yanko**, a doctoral candidate from the University of British Columbia, discusses his study of how a split grade one/two classroom was transformed into a “music atelier” inspired by the philosophy of the Reggio Emilia early childhood centres started in Italy in 1963 by founder Loris Malaguzzi. The basic tenets of Reggio Emilia are to develop, in young students, multiple ways of thinking, communicating, loving, and understanding. He shares in three vignettes how the children created musical soundscapes about local landmarks during which time they were inherently negotiating identity. Also, these “stories” show how the discourse unfolded between the classroom and music teacher as the atelier was progressing, illustrating the ownership the children were exhibiting for their work. Finally, they depict how the children were able to reflect and think metacognitively about their work when the project was over. **Sophia Xiang** is an MEd student at the University of British Columbia and a grade five/six French Immersion teacher. She illustrates how music, poetry, and visual arts enhance learner identity. She uses the musical metaphor of “Klangfarbenmelodie” as the frame in which to share her

work. Klang means tone for the music, farben means colour for the visual arts, and melodie means melody for the poetry. She argues that her teaching practice represents the cultural and linguistic hyphenation that is present in her students, which like Klangfarbenmelodie, honours “the space in between.” She shares how she focuses on the process (not the product) of art making in the multimodalities described above, to help students move past the spaces of cultural and linguistic discomfort, and to take risks in the creative process. In so doing, they enhanced their thinking and celebrated their identity. **Grace D. Player** is a Professor of Education at the University of Connecticut. Her study shares how playwriting became an avenue for three, middle-school Black girls to critique their experiences of schooling. It focuses on an after-school club called “The Unnormal Sisterhood,” where they wrote, read, talked, danced, and created together and through which the author rotated. Using the modalities of playwriting and performance, the girls were able to explore “their knowledge and ways of knowing rooted in their cultural, gendered, and racialized experiences and to share these with others in an academic setting.” Player argues, and illustrates with scripts, that playwriting provided cultural sustainability for the girls and allowed them to critique publicly the inequities and harassment they encountered in school. The multimodalities the girls used to explore topics that were particularly meaningful to them provide a lens into how these pedagogies might be translated into literacy classrooms to deal with intersecting structural oppressions that Black, and other girls, face. **Becky Beucher**, an Assistant Professor, and **Robyn Seglem**, an Associate Professor, are both from Illinois State University. Their study followed three Black male, secondary school students in their process of producing digital media projects which combined pictures, words, and music to create narratives about their lives. Discussions among the students themselves, with a researcher and with peers, were audio recorded and analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Based on the results of the research, which are shared in interesting textual excerpts and visuals prepared by each participant, Beucher and Seglem argue strongly for a multiliteracy, multimodal approach to literacy teaching in order to explore meaningful, personal, and cultural experiences, honour voice, and provide the opportunity to share these stories with others. They caution, however, that the sharing of personal narratives creates a vulnerability for the creator, and they question the value of grading this kind of work as it can shut down the willingness of students to participate in what can be a very rich and rewarding process.

### **Understanding Practice Through Artful and Multimodal Self-Study**

The fact that forms mediate understanding in different ways (Eisner, 1991) creates a strong rationale for incorporating multimodal approaches into teaching and learning. This expands the possibilities and perspectives of understanding and uncovers insights about phenomena, practices, and experiences that might not surface otherwise. This rationalizes the need for researchers to incorporate different kinds of arts-based/multimodal approaches into their work to get deeper understanding and to offer greater accessibility of the research to a wide range of audiences. Three of the contributions to this issue do just that in interesting self-studies. Self-study, frequently called autoethnography, is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). **Kelly Hanson** is a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia and a classroom teacher. In her self-study, she describes in detail the

approaches she used to integrate British Columbia's redesigned school curriculum into her teaching practices. This recent curriculum is predicated on the nine principles of The First Peoples' Principles of Learning (FPPL), which include "attending holistically to the unique mind, body, spirit, community and land relations that are integral to how students read and interpret the world." She situates herself as coming from a Euro-American settler world view and writes about how she challenged herself by juxtaposing her dominant approach to learning alongside the nine principles outlined above. She interrogated the settler narratives so prevalent in classroom literature. She searched for Indigenous Canadian literature to disrupt these narratives and honour Indigenous identities. She collaborated and interacted with others in workshops and community events while keeping on hand a list of questions to ask herself daily about her practices. In the process of this very reflective work, she concluded that FPPL is foundational to the "new" curriculum and provides a way of "giving closer attention to learning from identity, land and story." **Casey Burkholder** is an Assistant Professor at the University of New Brunswick and **Ashley Frawley** is an MEd Candidate there. They conducted self-studies on their teaching as White teachers in Hong Kong and Northern Alberta, respectively, to help identify and "disrupt problematic diversity narratives from their classrooms." They used memory work as the methodology to revisit, write about, and share their experiences to enhance their understanding of their current roles as teachers and activists. They juxtaposed and discussed these teaching experiences and then complemented this with the production of a collaborative cellphilm (cell phone and video production) to create a visual narrative. Using a visual methodology to analyze the cellphilm, they show in some detail how these visual narratives unfolded. This transparent process adds to the persuasiveness of their work and will be of help to other researchers. They argue that the multimodal approach they used enhanced their depth of critical understanding, which they intend to incorporate into future teaching and research to help disrupt White settler perspectives and privilege. **Karen McGarry** is a visual artist/educator and PhD student at the University of Cincinnati. She employs reflexivity as a process of self-study in which she explores the use of text and visual art to examine the *what* and *how* of her knowing. She shares how this intertwined inquiry process starts with an idea from something she has read or seen, which she then transforms into a visual form and grounds this in a discussion of qualitative methodology. Her textual exploration and accompanying visuals traverse *Autoethnography*, *bricolage*, and *phenomenology*, providing multiple pathways for generating connections and new understandings. In her own words, her arts-based reflections and images are her attempt to make tangible her "process for imagining what research and a researcher might look like..." It is a process for understanding and eventual becoming. **Aaron Zimmerman** and **Linnie Greenlees** are Assistant Professors from Texas Tech University, **Elizabeth Isidro** is an Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University, and **Stacey Sneed** is a PhD student at Texas Tech University. They use the method of *connoisseurship* developed by Elliot Eisner (1991) to explore the aesthetic or affective aspects of their teaching which are so often omitted in research. They use three compelling poems to do this. Three messages emerged, which they argue are heightened in intensity because of the poetry. First, teachers should seize meaningful moments that arise in teaching and explore these, rather than surrendering to the mandated curriculum. Second, teachers should not make assumptions about students' abilities. Instead, they should build trust and supportive

relationships with their students. Finally, since there is always uncertainty in teaching, teachers should embrace this aspect of their work and be open to “the magic of meaningful moments.”

## Exploring Ways of Knowing in Professional Learning

Continuous professional learning for educators is touted as imperative and yet, it is difficult to mandate, make engaging and successful. The articles presented here share a range of ways that have worked for a variety of educators. **Beverlie Dietze** is the Director of Learning and Applied Research at Okanagan College, in Kelowna, BC, and **Diane Kashin** is a Professor at Algonquin College in Ottawa. Partially funded by the Lawson Foundation, their research project uses a heuristic form of narrative inquiry to examine the perceptions of novice, early childhood educators about outdoor education professional learning experiences directed at young children. They build on previous research that outdoor play is important physically and cognitively for children and yet, children are experiencing fewer opportunities for outdoor play. The professional learning was structured as a series of multimodal modules in an asynchronous delivery approach. Their results showed that teachers’ experiences, values, knowledge, and attitudes all have a bearing on the quality of children’s outdoor play. The participants highlighted the need to provide families with information on the importance of outdoor play and on how parents can encourage play in all kinds of weather. The authors conclude that professional learning for early learning teachers builds confidence, awareness, and programming possibilities, and helps them to fully embrace outdoor play. **Christie Schultz** is the Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta and a PhD student. She shares a narrative inquiry of her professional learning experience at Alberta’s Building Peaceful Communities Summer Institute which she attended in 2018 over a two-week period. When she joined the group, she had no idea what it meant to create a “curriculum of community.” As she wrote, shared stories with her colleagues, which were in part about her dying mother-in-law, listened to theirs, read and wrote some more, she began to understand that curriculum making is a lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993). It comes from personal experiences, from realms that are usually instilled as separate and not to be disclosed. She came to realize that a personal and unjudging, safe space builds relationships, precipitates kind gestures, and creates community. The result is a curriculum co-composed collaboratively with others which moves beyond prescription. In this type of space, boundaries of the personal and classroom become blurred; the two worlds are bridged. Schultz concludes, quoting Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003), that curriculum is “intimately connected with the life stories of each persona and the intermingling of storied lives in the life space of the classroom” (pp. 347–348). **Sandra Jack-Malik** is an Assistant Professor at Cape Breton University. Overwhelmed by the tenure process that she was undergoing and on the brink of resigning, she decided to attend The Currere Exchange, Third Annual Retreat and Conference in 2018. The conference was designed for educators interested in curriculum and cultural studies and in “refreshing” their scholarly agendas. She shares how she was inspired by the conference and used the process of currere (Pinar, 1975) (which explores relations among academic experiences, life history, and social reconstructions) in an autobiographical journey of writing, poetry, and photographs about her life leading up to tenure and the futures ahead. The steps include: “Regressive,” where one looks back on past experiences; “Progressive,” where one entertains future; “Analytic,” where one focuses on the present; “Synthetical,” where the



threads which have emerged in the first three steps are woven together. This compelling piece will resonate strongly with other academics who have experienced or are anticipating tenure review. The process allowed her to highlight who she really is, what she knows and values, and what her future should be, which happily is to continue as a professor.

**LBK**

## References

- Aoki, T. T. (1993). Legitimizing lived curriculum. Re-mapping the curricular landscape. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 8(3), 255–268.
- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Bruner, J. (1960). *The process of education: Active and constructed knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy in education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gardner, H. (2000). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Goldberger, N., Tarule, J., Clinchy, B., & Belenky, M. (1996). *Knowledge, difference and power: Essays inspired by women's ways of knowing*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Pinar, W. (1975). *The method of "currere."* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Washington, DC (April).
- Wood, D., Bruner, J., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology*, 17(2), 89–100.



**Lynn Butler-Kisber** (B. Ed., M. Ed., McGill University; Ed. D., Harvard University), a former elementary school teacher, is Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at McGill. She has held a number of administrative posts including a deanship, two associate deanships, and five directorships, and has served on numerous committees within the University and in the educational milieu. In 2007, she was appointed and continues as Outside Educator to the Board of Directors of St. George's School and also serves on the board of Explorations Camp. Her interests, teaching, and graduate supervision focus on multiliteracies, leadership, student engagement, professional development, and qualitative research. She has a special interest in feminist/equity and social justice issues, and the role of arts-based analysis and representation in qualitative research. Her research and development activities have included numerous international projects. Locally, she is currently working on the NEXTSchool Initiative, a project to transform secondary English language education in Quebec. Last year she completed stints as a visiting scholar at universities in Alberta, Vermont, and Worcester (UK), where she focused on arts-based research and she presented on narrative inquiry and school leadership at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China, where she was awarded an honorary professorship. She has published and presented extensively in her areas of interest and the second edition of *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* was published by Sage in June 2018.

# The Journey to a Wider Understanding of Ways of Knowing: Knowledge Translation and the Arts

Katherine Boydell

## Abstract

In this commentary, educator and author Katherine Boydell reflects on her journey to incorporate art genres in the research process as a knowledge translation strategy for producing and disseminating research-informed knowledge. She highlights the need to move beyond descriptions of form and content to grapple with the unique methodological, theoretical, and ethical challenges of working with research participants, artists, and audience members engaging in this work. She describes some of her current arts-based research and identifies the current pressures to conform to expectations regarding “what counts” in academia and concludes with future suggestions to advance arts-based knowledge translation.

*Can you talk a little bit about your academic background?*

I began my research career as a community health epidemiologist, focused on identifying predictors of psychiatric rehospitalization using life table and other quantitative analyses. Very early into this work, I was confronted with a critical dilemma—what research participants were saying about their lives in the community and what the psychometrically sound and tested measurement instruments were telling us were profoundly different. Although symptomatology, level of functioning, and housing satisfaction scales were showing positive outcomes, personal narratives revealed a radically different story—one of isolation and loneliness, lack of meaningful activity, and deplorable housing conditions. This led me to return to graduate studies and pursue a degree in qualitative sociology, with the aim of focusing on understanding the in-depth and richly textured nature of the phenomena under research investigation, whether it be a lived experience, experience of an intervention, service or support, or a social context—with a view to social change.

*Where did this training in qualitative inquiry then take you?*

I remained focused on research in the mental health field, equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively interview in depth, facilitate focus groups, engage in participant and non-participant observation, and conduct critical analyses of data with strong theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. However, it was not long until I faced another challenge. The research results that we were generating were reaching our scholarly audience via peer-reviewed publications and scientific presentations, but my team and I worried about the failure of these methods to reach the service providers, policy makers, consumers of health services and their families, and the general public at large. Research articles are often not accessible, not understandable, and not adaptable to these important research stakeholders (Parsons & Boydell, 2012; Hodgins & Boydell, 2014). One research participant (a family member of an

adult child with schizophrenia) asked us what happens to the research and stated that if they knew it helped even one other person, then their time and involvement as a research participant would have been worthwhile. As a result, my research team began to share our results in ways that we believed would be more appropriately shared beyond academia. We trained research participants to use cameras to take photographs of their neighborhood in a study on supported housing. We involved a research participant in a performative rendering of research on community-based participatory inquiry. We partnered with the film department at a local rural university to create a documentary highlighting the narratives of family caregivers seeking mental health services and supports for their children (Tilleczek & Loebach, 2015). This documentary was used in “town hall” type public dissemination events in rural communities. The film was also incorporated in the teaching of allied health care professionals in college settings across the country. Audience responses to communicating our research results in this manner were very positive and motivated us to move toward a more serious consideration of formally using such creative methods in the research process.

*So, why use creative methods in the research process?*

There is much evidence to demonstrate that the arts have a significant role in portraying issues essential to our understandings of health, illness, and the body (Cox & Boydell, 2016). Such arts-based methodologies and initiatives represent a new paradigm for social inquiry and innovation in qualitative research. Many health researchers are using the arts creatively to generate new knowledge and communicate research findings. A range of artistic genres are employed: performative, visual, and literary, which include photography and other visual arts, theatre, music, poetry and dance, digital storytelling, body mapping, and material objects. The benefits of using the arts in research include increased attention to the meaning and experience of health and illness, inclusion of disenfranchised and marginalized communities, and the heightened ability to convey research findings in a way that engages target audiences and facilitates change in health care knowledge, attitudes, and practice (Boydell, Solimine, & Jackson, 2015; Boydell et al., 2018a; Boydell, Gladstone, Stasiulis, Nodin, & Cheng, 2018b; Gray & Kontos, 2015; Cole & Knowles, 2008). On a global level, there has been a continual increase in the number and variety of health research projects adopting an arts-based approach to creating research knowledge and/or disseminating empirical research findings.

*Can you describe some of your work in arts-based knowledge translation?*

My research program is collaborative and participatory. Our creative and research team has used dance (Boydell 2011a, 2011b), mural art (Boydell et al., 2015b), digital storytelling (de Jager, Tewson, Vaughan, Fogarty, & Boydell, 2017; Boydell & Belliveau, 2017), body mapping (de Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, & Boydell, 2016; Boydell et al., 2018a), material objects (Romano, McCay, & Boydell, 2012), and multimedia installation art to disseminate research on pathways to mental health care, the experience of mental ill health, and perspectives on novel interventions.

One recent example of our work in this area has been the use of body mapping to explore the experiences of young people with psychosis (Boydell et al., 2018a). Body mapping is a way of telling stories;

body maps are created using drawing, painting, or other arts-based approaches that visually represent aspects of individuals' lives, their bodies, and the world in which they live. It involves tracing the body of the participant onto a large piece of cloth or paper, which is subsequently embellished with visual representations of the participants' life narrative (Solomon, 2002).

In our research, via a series of facilitated workshops, young people were encouraged to reflect on their experiences of a 12-week physical health intervention, consider what narrative to tell, and how to represent it visually. They were asked to create an outline of their body and subsequently to use symbols and slogans to express their experiences of the physical health intervention and its impact on their lives. Following the body mapping process, participants were interviewed in depth about their experience and this interview was used to co-create a brief testimonio, or key to the body map (Figure 1). Thematic analysis and narrative inquiry were used to analyze the body maps. The narrative trope was one of recovery, highlighting the importance of the link between body and mind, individual and community, and the balance between light and darkness. Despite the pervasiveness of experiences of stigma and discrimination, there was an emphasis on developing feelings of connectedness (to self and others), hope and optimism for the future, and a sense of meaning and empowerment. Involvement in the body mapping process was consistently identified as therapeutic, offering an opportunity for reflection on the journey to recovery with a focus on past, present, and imagined storylines of the future. In this work, we highlight that the notion of embodied consciousness is contrary to a dualistic understanding of the mind and body. This shift in thinking is concisely expressed by Merleau-Ponty's point that, "we do not have bodies, we are our bodies" (de Jager et al., 2016, p. 13).



Fig. 1: Body mapping with young people experiencing psychosis

*You've talked about the use of the arts in the production of knowledge, and the beneficial consequences for research participants, but what about communicating research-informed knowledge to others?*

Our goal is most certainly to represent research findings via an aesthetic and visceral experience in order to engage audiences in ways that transcend conventional peer-reviewed publications and scientific presentations. When disseminating arts-based research, we are keen to explore the impact on the audience (Larsen, Vaughan, Bennett, & Boydell, 2018) and contribute to the use of the arts as a knowledge translation strategy. The body mapping project that I described earlier culminated in a dissemination event to share the research findings with a broad audience of service providers, academics, artists, and the general public. We wanted to offer a forum wherein audiences could draw upon their emotions and aesthetics to interpret the research. Our research team partnered with curators from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) here in Sydney and we put out an expression of interest to NIDA staff, students, and alumni, asking them to respond to the body maps using their own art genre.

The final dissemination product involved curation of the body maps which were reproduced on 4-by-8-foot silkscreens along with the 25 NIDA responses—including short films, soundscapes, poems, photographic images, sculpture, and a textile composition. *“Hold your heart high”* was a textile installation by artist Sophie Dieu, reflecting the stories and body maps of young people experiencing psychosis. In their body maps and testimonios, the heart occupies an important place, both symbolically and organically (Figure 2). It represents success during the recovery process and, as such, carries positivity and hope. By extracting the heart from inside the chest and making it fully visible, this work amplifies and acknowledges the role that our body, emotions, and psyche play in our lives. *Sublimation – citizen binary*, a digital photograph submitted by artist Barbara Doran in response to the body maps, depicts the experience of stigma, of being “marked” by others as different (Figure 3). As Barbara noted in her artist statement,

throughout time and place, no matter who we are or where we, we mark and shape our bodies because they are the sites for creating and knowing ourselves. The possibilities are infinite, but we hear them and sense them by feeling for tiny binary distinctions and arranging them into patterns. We are binary shape shifters. We constantly morph patterns of good and bad, happy and sad, yes and no, on and off, dark and light, loud and quiet, connection and disconnection—the list goes on.

One can see the ways in which she has taken up the main themes of our body mapping project, the binary distinctions that were identified in participant narratives.

The event launched with a brief overview of the study and its findings to approximately 150 attendees who were then encouraged to engage with the various art installations. We used a mixed-methods approach to “measure” the impact of this dissemination event. An online survey was distributed to attendees prior to, following, and six months after the event to measure knowledge of psychosis, the link between psychosis and poor health, and attitudes towards mental illness. A wall of sticky notes was also collected to obtain immediate responses to the installation and a random sample of attendees were

interviewed after the event about their experience. Results showed enhanced mental health literacy, and reduced stigma.



Fig. 2: "Hold your heart high"



Fig. 3: Sublimation

For example, respondents indicated that the artwork rendered the subjective experience of psychosis much more accessible to them. The body maps were reported to provide a clear visual link between the mind and the body. The respondents noted that the artworks were interesting, thought provoking, and a powerful way to gain perspective of the experiences of those individuals; it also raised awareness and lowered stigma regarding psychosis. These findings are supported by some of our earlier arts-based dissemination events that indicated they resulted in a greater knowledge base about mental health issues and help seeking (Baker, Willinsky, & Boydell, 2015; Boydell et al., 2018a).

*It appears that you have really been engaged in a great deal of research focused on the use of the arts as a knowledge translation strategy. What do you think are the current gaps in our knowledge about the use of the arts in the research process?*

Our scoping review on the use of art genres in health care research identified a number of research gaps (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012b). Although the 71 articles reviewed described the form and content of the research studies, there was little emphasis on the unique methodological, theoretical, and ethical challenges of engaging in arts-based research. So, we then set out to address these gaps, in particular the many ethical issues inherent in this work. A CIHR-funded planning grant allowed us to bring together an international group of scholars; we identified five central ethical challenges in arts-based health research: (i) authorship and ownership of the work, (ii) truth, interpretation, and representation, (iii) informed consent/anonymity/confidentiality, (iv) dangerous emotional terrain, and (v) issues of aesthetics. These challenges were described in a special journal issue on the topic that our team edited (Boydell et al., 2012a; Gladstone, Volpe, Stasiulis, & Boydell, 2012). Since that time, we have explored further ethical issues in terms of “dangerous emotional terrain” (Boydell, Solimine, & Jackson, 2015, 2017b), community-based arts research (Yassi, Lockhart, Fels, & Boydell, 2016), issues of representation and interpretation (Boydell et al., 2017b), and the implications for ethics committees (Lenette et al., 2018). We have also interrogated the current expectations of what counts in academia and the need to recognize the importance of different ways of knowing—empirical, pragmatic, experiential, and cultural (Boydell, Hodgins, Gladstone, & Stasiulis, 2017a).

*Can you expand a bit on this worry about academic currency and what counts in the university setting?*

Our team has written about the tensions experienced regarding academic legitimacy and the use of the arts in producing and disseminating research (Boydell et al., 2017a). Arts-based health research scholars typically work within a culture that values a particular way of knowing, where the academic peer-reviewed article is privileged and where there are “expectations of a linear, evidence-based tradition of writing and presenting research results” (Hodgins & Boydell, 2014). We argue for the need to reconsider what counts as knowledge and advocate attending to experiential knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, and cultural knowledge in addition to evidence-based research knowledge. As outlined by Greenhalgh and Wierenga (2011), knowledge should be viewed as being “created, constructed, embodied, performed and collectively negotiated” (p. 501). The reconceptualization of notions of evaluation and rigor are also required in order to effectively support the effective production and dissemination of arts-based health research.



*So, where to next? What are your plans for the future?*

I am committed to further advance the “science” of arts-based knowledge translation, focusing on a critical interrogation of the theoretical, methodological, practical, and ethical implications of engaging in this work. I am keen to continue to pursue collaborative partnerships with artists, designers, and other creatives in order to embrace performative, visual, and literary ways to produce and communicate empirical research knowledge. What is now required are large longitudinal studies of such arts-based health research projects that focus on what works, for whom and under what conditions. Future projects involve taking arts-based knowledge translation strategies to a new level, researching the potential of using online and virtual reality spaces for participants to create and audiences to engage in/respond to. I am confident that arts-based knowledge translation will facilitate the production of new research knowledge and provide an opportunity to engage both research participant and stakeholder audiences in meaningful ways.

## References

- Baker, N., Willinsky, C., & Boydell, K.M. (2015). Just say know: Creatively engaging young people to explore the link between cannabis use and psychosis in order to promote informed decision-making about substance use. (Invited paper). *World Cultural Psychiatry Research Review*, 201–220.
- Boydell, K.M. (2011a). *Using performative art to communicate research: Dancing experiences of psychosis*. *Canadian Theatre Review*, 146, 12–17.
- Boydell, K.M. (2011b). Making sense of collective events: The co-creation of a research-based dance. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 5. Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs110155>.
- Boydell, K.M., & Belliveau, G. (2017). Situated methodologies: A critical inquiry into art-based research methodologies. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 8(2), 135–139.
- Boydell, K.M., de Jager, A., Ball, J., Curtis, J., Lappin, J., Kalucy, M., et al. (2018a). Mapping a novel landscape for understanding physical and mental health: Arts-based research with youth experiencing psychosis. *Art/Research International*, 3(2), 236–261.
- Boydell, K.M., Gladstone, B.M., Stasiulis, E., Nodin, S., & Cheng, C. (2018b). Co-producing narratives on access to care in rural communities: Using digital storytelling to foster social inclusion of young people experiencing psychosis. *Studies in Social Justice*, 11(2), 298–304.
- Boydell, K.M., Gladstone, B.M., Stasiulis, E., Volpe, E., Dhayanhandhan, B., & Cole, A. (2015b). An aesthetic of knowledge translation: The co-creation of a mural depicting experiences of psychosis (pp. 39–50). In D. Conrad and A. Sinner (Eds.), *Creating together*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Boydell, K.M., Gladstone, B.M., Volpe, T., Allemang, B., & Stasiulis, E. (2012b). The production and dissemination of knowledge: A scoping review of arts-based health research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(1), Art. 32.

- Boydell, K.M., Hodgins, M.J., Gladstone, B.M., & Stasiulis, E. (2017a). Ineffable knowledge: Tensions (and solutions) in art-based research representation and dissemination. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health, 8*(3), 193–207.
- Boydell, K.M., Solimine, C., & Jackson, S. (2015). Visual embodiment of psychosis: Ethical concerns when performing difficult experiences. *Visual Methodologies, 3*(2), 43–52.
- Boydell, K.M., Solimine, C., & Jackson, S. (2017b). Performative dance and the ethics of embodying difficult experiences. In, *Ethics for visual research: Theory, methodology and practice*.
- Boydell, K.M., Volpe, T., Cox, S., Katz, A., Dow, R., Brunger, F., et al. (2012a). Ethical challenges in arts-based health research. *International Journal of the Creative Arts in Interprofessional Practice*. Spring Suppl Issue. 11.
- Cole, A., & Knowles, G. (2008). Arts-informed research. In A. Cole and G. Knowles (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Cox, S.M., & Boydell, K.M. (2016). Ethical issues in arts-based health research. Chapter 11 (pp. 83–91). In P. Camic and L. Wilson (Eds.), *Creative arts in public health: International perspectives*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.
- de Jager, A., Tewson, A., Ludlow, B., & Boydell, K.M. (2016). Embodied ways of storying the self: A systematic review of body mapping. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1602225>
- de Jager, A., Tewson, A., Vaughan, P., Fogarty, A., & Boydell, K.M. (2017). Digital storytelling in research: A systematic review. *The Qualitative Report, 22*(10). Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss10/3/>
- Gladstone, B.M., Volpe, T., Stasiulis, E., & Boydell, K.M. (2012). Judging quality in arts-based health research: The case of the ugly baby. *International Journal of the Creative Arts in Interprofessional Practice*. Spring Supplementary Issue. Issue 11.
- Gray, J., & Kontos, P. (2015). Immersion, embodiment, and imagination: Moving beyond an aesthetic of objectivity in research-informed performance in health. *Qualitative Social Research, 16*(2), Art. 29.
- Greenhalgh, T., & Wierenga, S. (2011). Is it time to drop the ‘knowledge translation’ metaphor? A critical literature review. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 104*, 501–509.
- Hodgins, M., & Boydell, K.M. (2014). Interrogating ourselves: Reflections on arts-based health research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 15*(1), Art. 10.
- Larsen, M., Vaughan, P., Bennett, J., & Boydell, K.M. (2018). The BIG Anxiety project: Visually exploring public experiences and attitudes to anxiety. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health, 9*(1). doi:10.1386/jaah.9.1.85\_1
- Lenette, C., Botfield, J., Boydell, K.M., Haire, B., Newman, C.E., & Zwi, A. (2018). Beyond compliance checking: A situated approach to visual research ethics. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*. doi.org/10.1007/s11673-018-9850-0
- Parsons, J., & Boydell, K.M. (2012). Arts-based research and knowledge translation: Some key concerns for health care professionals. *Journal of Interprofessional Care, 26*(3), 170–172. Invited Guest Editorial.

Romano, D., McCay, E., & Boydell, K.M. (2012). The use of photographed objects in understanding the process of recovery from a first episode of schizophrenia. *Arts and Health, 4*(1), 70–82.

Solomon, J. (2002). 'Living with X': A body mapping journey in time of HIV and AIDS. Facilitator's guide. Retrieved from <http://www.comminut.com/healthafrica/content/living-x-body-mapping-journey-time-HIV-and-AIDS-facilitator-%E2%80%99s-guide>

Tilleczek, K., & Loebach, J. (2015). Research goes to the cinema: The veracity of videography with, for and by youth. *Research in Comparative and International Education, 10*(3), 354–366.

Yassi, A., Lockhart, K., Fels, L., & Boydell, K.M. (2016). Ethics in community-university-artist partnered research: Tensions, contradictions and gaps identified mid-way in a 5-year multi-institutional 'arts for social change' project. *Journal of Academic Ethics*. doi:10.1007/s10805-016-9257-7



**Katherine Boydell** is a Professor of Mental Health at The Black Dog Institute, University of New South Wales. Her substantive research focuses on understanding the complex pathways to care for young people experiencing mental ill health, the use of new technologies in child and youth mental health, and the “science” of knowledge translation, while her methodological research examines the advancement of qualitative inquiry, specifically, in the study of arts-based health. She has used documentary film, research-based dance, digital storytelling, body mapping, photovoice, and found poetry in her program of research. She has published more than 200 journal articles and published the only text on qualitative inquiry in the field of early psychosis titled, *Hearing Voices: Qualitative Inquiry in Early Psychosis*.



# Global Robotics Competition Meets Inclusive Education: The Exceptional Journey of Five Resilient Students

Simon Parent and Sara Iatauro

## Abstract

The 2018 edition of RoboCup allowed young people from *Centre de formation en entreprise et récupération (CFER) de Bellechasse* to demonstrate their skills in programming and robotics. In this school, as in many schools, the use of technology is a particularly effective learning tool, especially for students facing challenges. The construction of a robotic device has allowed them to develop several skills, some of which can be reinvested in various contexts, whether at school or in their professional life. This commentary briefly presents the exceptional journey of Bellechasse students who were able to overcome many obstacles and compete with gifted students from around the world.

## Background

In June 2018, the city of Montreal hosted a major international event: RoboCup 2018. This competition was an opportunity for thousands of elementary, high school, and university students worldwide to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in robotics. These young people include the student team from *Centre de formation en entreprise et récupération (CFER) de Bellechasse*, a training centre located in the city of Saint-Raphaël, Quebec. These students, many of whom have neurodevelopmental or learning difficulties, are familiar with concrete learning that can have significant repercussions in their daily and professional lives. CFER de Bellechasse places great importance on creativity and collaboration, and is aware of the major contribution of technology, which allows for many *ways of knowing*.

After much thought, the Bellechasse team members, counting on the support of teacher Elise Croteau and psychoeducator Annick Pelletier, chose to participate in the OnStage component of the competition. Their task was to build a robotic device and integrate it into a stage performance. After competing at the provincial and national level, Bellechasse students reached the international finals and joined approximately 4,000 participants in the 2018 edition of RoboCup. Throughout the process, this competition has demonstrated how the use of technology, and more specifically programming and robotics, can be a powerful inclusive tool for meeting the specific needs of students in the classroom.



Fig. 1: Provincial qualifications for Quebec (Rosemount Technology Center, EMSB).

These Francophone students (with basic English skills) were able to compete and fully participate in the activities of this major event in which most of the participants were English speakers. They were able to count on the help of two bilingual members of the organizing committee to help them understand all the instructions given to participants. In addition to developing technological skills in programming and robotics, students mobilized their organizational, time management, and stress management skills on numerous occasions, which are critical skills for all students.

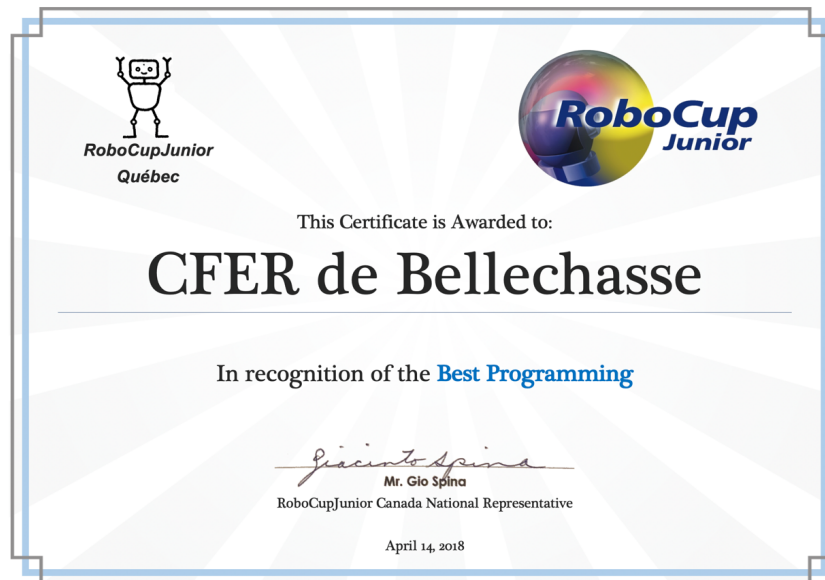


Fig. 2: Certificate awarded to the Bellechasse team at the end of the provincial qualifications.



As part of the activities of the competition, CFER students had to interact with other students from around the world, which was a particularly valuable opportunity for them to be exposed to other cultures and to develop their collaborative and communication skills. For example, during the *SuperTeam Challenge*, the CFER team was paired with two other teams from Israel and Portugal to complete a collaborative task. The purpose of this activity was to build a robotic device that could make a work of art, live on stage.



Fig. 3: The students of the Bellechasse team performed on stage with their robots, in front of a hundred spectators.

RoboCup was a highly stimulating learning opportunity for all students, many of whom have different learning profiles and propensities. Robotics is not only for gifted students. The participation of students from the *CFER de Bellechasse* Centre is an eloquent testimony of engagement and perseverance. We salute the hard work of these young people, which deserves to be highlighted.



Fig. 4: The NAO robot used by Bellechasse students in their performance.



**Simon Parent** is a PhD student at Université de Montréal, under the direction of Dr Thierry Karsenti. In his research, Simon is interested in the pedagogical use of programming and robotics in elementary school for the development of skills. He is also the Coordinator of Scientific Research at the Canada Research Chair in ICT in Education, where he has the opportunity to work on different research projects that include e-sports, distance learning for teachers in Niger (UTIFEN project), and the use of video games for learning (Assassin's Creed, Minecraft).



**Sara Iatauro** is a Robotics and STEAM Consultant who helps schools integrate Robotics, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics creatively in educational curriculums. She specializes in implementing these concepts across disciplines within an inclusive school program for students in Kindergarten to Grade 11. Her graduate research work focuses on technologies and robotics in education to assist teachers in engaging students in a sustainable manner. Since 2006, she has been involved with local and international communities of robotics. RoboCup is the world's largest international competition for intelligent robots and research. Through yearly competitions, the RoboCup community strives to promote the development of robots and artificial intelligence of autonomous machines.



# Articulating Ideas and Meaning Through the Use of Comics

Nick Sousanis

## Abstract

In this interview with author and educator Nick Sousanis, he discusses his PhD dissertation, which was written and drawn entirely in comic book form and later published by Harvard University Press under the title “Unflattening.” He describes how he proceeded with the idea of producing a dissertation in comic form and the support he received from his professors. He strongly believes that it is possible to convey complex ideas in comic form and that the form itself draws people in. He also shares what he learns from his students—often non-drawers—and gives examples of innovative work produced by them.

*Can you describe the events in your life in which you developed your talent for visual art, more specifically as a comics artist?*

I was into comics as a very small child. My much older brother read comics to me; “Batman” ended up being my first word as a result. I liked drawing comics, I liked making all kinds of paper constructions as a little kid. And I made my own comic through junior high and high school, that I created, printed, and sold called “Lockerman” (who makes a small cameo in “Unflattening”). When I came to university, I was still interested in drawing comics, but comics was not something you could do as a field of study and I wanted to do intellectual things—and comics certainly wasn’t something you could do as an intellectual. I studied mathematics and philosophy, and although I was still making comics, they were more or less in the background for some time.

After college, I eventually ended up in a Masters program at Wayne State University in Detroit, and in that period my brother and I started a magazine about art and culture called [thedetroiter.com](http://thedetroiter.com)—where, among other things, I wrote multiple reviews weekly about arts in the city. In the midst of that I was asked to be in a political art show around the 2004 election. With only a few days to go before the show I turned to making comics. These political comics I made triggered my full-on return to creating comics. (Not that there was ever a full stop, but there was a lot of unfinished work for five to 10 years in there.) Shortly after making those comics, I co-organized an exhibition of art and games and my friend suggested I do the exhibition essay as a comic. So I did this long-form comic about the history of games, how they work, and ultimately a philosophical look at games and life. This was one of the things that when I decided I was going to go to doctoral school, I said, “This is the kind of work I can make that can be educational, very sophisticated, complex, and dense, but doesn’t seem like it.” Comics are somewhat subversive in that way. You can hand somebody a comic book and they’ll read it, expecting something light. But you can so densely pack it in the way you use images, metaphorical images, image and text interactions, that, all of a sudden, they’re engrossed in something much deeper than they ever expected to be, and it hasn’t turned them away. So that’s sort of how I came to it.

I did study fine arts in my Masters program, and I wrote about the arts. And while I really liked the fine arts—and I still do—what I loved about comic books is that you could make something that was reproducible, distributable, and cheap. I give away lots of miniature excerpts of my work to anyone I end up talking with. Beats a business card, and people appreciate it. In that way, you can reach a lot of people. Whereas if I made a painting, only one person could own it and it would cost more money than I could ever pay for it for me to be able to make it worth my time to make.

*You very successfully produced a visual rendering of comics art in your wonderful book “Unflattening,” which was your dissertation for your PhD. Can you discuss how you made this happen and how you were supported and/or challenged by academia along the way?*

None of my advisors knew anything about comics: they were interested enough, curious enough, and I think really somewhat just interested in seeing something that was not the same thing they’d seen their whole career. I had very senior professors. In English Education I had Professor Ruth Vinz, who worked in poetry. I had Robbie McClintock who moved from history of education to technology and education, who was emeritus by the time I finished and really always interested in things that were different than what education had been. And then finally, I had Maxine Greene, who needs probably less introduction, philosopher of aesthetic education. While she didn’t know anything about comics, she was really excited about the possibilities in how they realized her own philosophy of making meaning through the visual.

*Were there any challenges that you experienced?*

I was fortunate, I believe, because of their senior and emeritus status, they weren’t risking anything by supporting me. I think the fact that I came in with the plan already—not that I knew exactly what I was going to do—but I knew I was going to work in this form. I wasn’t a dabbler in it. This was something I was already an experienced practitioner of and further dedicated myself to as soon as I got to school. And I’ll say this just as a side note before I continue: it was important to me that my work was as accepted by the comics world, as it was by academia. I think the bar for drawing good comics is kind of low in academia, and the bar for drawing good comics in the comics world is obviously much higher. It really mattered to me to make connections in the comics world to inform my practice, the sort of feedback about the form and craft that I didn’t expect to get in academia. I think to me that’s a really important thing about doing alternative kind of scholarship is to be as well-versed in the medium that you’re using—or the form you’re using—as you are on the research side of it. And striking that balance really fuelled mine. The third thing that helped me was not only didn’t I know any better, but I was really stubborn: I was just going to do this thing. I was little bit older as a grad student and wasn’t doubting it. I was just plunging ahead doing it. From there, I became a bit of an evangelist for this work (and still am), speaking at conferences very early into my program about why this work mattered. On the average, people were very receptive—and there was a lot of enthusiasm early on (particularly from the Digital Humanities folks) that ended up generating a lot of interest and attention to the work before I’d really even gotten going on the dissertation.

As far as people pushing back, I can recall an AERA talk ... a professor had sort of an odd comment: "If you're so anti the academy, why do you want to be a part of it?" Which I thought ... number one I don't think I was particularly anti academy at all and two, it didn't make a whole lot of sense, because the point is you can love being part of something, but also say, "there are ways that it can grow or expand or change." This sort of thing was disturbing but mostly emboldened me to push harder. My advisors approached it like: "Let's see what happens." At some point I had achieved so much momentum for the project, with broad interest in the work from multiple directions ... there was no reason to get in the way of it had they even wanted to. Some of my cohort—they were all supportive in general—but I think a few were a little more cautious: "Are you really going to do this?" I'm not sure what their concerns were exactly ... but I did feel that.

Overall, I think I was really very fortunate. I think I hit the right time in history where people were open to it. And I just happened to have the right set of mentors, the right set of skills, and the right set of ignorance about what I wasn't supposed to do that it just kind of sailed through a lot easier than it could have.

*Where have you gone with this now that you're in academia and where are you planning to go with it?*

I'm very grateful for the success of this work and to see it spread into so many different educational settings in the US and abroad, and that I've had the opportunity to speak about it with so many different people. But at the same time, it's the first long-form work I've ever made—I feel like I'm kind of just getting started. I'm really excited to push boundaries on that.

I've learned so much from my students. I've been fortunate since I was a student at Columbia to teach classes there to primarily self-described non-drawers, and to continue in a post-doc at University of Calgary where I taught classes to mostly non-drawers, and now at San Francisco State, where I launched a Comic Studies minor.

I do have some classes that have a fair amount of animators and drawing students in them, but the majority of my students still have no prior experience. My goal in class is to get everybody to understand how much they actually can communicate visually and how much they already know about drawing because they're visual creatures who are spatially embodied and live in the world. All the times that I work with them I learn better about how to start from that place, and I think the more I learn from doing that with them, the more I trust it and, hopefully, the more I can trust it in my own work.

In "Unflattening" there's an argument for why the visual should count. The next work that I'm slowly in the midst of is a little deeper look at how we do make meaning through the visual and how much the body itself—how much our movement ... the fact the way we have fingers ... and the ways our eyes work, and all those sorts of things—how that is part of our thinking. You can use that to think about what schools maybe could look like, or what education could look like in a different way. You think about the body being really vital to learning, rather than incidental to it.

To this end, I've teamed up with my friend Andrea Kantrowitz, who is a drawing researcher, and another colleague, Kathryn Ricketts, who is a dance professor, and we have done two workshop-performances together so far, where we weave together our different modes of making meaning. We start with a performance where drawing responds to dancer, and vice versa, which segues into a workshop where we move between dance, drawing, and comics to get participants quickly engaged in exploring these forms (<http://spinweaveandcut.com/new-scholarship-pmla-comic/>), and it's been really fascinating.

*If we believe that viewing and portraying work provide a different and important way of thinking and understanding, what suggestions do you have for elementary and secondary school teachers in order to support visual literacies?*

The second or third time I taught my Comics in Education course at Columbia, the texts that we used didn't come in until three or four weeks later into the semester than they were supposed to. So, we did all sorts of comic-making exercises right upfront at the beginning part of the class. I started to apologize to the students and say, "Sorry, we haven't really learned anything...", and I stopped myself. And I realized instead that, in fact, all the things we had been doing had taught us so much, one, about how much we already knew, two, about how to do these things, and, three, about the theories that we were going to talk about. I had been giving them constraint-based exercises and all kinds of things to get them making. Just to give you one example, tell me "How you got here?" (which you can interpret in many different ways) in a comic strip of three panels and a version of it across two pages. And so, everybody goes home and does their thing, and they'd come back and compare the choices they had made individually in the three panels versus the two pages. And then, we'd be looking and learning from all the different ways each student had approached it. And, in fact, they had taught themselves an enormous amount. That still stands out to me. Here we were doing all these things that felt like play, but they were teaching themselves important, lasting lessons as a result.

And I think even those of us who are in the arts or think about play as important, there is still a part of us that will downplay it because, "it's fun; it's sort of trying things." And, yet, I think the more you learn to embrace that and make that the front part of what you do, the more it can inform your work as a whole, and how it can point you in directions for new discoveries.

I do get this question a lot: "I agree with you that makes sense, but I'm not a maker, so how can I be the one leading it?" I think part of that is the sort of the trust that your students will figure it out. That doesn't mean you should be ignorant about what you're going into, but it does mean trying things knowing that some might fail, trying things knowing that if they're into it if you set up situations in an environment where they're excited to play and to try, they will start teaching themselves, and you, at the same time. I think being open to that and trusting that play really is serious learning is the key.

*What advice would you give to graduate students and/or supervisors about pursuing visual modes of inquiry in their work?*

I think what I said a little bit earlier about seeking out comic makers when I was doing my work was as important as the advice I was getting in the academy, I think that is really key. You don't want to be a

dabbler in it—not that there’s anything wrong with being a dabbler, but if you’re going to make this kind of work, you want to understand the form you’re working in as well as the research you’re bringing to it. Without doing that, I find that that work tends to be more like illustration: “Here are some great ideas I had, and I stuck some pictures with it.” I think really immersing yourself in the ways of the form is key, and that often means seeking outsiders—maybe within your university, maybe not. But I think it’s absolutely worth it.

In my case I definitely started making comics as academic work because of accessibility. I was really interested in the ways I could make complex ideas accessible to a broader audience without dumbing them down. In fact, in comics I was maybe making denser work than I would have made in text alone. But I learned something more in the course of making the work ... People frequently ask me this question: “Did you come up with the words first or the pictures?” And I say, “Yes!” And it’s really this back and forth between images teaching me things that I want to write, words teaching me things or suggesting things I want to draw, images suggesting directions that I’d go in my research that I wouldn’t do otherwise because I have to solve problems in the image. There are things that the images suggest that I wasn’t thinking about or things in my sketches that make me think of something I would never have thought of. So while the work started about making ideas accessible, ultimately working visually changed what I came up with in my work. Had I written the text for this and then drawn it afterward, it would be a completely different thing. Instead, with the way I work, which is starting with sketches, starting with images. I think that’s a prime lesson of this: it’s not about making it easier, it’s not about making it aesthetically different; it’s really about changing how you think, or the ways you do your thinking, from the ground up. And the thing I do with my students—who tend to be not trained artists—whatever skills they come with, they all end up figuring out ways to make meaning, and sort of *surprise* themselves. I think that’s a really key word: they surprise themselves in how they can articulate ideas and meaning through the use of the visual—and I don’t mean the use of the visual as about specific skills or training, but as a way of spatially organizing information or marks to create meaning. And I really see that everybody can do that, and it definitely changes what you can do and the kinds of questions you can ask, and how often you can surprise yourself.

*Do you have one example of a student that you came across that really just—by playing and doing these kinds of exercises—transformed what they were doing?*

Many. One student in particular who demonstrates this well was a student in my class called “Comics as a Way of Thinking” in the English department at the University of Calgary where I was a post-doc. She was super shy. It was a smallish class, 18 students, and I could get her to say one sentence each class. She was really interested in comics but had zero drawing experience—everything she made was sort of stick figure, smiley face, level of craft. But she kept doing these curious things in the way she used the space of a page in the comics. Without going into the specifics about comics that much, comics are both this thing where you draw sequential serial images, but you also are thinking about the architecture of the whole page at the same time. So, there’s sort of a back and forth between those things. And she was really using that “whole” in an interesting way and she produced this piece for her final that moved me so much I have since shared it in all of my public talks. While it’s hard to explain without seeing it, I’ll say that this apparently it started from her just playing with some words and some pictures about herself and from that, these repressed thoughts about being bullied and picked on in high school came out.

The final piece turned into this really powerful and affirming statement about who she is. She still drew a stick figure version of herself, but even with that she used the form quite innovatively. There's a lot of play obscuring her character's face until the end, she does a ton with comics panels as boxes, sometimes as a window that you see through, but also as obstacles blocking her. There was a lot of play with those sorts of things and then the high point: as she's talking about her being trapped and constrained in these boxes, she moves to a page of only words, but words that read in this sharp-angled spiral that moves through the page as you read through it as her words talk about no longer constrained by boxes. It never stands out like she's mastered some sort of Rembrandt-ish skills of art, but it's this powerhouse of how using the visual and using the space in a way she did could showcase or could open spaces for thinking in different and really profound ways, and it's produced in a way that can be shared easily with others. The way she moves the reader through space and played with the very way we read, turns this into an incredibly moving piece. <http://spinweaveandcut.com/education-odessa/>.

One more example, a student from a class a year or two ago—again, not a trained drawer at all. In class, we read comics and learned a bit about graphic medicine, comics that deal with health in visual form. He made a comic about his grandmother who had died of Alzheimer's, and he really never knew her when she was healthy. He explored his understanding of her and her vanishing memory with things like blank panels—some to talk about not knowing his grandmother and others about her no longer knowing who she was. It was done with the most minimal amount of drawing, but even the blank panels became powerful statements in the way he'd orchestrated it all.



**Nick Sousanis** is an Eisner-winning comics author and an Assistant Professor of Humanities & Liberal Studies at San Francisco State University, where he is starting a Comics Studies program. He received his doctorate in education at Teachers College, Columbia University in 2014, where he wrote and drew his dissertation entirely in comic book form. Titled “Unflattening,” it argues for the importance of visual thinking in teaching and learning, and was published by Harvard University Press in 2015. *Unflattening* received the 2016 American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence (PROSE Award) in Humanities, the Lynd Ward Prize for best Graphic Novel of 2015, and was nominated for an Eisner Award for Best Scholarly/Academic work. To date, *Unflattening* has been translated into French, Korean, Portuguese, Serbian, Polish, Italian, and Chinese.

# The Ormiston Philosophy: A Changing Education Paradigm

Luke Sumich

## Abstract

Luke Sumich is one of the founders of Ormiston Junior College in Auckland, New Zealand. In this interview, he describes how the school came into being and the philosophy behind its personalized approach to education. He explains the views of the students and their parents as well as the challenges and hurdles encountered since the inception of the school. He concludes by offering advice for educators interested in innovative systems change.

*It's apparent that you have established a wonderful new school in Auckland, New Zealand, called Ormiston Junior College. Can you tell us about the genesis of Ormiston?*

The area that we have is sort of a sprawling suburb on the outskirts of Auckland that's now been encompassed by more sprawling suburbs. But the area was farmland and the government decided that they needed a strategy to get the seven schools built in this area. So, they made a break from tradition and sort of said, "What would be the best model for education in this area?" And they've gone for a primary school, which is our Year 1 to 6, and a junior college, which is our Year 7 to 10, and then I think one senior college, which is our Year 11 to 13. Traditionally in New Zealand, you could have had a full primary which went all the way to Year 8 and then a giant college that went from 9 to 13. But they didn't want to have schools over a thousand students. They felt that at that point you start to lose a little bit of the intimacy of education. So, in the last eight years, they have been building these schools as the area has grown and the products have been developed in the housing. And we're the second-to-last piece of the puzzle, which is the junior college.

Evolving from that is what I would call a "perfect storm"—we're in a changing paradigm of education where we're moving away from content all the time. The school being a junior college is not a high school, but it's not a primary school. We picked up the funding from the government, so, we're funded as a high school and got a bit more money. And another beautiful thing is: we're not strangled by external countrywide exams because they only happen in senior college. We've got this perfect storm of a new build, brand-new facilities, excellent funding, and not getting hamstrung by external exams. All the stars have aligned for us to be able to come on and be reasonably creative and reasonably research-driven with education at the moment.

*The vision as I understand it for Ormiston is to guarantee that every learner engages in innovative, personalized, and world-class learning. Can you describe what this looks like in terms of physical space, curriculum, pedagogy, and timetabling?*

"Guarantee" was a very difficult word to include in our philosophy. But the point really is that, to go and chase that goal is a lofty goal, and to go and chase that goal we have to think about every learner and

not consider the way things may have been ... children are doing very well in this way. Many schools are successful around the country and around the world and have a traditional style of teaching and learning and it's been wildly successful for lots of children. However, these often burnt pale. And so, when you talk about guaranteeing every learner, the words that came for us weren't "guaranteed"; it started to go to "every learner." And what we quickly realized is that there are a bunch of disengaged children who don't do well, who always seem to be failing ... the poor or the economically disadvantaged around the world and you will find that they're the ones that aren't engaged and, certainly, you couldn't guarantee that they would be getting the best. So, we needed to do "also/and." We have to be able to make sure that we still succeed with the ones that are succeeding in every school anyway. They have to guarantee that they're going to get over the line as well. Those that traditionally have struggled in a traditional education get across the line too.

So, what we really have done is have a look at the research and particularly research about what makes a successful learner or what makes a successful student or what makes a successful contributor to our country. And what it really comes back to: relationships are key to children's learning and there is a saying that, "children don't care how much you *know* until they know how much you *care*." And that couldn't be truer. We are working here with pre-teens and teens ... so the ages of our children are 12, 13, 14, 15. We also get the complexity of pubertal changes and, particularly, chemical changes in the brain at this time. Again, when I say "research," I'm talking also about the research around "relationships matter" and children who have a relationship with their teacher. But, also relationships on a level that allows us to understand the chemistry in the brain and understanding what's going on in the brain. And relationships also around: "I've made a mistake." Not "I'm telling you off" and blame. And we'll find with teenagers and with parents—parents will blame, and teenagers will react. We know in terms of a teenager that they will react rather than think logically. Taking the research to the actions, which is what I'm trying to do now is say: "We understand that teenagers ... the emotional part of their brain will kick in and the logical part of their brain will drop." And so, when you ask them, "What were you thinking?—[they reply] "I don't know." "But why did you do that?"—"I don't know." If you ask them: "How do you feel about it? How do you feel about what's happened?" You'll go in and get an answer because they do have an emotional connection.

Now I moved it to action. So, what have we got? We see that each teacher in the school has a group of 12 to 14 students. They are known not as their teacher but as their "MAC," MAC meaning mentor, advisor, coach. These students need to have a MAC that they can rely on. If they enroll at the school in Year 7 at the age of 11 or 12, that MAC will be with them for the four years that they're here. The key to a lot of these relationships: build relationships; maintain them. Often, a teacher will have a relationship with a student, and then next year they get a different teacher and have to start all over again. So, why would we do that? And often a kid will behave well for six months for a teacher in a honeymoon period, [and say], "Oh she knows me, she knows me well, and she's talking to my parents." It almost becomes family and when you can get to family you can get to situations that will enable children to be in the best possible place for their learning because of the trust that's laid out in front of them.



On a daily timetable, this teacher who has 12 to 14 kids, and their MAC, they will see ... in a week they will be with them four to four-and-a-half hours. They will be their academic coach. They will be their social and emotional advisor. They will be their mentor and advisor, and link with their parents. We have a lot of students that are not born in New Zealand or come from a second-language background, predominantly Asian, and the mentality of “being at the appropriate level” for a student like that is not appropriate for that family; “above” is the only place that students can be in terms of their learning for lots of our families. And this places massive pressure on our students. So again, to be able to have a person that understands education as an adult can almost act as “in loco parentis,” which is sort of what you are as a teacher: you are a teacher and an adult at school and almost their parent for that period of time. On a daily action, we set up a timetable that allows us to build relationships and almost a “relationship curriculum.”

There’s also another thing around movement: children have to have some form of physical activity. Otherwise, they’re delivered to school in a car, get out, sit around all day with their friends, get picked up, walk home, get fed, and repeat the process. Every child in our school will do a form of physical activity during the day. There’s multiple choice from hip hop dance through to the walking group through to badminton and more, it’s irrelevant really, what it is, but, for their mental health and well-being, every child, every day, will do some form of physical activity.



Fig. 1: Ormiston Junior College

*Can you describe some of your innovative practices?*

It’s sometimes difficult for some people to consider “innovative” as being one thing and other people to just ... it can become a new norm. I suppose one of the things that I would think of as innovative: we took the New Zealand curriculum and we said, “What’s the essence of the learning that is required?” There’s detail as well in the New Zealand curriculum—there’s an essence and there’s detail. If I just give an example in Science: the essence of Science ... generating and testing ideas, gathering evidence, making observations, carrying out investigations of the modeling, communicating and debating with others, in order to gain scientific knowledge. Those are really powerful essences. And if our kids could learn the essence of Science, that would be far more effective than when I switch to the back of the curriculum and I have a look at what it’s saying in detail around Science and essences and astronomical science ... we should investigate the conditions of the Planet, of their moons, and the sectors affecting them. Now, that detail is lovely but not relevant. But generating and testing ideas, gathering evidence, making observations, carrying out discussions, are massively relevant. Those essence statements are very

important. We wrote some criteria: “Can you give evidence children that you can generate and test ideas? Can you give evidence that you can make an insight and be able to prove that or disprove that? Can you debate and communicate with others?” That was essentially what we said was the most important thing to learn—not the planets. So, what we did with them was combine ... make it into a badge ... and children had these badges and some of them are science-related, some of them are technology-related, some of them are science and tech. That badge that I just read there, that criteria ... that’s almost every subject in the curriculum.

Children then go out and they do projects on whatever it is that they’re chasing: some of them are doing global warming projects; some of them are looking at the old folks’ home up the road and the impact on aged care; others have been working on fish ponds and looking at sustainable fishing and have actually traveled to Hawaii to look at the traditional Hawaiian coral fish ponds. But the point is that those areas of study that they go down: as long as they can work their way through the essence of the curriculum, then we feel that’s far more valid and it’s far more robust than us teaching a set of things like the planets. The Periodic Table is a great example: Why would I teach the Periodic Table? Why wouldn’t I just be using it in some way?

We feel that that’s reasonably innovative. But the real goal in this—I think this is the bit that’s probably better thought through—is that we have then said to the children: “Ah, so at assessment time, how have you been going?” And what they have to do is come back and give evidence towards the criteria of that badge that says, “Here’s what I’ve been doing.” And they pitch back, they pitch back to their MAC—the 12-14 kids—and their teacher who’s their mentor-advisor-coach, and they say, “This is the badge that I’m going for. Here’s my evidence. Here’s my learning.” And they ask questions. And at the start, the kids ask questions, the teachers ask questions, and they grade and self-mark and grade for themselves.

I think that if we look at the key elements of the system: in a traditional school we might have had a test, marked that, and said, “You got a B minus.” That feedback is horrid. There’s no self-assessment, there’s no peer assessment, there’s no eliciting of evidence. They actually might have asked for an essay and used that as the evidence, and there’s no shared learning expectation. If you really want to see full learning, I think that coming back and being able to talk about, describe, show and a test too, with your peers and your teachers ... I would call that probably quite innovative practice. That’s one area that we could be very proud of.

*Since the inception of Ormiston, what hurdles or challenges have you encountered?*

The hurdles are traditional parental expectations. They went to school like all of us and they experience school like all of us that let’s just go back to ...most of my parents would be born in the 70s or 80s, went to school in the early 80s, early 90s, late 80s ... around that period of time. Their only knowledge of school is what happened to be. And now children have some choice in their education in what appears to be to them freedom or perhaps, “I don’t like this new-fangled mucking around.” So, it’s an exercise in continuous upscaling of parents’ knowledge of education, and some don’t want to know:

“My kid is at school ... can you just say nothing ... can you just give them a grade ... can they just pass?” With some that’s quite difficult ... we do have some parents who want everything explained—not many—and they can be hard because they can be quite high maintenance and be not satisfied by something. And then you’ve got others that don’t want to know, and then you’ve got others that are the silent majority—they’re certainly happy because they think they’re happy, but I’m not sure they really understand what and how we’re trying to do things. We found getting them engaged in what we’re doing ... it would be much better if they were 100% behind us because they understood. There are many parents who are 100% behind us—but it’s not that they understand—it’s just that their kids are happy. It’s frustrating and it’s a challenge. And I’m continually having to prove myself and the school and it’s hard to live in that space every day.

*What about the students? What do the students say about Ormiston?*

There are some students that completely, enormously, and unequivocally have grabbed the whole concept and understand the whole concept, which I’m *clapping* and I’m so appreciative of those students. There are others that ... they go home, and their parents are saying, “What are you doing?” [And they answer], “I don’t know.” They feel a little pressure sitting in between their parents’ opinions—which are not being voiced enough—and their own.

What are they saying? “They love it!” They absolutely love it and what is beautiful ... I got an e-mail the other day with attendance and this comes from the government and the government does assessment on attendance for every student in New Zealand. And they generalize you and they put your whole school in. You’ve got to understand: I’ve got year 7, 8, 9, and 10, and year 10, the year before all the exams start, and year 10 has the worst rate of attendance across New Zealand in terms of kids who wag or bump school or don’t go or missed classes, or whatever. Our school in the ranking was out-of-control ahead of everybody in terms of attendance. We were 7 to 10 percent higher than private schools; we were above the schools that are similar community types—we were 15 percent ahead of them. There was a lovely little snapshot that arrived: we’re doing something right from a real evidence base. The children really are getting a good ride—they love coming.

We had to develop together a set of values that we believed in as teachers and as a community. And when we push those values ... but one thing about teenagers, [they often say], “it’s got to be fair,” if it’s not fair they don’t want to know. And if we say: “We care about your personal health and well-being”—then we go and deliver there, and kids are seeing that. What I would say is the anecdotal evidence from parents is: “I can’t believe this is the same kid that I had last year” (when they come to our school). So, we are here in terms of the children; they are our biggest advocates. And that’s why they are a juxtaposition with the parents with their life’s issue: “What’s my biggest problem?” Also, they’re our biggest advocates—that’s why there’s so many happy families because of the happy kids.

*What about the skeptics about academic success rates? How do you respond to that? How do your children fare?*

We also do standardized testing across the country. If you sit on the spaces that we sit on, you can't afford to not be performing in all areas. I talked about also/and earlier on: the non-negotiable literacy and numeracy is non-negotiable literacy and numeracy! It is taught—it is rigorously taught. We're still running the standardized testing for reading, writing, and math to ensure that our numbers are holding up, improving, and getting better. And we've had some pretty outstanding results in terms of that. We're very comfortable that we can point fingers to that and be equal to and/or above our peers or with our peers in terms of our scope.

We get a lot of visitors—the neighboring schools, the schools around Auckland, a good 100-150 schools that walked through the doors this year. And my point to them is that we must share what we're doing with them and not belittle traditional education. There's a place for either/or, or there's a place for and/or, in our schools. So, I think the way to address setbacks is to embrace them as well and to let them know that some of the stuff that they're doing is completely valid and validated, and we haven't thrown that out as well. I think by doing that ... I ask people, I say to them when they come here: "Look, this is Version 1.1, and we're doing our best every day. And without the support of the education community, we're not going to make the little steps that everyone does. And if we're making giant steps for you what looks to be impossible, then clap and say thanks for opening a few doors because that's allowed us to take these smaller steps." I think setbacks are to be embraced—not to be pushed to the side and argued with. By doing that, we row the boat forward for education across the sector, rather than in one particular school.

*If you were to give advice to other schools engaging in innovative systems change, what would you say?*

It needs to be about "we," "we believe." You're not going to get the buy-in with saying: "This is going to happen; this is how it happens." I think that's really important that it does have to be about a "we," "we believe about learning." The second thing I would say is that surrounding yourself with people of more complementary skills, rather than similar skills. "Complementary" meaning almost "oppositional." I'm meaning it in a way that if I'm a creative thinker, and I fill the room with five creative thinkers, we're not going to get the job done. Some people have amazing ideas, thoughts, and processes, and they're required in the room. Also in the room is the detail person; they are required in the room. If the detail person is not there, action's not going to come from there. And the emotional thinker—the EQ—is required in the room because with the EQ you can make great decisions and have great ideas, but you forgot there are people involved and this has an impact beyond where your thinking is going to take you. And then, of course, you've got to have the summative thinker—the person in the room that's got that "big picture" understanding.



Fig. 2: Collaboration at work

I'm a real believer in having a diversity of thinking and a diversity of staff, a diversity of ideas, which, as long as the "we believe" are the norm, then you can really get leverage and get moving. You can't have a room full of diverse thinkers who aren't prepared to shift from what they believe/I believe/we believe—you won't get anywhere. I think that's the process that I sort of have ... that's what I've evolved over the last 30 years and 20 years of principalship and 30 years of teaching is that I've had to shift to other people's ideas that are better than mine. Therefore, what will I give up, what will I forego for the betterment of the team. There is a lovely word called "collaboration" that can mean many things. And [when it comes to] collaboration, people say often, "we'll share." But actually, collaboration is also about "giving away": I will hand away because in collaborative thinking and collaborative group thought, sometimes you've got to give stuff up. I'm a bit of a fan of having a diversity of thinkers and I'm a fan of setting a baseline—and that baseline would be what we value and believe.



**Luke Sumich** loves test cricket, is a keen fisherman, handy golfer, and a long-suffering coach of every sport his children have chosen! He graduated from the Auckland College of Education in 1987. Luke has taught at Kedgley Intermediate, Onehunga High School. He was Principal at Punaruku School, foundation principal at Summerland Primary School, and is now foundation principal at Ormiston Junior College, Flatbush, Auckland.



# Black Male Students Negotiate Ways of Knowing Themselves During Digital Storytelling

Becky Beucher and Robyn Seglem

## Abstract

We explore how valuing Black male students' literacies within academic contexts during multimodal writing can position students' ways of knowing at the center of their learning. This centering requires a repositioning of students' cultural literacies at the core of instruction. Using multiliteracies and Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks, we analyze and share excerpts from conversations with three Black adolescent high school seniors as they composed and reflected upon authoring digital autobiographies for an assignment in their Black Literature class. These reflections illuminate how the students drew on culturally salient texts to share elements of themselves with their peer and teacher audience.

## Background

In this paper we explore how valuing racialized students' literacies within academic contexts during multimodal writing can position students' ways of knowing at the center of their learning experience. Centering minoritized students' ways of knowing in school and curricular contexts necessarily requires a repositioning of students' cultural literacies at the center of instruction. This move is of particular importance given how standardized, and therefore homogenized, forms of curriculum and assessment drive decisions around which texts students should be reading, inclusive of text content and form (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). This practice perpetuates the erasure of minoritized ways of knowing and all too often marks minority students as failures despite their proficiency with culturally salient literacies (Kirkland, 2013, 2017).

In our discussion, we share excerpts from conversations that Becky had with three Black adolescent high school seniors—Devonte, Malcolm, and Gabriel—as they composed and reflected upon authoring digital autobiographies for an assignment in their English Language Arts class titled, “Black Literature.” The excerpts we have selected from these conversations illuminate how the students drew on culturally salient texts (e.g., hip-hop music, quotations from Black leaders; images of their families and friends; sports icons and college mascots) to share elements of themselves with their peer and teacher audience. These conversations concurrently showcase their perspectives about their own agency to control micro and macro identity narratives circulating within the school about who they are. Indeed, as Haddix (2012) has argued, Black male students can “reclaim their literate identities” (p. 129) through storytelling. Through examining these conversations, we discuss how students' ways of knowing themselves were informed by cultural and school discourses related to Black masculinity.

Teacher-centered instruction is often coupled with the privileging of “learning as ‘curricular,’ [meaning] that classroom learning proceeds in accordance with a formally imposed/officially sanctioned sequenced curriculum which is founded on texts as information sources” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 6), rather than on students’ cultural discourse. Alarming, if as Battiste (2013) has argued, “Education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples” (p. 159), then understanding why Black males continue to have one of the highest rates of school dropout among adolescent youth (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015) requires us to ask, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) has argued, not why students of color are failing out of school, but rather how school continues to fail students of color. Indeed, as Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn (2017) contend, “It is important for literacy practitioners and researchers to interrogate and teach against such beliefs in ways that build on the strength, brilliance, and power of Black lives” (p. 72). In this article, we implore teachers to consider whose knowledge systems are valued through curriculum, instruction, and assignments.

Attending to students’ ways of knowing and finding the intersections between those ways of knowing and class curriculum is a powerful technique for valuing student knowledge. We showcase one example of how students’ interests can be intricately tied to a school assignment in ways that matter for students. Listening to students’ reflections about their choices made while composing their digital autobiographies offers us insight into how they were negotiating these choices in relation to how they understood themselves to be known within the school context by their peers and school staff, teachers, and administration. We align our thinking with other proponents of culturally embedded pedagogies who argue for a complex approach to integrating students’ language and literacies in a manner that maintains a focus on creating equitable and humanizing conditions for all students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2015). As Kinloch and colleagues (2017) have argued,

The unreasonable number of Black youth under academic distress, detention, and threat of death result not from their lack of intellect, talent, or composure, but from mainstream society’s refusal to either acknowledge Black students’ humanity or nurture their developing identities. (p. 71)

Again, we align our approach with Kinloch et al. (2017) who argue that there is a moral imperative for researchers to conduct ongoing studies that “emphasize how an ideological model of literacy is beneficial for understanding adolescent literacies, identities, and counternarratives outside of school” (p. 72), which we are locating within the school context of academic curriculum.

## Multiliteracies

Calls for expanding texts and reading and writing practices in school are not new. More than 20 years ago, the New London Group formed to encourage a more expansive approach to literacy instruction. Their call to action was not an easy one to craft. Indeed, like many English teachers experience today, the conversations between the esteemed researchers who made up the group “were fraught with dialectical tensions” (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018, p. 74). As a result, the *pedagogy of multiliteracies*, a seminal document that continues to influence literacy research today, “was actually an attempt to



reconcile those different tensions by making the case for immersion in practice, for explicit instruction, for critique and deconstruction, and for social, civic and semiotic action” (p. 76).

Within this new notion of literacy, social interactions, civic engagement, and the inclusion of signs and symbols as important texts were elevated in literacy instruction. As such, multiliteracies were conceptualized as less a study of the tools used to read and compose text, and more as a study of the texts within the context of a larger society. As Allan Luke (2018) reminds us, “literacy matters, but how it matters, for whom, when and where depends upon the rules of exchange in a social field” (p. 4). And in today’s tumultuous social and political landscape, Luke (Garcia et al., 2018) prompts us to remember the importance of Freire’s (2000) push for students and teachers to read and write the world. For Luke, the very intent of the multiliteracies pedagogy was a focus on pedagogical design as “an agentive bridge between convention and innovation, between the canonical and the new, between reproduction and creativity” (Garcia et al., 2018, p. 75). Through this lens, then, multiliteracies prompt teachers to preserve and privilege culturally salient texts, to use literacy to build community rather than tear it down, and to engage students in civic action. Advocates for integrating hip-hop music and culture in school curriculum have been making similar arguments about the civic and academic benefits for youth of color. We draw on hip-hop music as a way of knowing because of how Malcolm, Gabriel, and Devonte drew on musical discourse when composing their digital autobiographies.

## Hip-Hop Music and Ways of Knowing

Hip-hop music began as a multimodal construction of sounds, beats, rhythms, and narrative authored by Black revolutionaries who, through their music, were concurrently functioning as poets and political leaders. As the music industry bent toward White male adolescents’ taste preferences (Rose, 2008), American mainstream cultures’ exposure to hip-hop music as entertainment was largely shaped through the image of popular gangsta rap, a genre rife with misogyny, glorification of guns, violence, sex, drugs, and other related illicit activities. Recently, there has been a resurgence of politicized hip-hop on the mainstream stage, epitomized by Kendrick Lamar being awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his album DAMN (Lamar, 2017). As modern technologies afford widespread access to music files with opportunities for remixing and composing with hip-hop music as a modern form of sampling, educators cannot afford to ignore the influence hip-hop music has on shaping how youth are making sense of themselves and how they are speaking back to these discourses.

Scholars have argued extensively for harnessing African-American youth hip-hop culture in the classroom (Alim & Haupt, 2017; Emdin, 2017; Mahiri, 1996, 1998, 2006; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Paris, & Alim, 2014). Hip-hop music has many affordances for education, inclusive of promoting urban youth’s ways of knowing (Emdin, 2017), and for developing *all* students’ aptitude in reading and communicating through multiple linguistic registers and discourses. Such an ability enables students to critically interrogate power relations emergent across texts (Gee, 2014). Indeed, “the influence of rap as a voice of resistance for urban youth proliferates through artists that endeavor to bring an accurate yet critical depiction of the urban situation to a hip-hop generation” (Morrell, 2002, p. 10).

Moreover, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) have argued that within the English Language Arts classroom, hip-hop, a culturally salient genre—with merit in its own right—could, “serve as a bridge between urban cultures and the literary canon” (p. 90). Hip-hop, they explained, was ideal for inspiring discussions that could lead to critical analysis and composition of texts—both expository and poetic. For youth, and particularly for youth identifying with urban hip-hop culture, studying hip-hop music through a critical lens can offer students access to counter narratives and avenues for powerful self-expression within school contexts. However, as we learn from the three students about how they found their own ways of knowing themselves in hip-hop music, we exercise and advocate for caution here.

Kirkland (2013) warns about reading too deeply into hip-hop music’s lyrics to know Black male’s lives. He explains, “There has been a lot written about Black males and rap, indeed romanticizing the escapade as *the* universal narrative where modern Black male stories reside...” (p. 34). In seeking to learn with students about the role that music (and other texts) played in how they came to know themselves, we reject a position that might view students’ selected hip-hop songs as wholesale reflections of their life stories, experiences, or subjectivity. Rather, we understand these songs, and the students’ reflections upon these songs, as offering traces for how the students understood themselves in a world that shackles young Black men’s subjectivity to narratives saturated with stories of violence, criminality, and academic failure.

## Methods

Over the course of a school semester, Becky, a White female literacy researcher and Devonte, Malcolm, and Gabriel, three Black male high school students, met and discussed the digital media project (DMP) during class time, students’ free periods, before and after school, and during lunch time. While Robyn did not meet the students in person, she came to know them through examining their DMPs and through the case studies Becky composed. Over the semester, Becky collected audio recordings of students talking to her, themselves, their peers, and their teacher about their digital composition choices as they composed digital autobiographies for a high school English language arts project. Throughout, students reflected on the salience of hip-hop music in their lives as they wove the songs they listened to on repeat into their iMovie projects. These cases highlight how students—whose in-school academic success (e.g., writing essays, taking multiple choice/essay tests about literature) typically ranged from excelling to failure—each demonstrated a sophisticated capacity for navigating both critical and academic literacies during digital storytelling. Our analysis illustrates how curriculum that invites students to draw upon their multiple ways of knowing, enables students to “develop the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives” (New London Group, 1996, p. 67).

In this article, we share three excerpts from larger case studies. We drew on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Luke, 1995) in our approach to exploring students’ articulated *ways of knowing* themselves in relation to their modal choices and micro and macro discourses that they were measuring their sense of self in relation to. Through CDA, we revealed and examined the larger “storylines” complexly embedded

in each student's unequal and consequential access to various forms of power, in which their more explicit narratives are situated.

## Participants

Devonte, Malcolm, and Gabriel were high school seniors in the class Black Literature taught by Dr. Kira Buchannan at Regional High School in the fall of 2012. Kira and Becky created the Digital Media Project, a digital autobiographical writing assignment that required students to combine pictures, words, and music in a coherent narrative about their lives. Each of the cases below showcase how the three students engaged in multiliteracies practices through this project that allowed them to *speak up*, *negotiate*, and *engage in critical thinking*, key elements identified by the New London Group (1996) in their vision of future literacy practices.

**Speaking Up: "So, I keep it on lock. But...I feel like it's necessary to tell you" ~ Devonte.** During their time together, Devonte frequently shared that he felt grossly misunderstood by his peers. Because of these presumed misunderstandings, he expressed reticence for sharing details of his life that he believed his peers would hold against him. Yet, he simultaneously expressed a desire to disrupt his peers' perceptions of him, even as he himself struggled to liberate his present self from his past. He worked through these tensions as he conceptualized, composed, and reflected upon his approach to composing his digital story.

Devonte identified the theme of his digital story as "struggle," explaining, "Mine's like, kind [of] like a struggle theme." He continued, "Like coming from nothing and trying to be something type thing." He later shared that as a young child between the ages of 10 to 15, he had to sell drugs to help his family pay their rent. Devonte was reticent to share these details with his peers, explaining, "I let very few people into my life because I don't want to be judged." He explained that he generally keeps these details, "on lock;" yet, after making this statement, he turned to Becky and said, "But I feel comfortable with you, telling you about it because I feel like it's necessary to tell you."

Devonte found a safe avenue for sharing through his modal choices. By situating his early life of struggle alongside other Black males like the Notorious B.I.G. and Meek Mills, hip-hop artists who rapped about coming up through struggle, Devonte was able to allude to his early life of struggle without publicly naming that struggle as his own. This allusion emerged when he discussed his music choices with Becky, pointing to how Meek Mills' rap describes how he had to hustle. "That's what I had to do, so it's all the same thing." As "Dreams and Nightmares" played in the background, "Ain't this what they been waiting for?" Devonte reflected on his past life that, for him, mirrored what Mill rapped about in "Dreams and Nightmares." "So, it's been a little ra. It's been rough from the beginning with what me and my brother had to do, but it's all good...I mean it all comes to play right now. So it's all good." Here, Devonte indexed time in reference to the struggle as something experienced in the past; he also used the word "beginning" in relation to talking about this struggle, as though as far back as he could remember, his life had been wrought with struggle.

Meek Mills was not the only rapper he referenced in this exchange. “It’s all good” mirrored a phrase in refrain of the song, “Juicy,” by Notorious B.I.G. that Devonte also included in his digital story. This song held special significance to him because his mother had played Juicy in their home when she brought him home from the hospital following his birth. Whether intentional or not, Devonte drew upon the language and discourse in these hip-hop songs as he engaged multiple modes of expression, both in conversations about his digital story and in his digital story composition.

Devonte also situated his ways of knowing himself alongside the words of the renowned German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He expressed to Becky that these words resonated deeply with him. On the frame (see Figure 1), the text was set against a black backdrop and was written in white, aside from the word “overwhelmed,” which was layered with color; the top of each letter began in red that faded to green towards the bottom of each word.

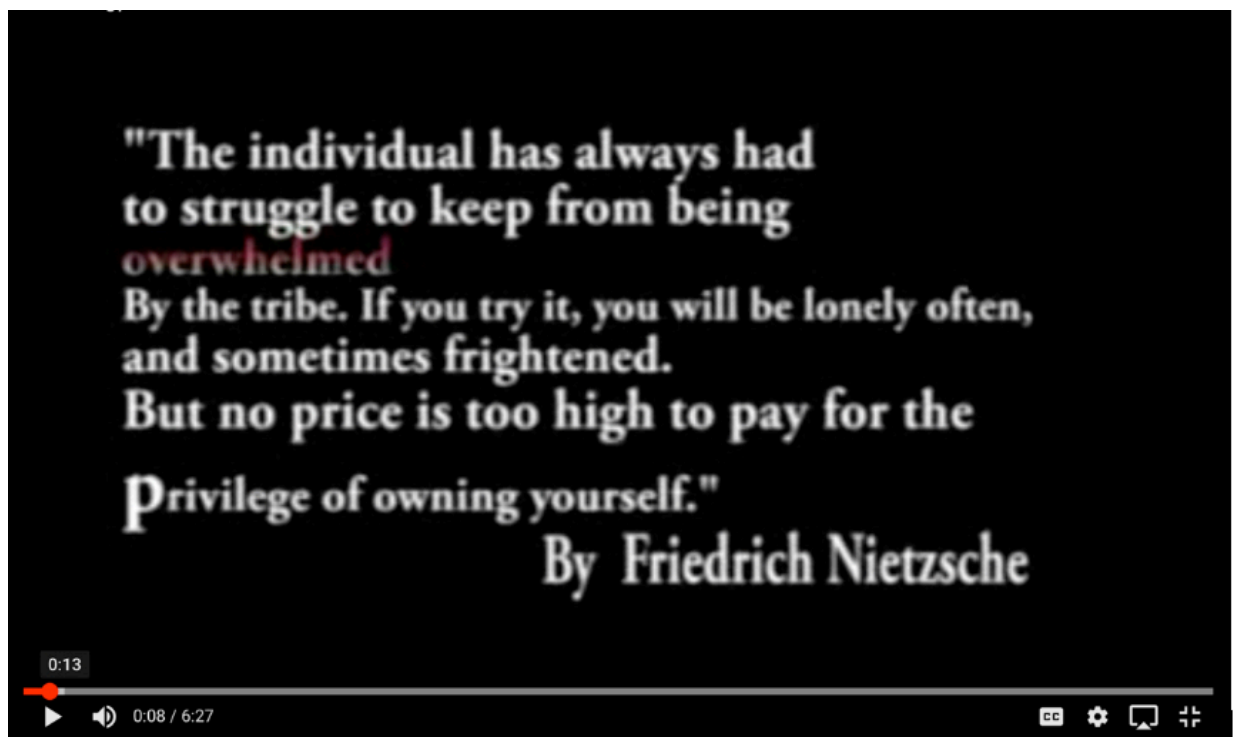


Fig. 1: Devonte’s Digital Media Project, Nietzsche quotation.

As these words appeared on the screen, lyrics from “Juicy” emerged from the computer speakers. The voice of the Notorious B.I.G. finished the opening lyric, “I would never amount to nothin’, to all the people that lived above the buildings I was hustling in front of that called [the police on me].”

The juxtaposition of the song lyrics with the Nietzsche quotation seemed to capture the essence of the tensions Devonte struggled between in his efforts to claim his own narrative.

“Hustling” was something that Devonte had admittedly done in his life, and as he composed his digital story, he struggled between telling people about that life and telling a different story. He recalled

experiences where people made unfair assumptions about him being mean when he viewed himself as direct and honest. He also named “judgment,” or desire to circumvent judgment, as reasons for not sharing his own hustling experiences with the class. Devonte’s modal choices reflected the ways he was thinking about these struggles in relation to his own life as well as how he was drawing connections to how others had articulated living with hardship.

Further, his discussion with Becky around his reasons for selecting the Nietzsche quote underscores how deliberate his choices were in composing his narrative:

Devonte: It just means a lot. This one like stuck to me the most over all the ones I read.

Becky: That last line, “the price is too high for the privilege of owning yourself.”

Devonte: Exactly. That's the one that actually like stuck to me.

Becky: Yeah.

Devonte: If I, cuz see, uh, can I start off with something like that?

Becky: Yeah.

Devonte: That, that honestly like pulls you in.

Asking Becky if he could start his DMP in this manner implied that perhaps he held in mind their earlier conversation about how good writers start narratives as he selected this quotation. Regardless, that quotation “stuck” to him among the others. Devonte explained that he liked the quotation because it had the effect of “pull[ing] you in.” Using the pronoun “you” rather than “me” suggests that he may have been thinking about a provocative opening for his audience, or perhaps he just meant that the quote resonated with him.

Ultimately, Devonte’s experience with materializing a struggle storyline allowed him to negotiate what he revealed about his own personal experiences living as a Black man growing up in poverty in the United States in a narrative that would be publicly shared with a peer audience that he expected judgment from. While Devonte engaged a socially critical discourse in his DMP wherein he implied his understanding that his struggle was shared and endured by many Black men in the United States, he purposely withheld sharing the details of his personal life struggles from most people to circumvent this expected judgment.

In early conversations with Becky, he explained how the music allowed him to express the struggle he had endured as a young Black man. For Devonte, the music functioned as a source of solidarity and as a shield. Ultimately, the choice to tell the details of his life and struggle remained his, and music allowed him to speak up and share traces of his life without having to take others’ judgment on alone. It is important to note that Becky made careful efforts to not judge Devonte and to instead serve as a critical witness (Dutro, 2013) receiving and holding his stories with gentle care. This approach to listening resonated with Devonte who expressed both his willingness and his desire to divulge details of his painful memories during their conversations, creating a space for him to use literacy as a way to speak up about ways he knows about life.

**Negotiating: “...Like, I’m not even sure you get what he’s saying” ~ Malcolm.** Malcolm wrote his DMP amid contemplating an uncertain future and was negotiating several discourses related to how he and

others were defining him. Following several weeks of living displaced from his home and, as a result, missing a significant amount of school, he had returned to failing grades in several of his classes, grades he was admittedly dismayed about. He had concurrently been accused of stealing and selling school laptops, which he contested and was waiting for his pending court date. In addition, he had narrowly avoided being the victim of a drive-by shooting over the previous weekend. He talked about all these upheavals as he composed his DMP.

Many of the words that Malcolm wrote across the images in his DMP were taken from a poem he had written during class in Black Lit. He read this poem aloud after school one day. The poem below is composed from the audio transcript and includes his compositional pauses.

Look me in the eyes; tell me what you see. I was losing out on life due to my selfish needs. Never understood why many [pause]. Ho, a, never understood why. Why I had so many re—[pause]. Why I had so many responsibilities at what building character is. Is what I didn't see. So I set out on this mission to destruction and hustling. See Moms wanted—[pause]. See— [pause]. Oh yeah. And see Moms wanted the best. Kept me away from the set. Even tried to move me out to jet. Everyday I ha—[pause]. I was training like it was my last breath forcing these visions on my path NFL dreams. But, broad day struck with my blue flag.

The poem constructs a humble, reflective, and passionate version of Malcolm. Yet, in much of his DMP, Malcolm is “Mo-Stacks,” the star of Malcolm’s DMP. In this video, his clothes are labeled with words like “fresh to death” (see Figure 2); he has a beautiful girlfriend and supportive mother, whom he loves; he has a crew; and he plays football and is looked up to by children. He also included elements of his written words throughout his DMP. Yet, his negotiations came in the form of him weighing how his audience would interpret the content.

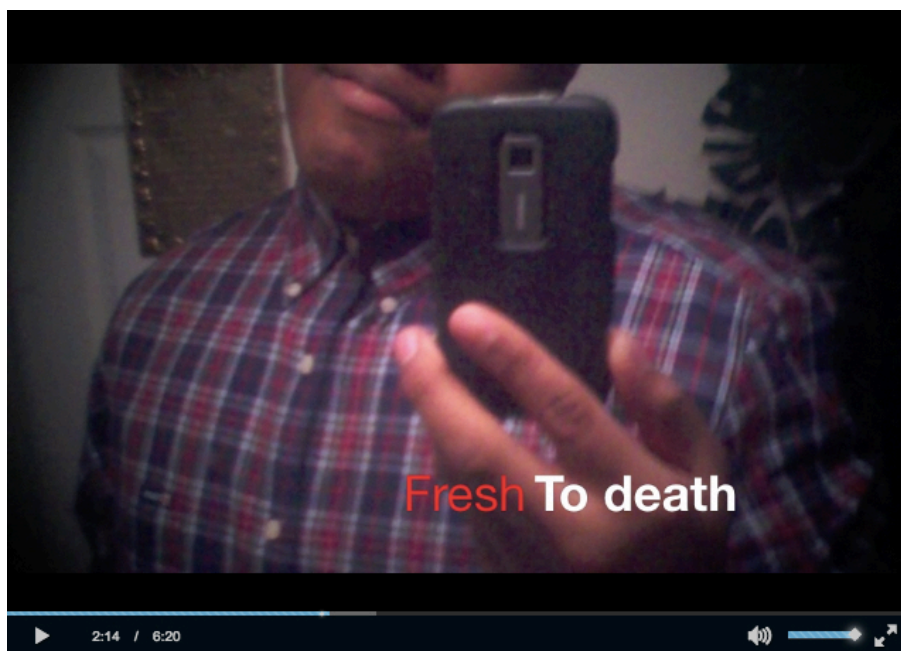


Fig. 2: Malcolm selfie, “Fresh to Death.”

Malcolm shared that the music in his DMP revealed “a lot of stuff” about himself that he could not explicitly say. Referring to another song he ultimately did not keep in his final DMP, Malcolm explained, “...if you listen to my song, it literally talks about me...Literally, everything that he’s saying.” Following his general explanation of the parallels, he asked Becky, as he often did, whether she understood: “You know what I’m saying? Like I’m not even sure you get what he’s saying.”

He opened a conversation with Becky on his own initiative, wishing to explain that his song “literally” talks about him and told his story. Yet, he assumed that his audience (Becky in this instance) would not understand the meaning of the words, rendering his story safely hidden within seemingly incomprehensible lyrics. It is also perhaps telling that he chose not to include this song that he felt was “literally” about his life on account of his sense that his audience might misunderstand and judge him.

He mentioned several times he did not intend for his words to be understood, nor did he expect people to understand them. His reflections exemplified a felt isolation that Malcolm expressed frequently. In this, he raised questions about the assumptions we are at risk of making about others if we fail to pursue learning more about their perspectives and experiences.

Perhaps in response to these discourses that conflicted with his own sense of self, for his final DMP, Malcolm chose to write about a person amid success. Meek Mill’s “Realest Shit You Ever Seen,” is a song largely about the protagonist being powerful and obscenely wealthy to the extent that he can burn money. Malcolm’s self-characterization in relation to a successful, powerful, defiant, modern rap artist enabled his artistic control over the story of himself, a person whom he believed was not understood in his daily life. Malcolm knew that music had the capacity to tell his life story, but rather than selecting the song that told the story of his life, he chose the song that told a story of success; thereby, interweaving latent success in his life narrative.

Malcolm further confronted the discourses engaged by people in his life who cast him as a criminal and failure with a provocative close-up image of his face through which he invited his audience to look him in the eyes when they cast their judgment. In this frame (see Figure 3), Malcolm stared intensely at the camera, eyes squinted, eyebrows raised, jaw clenched, lips parted, and teeth showing. He wore a black doo rag on his head, a plaid shirt, and a black jacket. As the music played, the camera panned out showing more of Malcolm’s face. Meek Mill rapped, “Look me in the eyes; tell me what you see!” Mill’s voice echoed, “Realest shit you ever seen. Realest shit you ever seen.” Immediately after the image appeared, white text moved in rapidly across the screen stopping at Malcolm’s pictured eye-line. The text, written in white, read, “Look Me In My Eyes Tell me what You see!”





Fig. 3: Malcolm, Look me in my eyes. Tell me what you see.

The lyrics playing during this slide—Mill’s words, “Realest shit you ever seen. Realest shit you ever seen”—seemed to cast Malcolm’s invitation, “Look me in my eyes. Tell me what you see,” as a rhetorical question. Mill’s lyric provided an answer to what one should see when looking Malcolm in the eyes. The exclamation point following the words, “Look me in the eyes; tell me what you see” indicated how this line functioned as an imperative. Juxtaposing the fierce look captured in the image of Malcolm underscored the connection between the imperative and the music overlaying the image and words. Yet, this slide followed a video introducing Malcolm himself as a fictionalized character, Mo-Stacks. In this way, Malcolm’s DMP constructed an elusive self-representation that defied categories of his “real” self and the fiction of an imagined future.

While he was asking the audience to see him, he was literally not being Malcolm; rather he was presenting future, fictionalized Malcolm. He offered an intimate invitation for the audience to look into his eyes and see what was there; yet, he held them far away from the self he allowed them to know. Interestingly, in the following slides, Mo-Stacks seemed to disappear while images of the high school Malcolm encompassed a majority of his narrative up to the final video that concluded his DMP. His multifaceted presentation of self, combined with how he negotiated this sharing, reflects the complex approach Malcolm continued to take when constructing his subjectivities in relation to his varying audiences.

**Critical: “...You'd Be Like, What?” ~ Gabriel.** Like Devonte and Malcolm, Gabriel, too, consciously performed the complex task of managing audiences (teachers, researcher, peers, family, football fans) across in-and-out-of-school spaces. Reading through texts, he demonstrates his understanding of how the public nature of the DMP meant his choices must be made in relation to who he was telling the story for.



Rather than viewing the DMP as personal narrative that might divulge intimate details of his life, Gabriel instead described the DMP as a “fancy little project” and his expressed goal was to earn an “A.” For this reason, Gabriel scheduled daily meetings with Becky to work collaboratively on his DMP. For Gabriel, earning an “A” primarily meant composing a project that was appropriate for his school-based audience.

Gabriel’s approach to engaging critical literacies during digital composition is evidenced when he pushed back against Becky’s encouragement that he select personally salient music. Becky asked Gabriel what music he listened to when he was happy, as he had expressed a desire to strike a “happy tone” in his project. Immediately, applying his sense of his DMP school audience, Gabriel said, “the songs I listen to are dumb. But I like ‘em. Like 2 Chainz and stuff like that.” Becky reminded him that this was his movie, and he should include what he liked. Laughing, he implied that because she was a part of his audience, her opinion would matter. He elaborated, “If you heard the song you'd be like, what?” They laughed together; he continued, “It's called crack.” Gabriel played the first part of the song to prove his point: “Started from the trap now I rap. No matter where I'm at I got crack.” The song ended, and Gabriel relayed, “You see why I don't want to use it? That's actually my game song. I play it before every game.” Here, Gabriel succinctly explained why one of his favorite songs, a song about a rap star who used to sell drugs but who now makes his income rapping, did not belong in his personal digital narrative account of whom the story would be shared with—in this case, he kept his teachers in mind. In making this statement, he also indexed his awareness of how context mattered for song choice—a song that was appropriate for the football field did not belong in the classroom.

Later, Gabriel worked to achieve a melancholy effect when selecting the most appropriate song to reflect his sentiment about his mother, whom he had not seen in person for 10 years. Gabriel instantly knew that he wanted the song “Battle Scars” by rap artist Lupe Fiasco to play on the screen as his mother’s image appeared. Becky and Gabriel listened to the song together. As Lupe Fiasco sang, “...These battle scars don’t look like they’re fading, don’t look like they’re ever going away—” Gabriel stopped the song and said, “See right there that part.” He continued,

Like what he said, like even though all of these things I’m doing like he said, it’s almost like the sadness is not going away because I’m no closer to my mom than what I was when I left her, you know?

Gabriel felt compelled to include a song with lyrics that articulated the emotions he rarely verbalized himself and that he felt guarded about.

When Gabriel selected the picture of his mother, he called her his “heart and soul,” underscoring the centrality of her role in his life. The song emphasized the pain he felt because she could not share in his accomplishments as they lived half a world away from one another. He explained, “Everything I do is for my mom,” elaborating to Becky about his mother’s importance to him and the pain represented in that song. However, he did not wish to share those details with his peers. He explained:

I just don't care for them to know. That's just how I feel like. Because we are going to do this, present is, and it's going to be over with. They don't need to know my whole, like life story or what not. Like, I don't know. Cuz watch, when we see other people's stuff.... It's not gonna have all [of this information about people]. And this is like, this is kind of like my how do you call it? Sensitive side?

Gabriel expressed sensitivities to how his peers might interpret his emotional self as he considered songs for his DMP. In response to Becky's reaction and in further explaining why he edited out the explanation he originally gave Becky about his mother, Gabriel expressed that he did not want to invite people's sympathies or pity with his DMP. He said, "I don't want to be looked at like [I'm] this sad kid walking around." He continued, "I don't want my whole presentation to be like this, this sad story. Like there is no happiness in my life."

Gabriel also expressed concerns about disrupting gender norms related to masculinity. For this reason, he hesitated to include the song "Diamonds" by Rhianna, explaining, "I don't know how people would look at it, like oh he's using a song by a girl, or what the heck?" Becky's reading of his hesitation at the time was that he feared his masculinity might be called into question in using this song, and she responded accordingly in telling him that she expected that his masculinity would remain unchallenged should he include that song, which reinforced the gender and heteronormative discourses Gabriel was negotiating as he considered what it meant for him to select a "song by a girl." Ultimately, Gabriel decided to have this song play as images of his high school senior photograph, an image of him with his partner's arms wrapped around his chest, and professionally taken images of himself playing quarterback on the football field, played across the screen (see Figure 4). This choice of music demonstrated his efforts at disrupting dominant gender norms related to his subjectivity.



Fig. 4: Gabriel on the football field.

Gabriel's case complicates how teachers can understand students' motivations for selecting music that they claim speaks for them. Gabriel closely read and considered the music lyrics he wanted to include for a specific desired effect on audience. His approach reflects a complex intertwining of traditional, multimodal, and critical literacies where each became prominent according to author purpose and in which no single form dictated the overall story design.

### **Privileging Student Cultural Discourses as Ways of Knowing**

Listening to students' reflections on their composition processes reveals how Malcolm, Devonte, and Gabriel weighed various discourses between how they and others knew them as each wrote about himself. Devonte used the digital storytelling processes to speak up and voice his position on urban poverty and to reflect on his experiences living in those conditions. He found in hip-hop music and philosophy a certain perception of his life that resonated with his values and projected life goals. Malcolm's digital story process reflected the ways in which he was negotiating multiple discourses influencing his way of knowing himself. Malcolm contended with labels like "failure" and "criminal" in his daily life. He began his digital story with a powerful confrontation inviting the audience to judge him on his terms. Gabriel's case demonstrates how he engaged analytical and critical literacies while composing his digital story. He considered how his peers and teachers would interpret his use of hip-hop and other songs performed by male and female artists. Throughout the school semester, students were also negotiating these discourses through spoken conversations, pen and paper writing, listening to music, reading other's published words, looking at images, and through remembering, reflecting, and projecting to future selves. Considering Devonte, Malcolm, and Gabriel's processes, we offer the following implications from these cases.

Given the sensitivities evidenced in each student-author's processes through which they negotiated the varying versions of themselves that they might share with others, we contend that publicly displaying personal narratives asks students to be vulnerable with one another, often in uncomfortable ways. Knowing that students are negotiating *how* others see them, teachers should offer students multiple avenues for divulging personal information about themselves and acknowledge that a part of that process involves considering whom one represents oneself as. Regarding assessment, we question the value of awarding points to this kind of personal writing. Each student used multiple literacies throughout their process, some of which lent themselves better for different writing purposes, and we are concerned that awarding points related to students meeting set criteria for composition might interrupt the rich processes students engage as they weigh and consider audience in relation to autobiographical storytelling. We encourage teachers to include multiple forms of writing as options for students' composition processes. Furthermore, students might benefit from having conversations with the teacher and with peers of their choosing about the process around what each author is considering and weighing through their decision-making processes.

Ultimately, as we consider students' ways of knowing and the experiences that influence how they and others come to know them, we must simultaneously consider which texts should be privileged in their educational experiences. Thus, this article has engaged a conversation about consumption and production, about which texts adolescents are interpreting and constructing both inside and outside of school, and, how they are weighing these narratives as they make sense of themselves. The high incidence of incarceration, lethal profiling, and the low graduation rates of male youth of color underscore the crucial importance for educators to design curriculum that affirms Black male subjectivities and literacies within school contexts. We have argued that school curriculum must account for youth's out-of-school literacy practices and interests in in-school spaces, not simply to sanction these literacies, but to invite direct and meaningful engagement with the texts that students are drawing from to make sense of their lives and their positioning in the world.

## References

- Alim, H. S., & Haupt, A. (2017). Reviving soul(s) with Afrikaaps: Hip hop as culturally sustaining pedagogy in south Africa. In D. Paris and H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 157–174). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon, Canada: Purich Publishing.
- Dutro, E. (2013). Towards a pedagogy of the incomprehensible: Trauma and the imperative of critical witness in literacy classrooms. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 8(4), 301–315.
- Emdin, C. (2017). *For white folks who teach in the hood ... and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Garcia, A., Luke, A., & Seglem, R. (2018). Looking at the next 20 years of multiliteracies: A discussion with Allan Luke. *Theory Into Practice*, 57(1), 72–78.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teaching Education*, 53(2), 106–116.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Haddix, M. M. (2012). Reclaiming and rebuilding the writer identities of black adolescent males. In D. E. Alvermann & K. A. Hinchman (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives: Bridging the everyday/academic divide* (pp. 112–131). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kinloch, V., Burkhard, T., & Penn, C. (2017). Beyond school: Examining the out-of-school literacies and counternarratives of adolescent learners. In K. A. Hinchman & D. A. Appleman (Eds.), *Adolescent literacies: A handbook of practice-based research* (pp. 61–77). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Kirkland, D. E. (2013). *A search past silence: The literacy of young Black men*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Kirkland, D. (2017). Beyond the dream: Critical perspectives on black textual expressivities... Between the world and me. *English Journal*, 106(4), 14–18.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3–12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2017). The r(e)volution will not be standardized: Teacher education, hip hop pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0. In D. Paris and H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 141–156). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lamar, K. (2017, April 14). *DAMN*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/kendrick-lamar>.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2003). *New literacies, changing knowledge and the classroom*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Luke, A. (1995). Text and discourse in education: An introduction to critical discourse analysis. In M. Apple (Ed.), *Review of Research in Education*, (21), 3–48. Washington, D.C. American Educational Research Association.

Luke, A. (2018). *Critical literacy, schooling, and social justice: The selected works of Allan Luke*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Mahiri, J. (1996). Writing, rap, and representation: Problematic links between text and experience. In P. Mortensen and G. Kirsch (Eds.), *Ethics and representation in qualitative studies of literacy* (pp. 228–240). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mahiri, J. (1998). Streets to schools: African American youth culture and the classroom. *The Clearing House*, 71(6), 335–338.

Mahiri, J. (2006). Digital DJ-ing: Rhythms of learning in an urban school. *Language Arts*, 84(1), 55–62.

Morrell, E. (2002). Toward a critical pedagogy of popular culture: Literacy development among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(1), 72–77.

Morrell, E., & Duncan-Andrade, J. (2002). Promoting academic literacy with urban youth through engaging hip-hop culture. *English Journal*, 88–92.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60–92.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85–100.

Rose, T. (2008). *The hip hop wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip hop--and why it matters*. New York, NY: Civitas Books.

Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2015). *Black lives matter: The Schott 50 state report on public education and black males*. Retrieved from <http://schottfoundation.org/resources/black-lives-matter-schott-50-state-report-public-education-and-black-males>.



**Becky Beucher** is an Assistant Professor of Secondary Literacy in the School of Teaching at Illinois State University. Her research interests include investigating racialized adolescent youths' multiliteracy practices and engaged identity discourses in secondary school contexts. She uses poststructural and decolonial feminist theories to explore youth's storying processes during digital composition. She draws on findings from these explorations to develop critically informed multiliteracies curriculum with practicing teachers. She taught English and Language Arts for six years in middle school and high school public, private, and charter school classrooms.



**Robyn Seglem** is an Associate Professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University, teaching content literacy, language arts methods, and educational technology. She has served as a co-director of the Flint Hills Writing Project, an affiliate with the National Writing Project, and is a nationally board-certified teacher. Robyn worked with a team of ELA educators to recently revise and update the standards for English and Language Arts for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. She taught language arts for nine years in the middle school and high school classroom.

# Revisiting and Disrupting Uncritical Diversity Narratives Through Autoethnography and Cellfilming

Casey Burkholder and Ashley Frawley

## Abstract

As two white female teachers, we look back on our teaching experiences in Hong Kong and Northern Alberta to disrupt problematic diversity narratives from our first classrooms. Through critical autoethnographic approaches and cellfilming (cellphone + video-production), we analyze our engagement with privilege within our classrooms. We found that we both promoted uncomplicated conceptions of diversity, and each engaged in what Eve Tuck (2009) has described as damaged-centered approaches—teaching practices that established, “harm or injury in order to achieve reparation” (p. 413). We see these experiences as a case study in how to look back productively to change the way we teach in the present and future toward visions of justice.

## Background

How do teachers learn about multiculturalism and diversity within Canadian faculties of education, and how do these experiences affect their first teaching experiences? How are diversity and multiculturalism positioned in these teacher preparation programs? As two white female settlers writing from unceded and unsundered Wolastoqiyik territory in Fredericton, New Brunswick, we look back on our memories of our Atlantic Canadian teacher education programs and first teaching experiences in Hong Kong (Casey) and Northern Alberta (Ashley). We do this work to disrupt the uncritical multicultural narratives that we both recognize from our teacher preparation and our early pedagogical practices. We define uncritical multiculturalism as the centering of white, cisgender (i.e., where a person’s biological sex aligns with his or her gender expression), heterosexual, middle-class settler colonial experiences, and the understanding as all that falls outside those borders as diverse (Adams, 2017; Osler, 2015). We acknowledge that in this writing about our memories and experiences—aimed to unsettle/disrupt uncritical multiculturalism practices and pedagogies—we center our own experiences, as white, settler, cisgender female teachers. We see this as a tension in our work as we look back.

We both attended predominantly white mono-cultural teacher education programs in Atlantic Canada. Casey graduated in 2008, and Ashley graduated in 2014. At both of our institutions, diversity and multicultural policies and practices were discussed by largely white faculty members. However, we also acknowledge that within these two schools we encountered white critical feminist educators who challenged students to consider white privilege through their teaching materials, experiences, critical reflections, and learning opportunities. We see our work here as a continuation of the ideas they challenged us to engage with in our Bachelor of Education experiences.



Through critical autoethnographic approaches—engaging in critical analysis through the practice of writing personal narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016)—and by creating a collaborative cellphilm (mobile film production, see Dockney, Tomaselli, & Hart, 2010; MacEntee, Burkholder, & Schwab-Cartas, 2016; Mitchell & De Lange, 2013) looking back on our first teaching experiences in racially and culturally heterogenous classrooms, we analyze our engagement and entanglements in whiteness and in learning to read our uncritical diversity narratives as multiliteracy practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; New London Group, 1996)—socially and culturally located ways of seeing and representing the world in our teaching (Emmitt, Komesaroff, & Pollack, 2006). In the study, we ask:

1. How do we remember conceptualizing diversity in our early teaching practices?
2. How do we remember our own investment in whiteness in two non-white teaching contexts?
3. What might thinking through our memories of uncomplicated diversity narratives mean for our teaching practices in the present and future?

We revisit our experiences through what Giroux (2005), drawing on Freire and Macedo (2005), called a “dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on one hand, and language and transformative agency on the other” (p. 5). How did we, as beginning teachers, read the world and the world of the school, and how do we read these worlds now?

## Theoretical Perspectives

### Decentering Hegemonic Whiteness

We see the ways we learned to read and construct difference in relation to hegemonic whiteness within both of our teacher’s college experiences as a kind of multiliteracy practice—as socially and culturally located way of representing and responding to the world (Emmitt, Pollock, & Komesaroff, 2006). In these schooling experiences, we learned to read multiculturalism in relation to whiteness. These experiences of white privilege were extended in our first teaching practices. For example, while living and working as a teacher in Hong Kong, Casey received unearned privilege in relation to her compensated labour, being treated with undue reverence in her professional capacities, in her interactions with majority community members and institutions, and as she navigated her way through Chinese language learning. While teaching in a northern community in Alberta, Ashley often found herself apologizing for her whiteness as if it were simply a skin colour and not fully understanding the privileges and “passes” she was privy to. She draws from Jennifer Holladay’s (2000) book, *White Anti-Racist Activism: A Personal Roadmap* that was highlighted on the *Teaching Tolerance* website, which explains that white privilege

provides white people with “perks” that we do not earn and that people of color do not enjoy...white privilege shapes the world in which we live — the way that we navigate and interact with one another and with the world. (Teaching Tolerance, 2018, para. 4)



We also draw on Eve Tuck's (2009) notion of "damage-centred" (p. 415) narratives—those "that operate[], even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (p. 413)—as we describe Ashley's memories of her work in an Indigenous-majority elementary school. The privileges Ashley received through her whiteness allowed for her to pursue a Bachelor of Education degree. During her studies, she cultivated strong relationships with critical feminist educators who continually challenged her to recognize that she must be ethically responsive in her practices as a white settler educator.

## Multiliteracies

Our study builds on the New London Group's (1996) suggestion that a reframing and opening up of traditional autonomous understandings of literacy—simply reading and writing—is needed to situate researchers, activists, and teachers engaging in social action as a multiliteracy practice. Multiliteracies are understood as ways in which language and expression are represented in multiple ways and through different modes. Other scholars working within a multiliteracies framework (see for example, Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Dyer & Choksi, 2001; Gee, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Rowsell & Pahl, 2015) explore the ways in which literacy practices might be employed in both research and pedagogical projects with an aim toward researching and teaching for social change. The ways we read the world, through different texts and experiences, shape the ways in which we understand ourselves in relation to others. Sheridan-Rabideau (2008) argues that, "this expanded view of literacy is rooted both in traditional literacy scholarship and in contemporary technological possibilities" (p. 4). We frame our practice of looking back on our experiences as early career teachers through cellphilmimg (cellphone + film production) as a multiliteracy practice; a way of revisiting our memories through do-it-yourself (DIY) media-making. We do this work in an effort to decenter our own teaching practices in order to look back productively and make sense of the ways in which we have moved forward as teachers.

## Methodology

**Revisiting our teaching pasts as a multiliteracy practice.** We engage our memories of teaching in the past in order to understand our role as teachers and activists in the present (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Morrison, Radford, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014). We see the practice of reflexively revisiting (Burawoy, 2003) our memories of the classroom through a theoretical framing of this work as "productive remembering" (Strong-Wilson et al., 2014, p. 442). We frame learning to read the past in this way as a multiliteracy practice. Drawing on Madison (2012), and Boylorn and Orbe (2016), we argue that researchers have an ethical responsibility to describe and unsettle injustice that we encounter in our practice and in our lives. We wonder: what does it mean to look back on our past experiences, that we thought were justice-informed, and acknowledge the harm we may have done? We wonder, how did we learn about multiculturalism and individual differences in a way that privileged whiteness, and how systemic injustices were obscured in our teacher education programs, and in our first classrooms? What might that mean for our justice-informed teaching and research in the present? Critical autoethnography

provides a method to address injustice as the practice demands that a researcher's positionality and privilege is acknowledged alongside "marginalization and to take responsibilities for our subjective lenses through reflexivity" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, p. 15). By accounting for our positions through the process of writing and reflecting on theoretical lenses that help anchor our thinking, critical autoethnography provides us a way to revisit our past pedagogical practices (Hanson, 2004). At the same time, we wonder, how might we look back in the future on our practices today?

**Revisiting my first classroom: Casey.** My first job after teacher's college was at a public secondary school in Hong Kong. When I arrived at the school, I assumed that I would be teaching a mainly monocultural group of Chinese students. However, my students were not Chinese; they were ethnic minorities, some of whom had been born in Hong Kong, and others who had moved to the territory to be with family members who were living and working in the city. I taught the students in English, and aside from a Chinese language learning class, they spent their days learning in English. Within the school, there were Chinese students who were taught in Chinese, and who rarely had opportunities to mix with the ethnic minority students, even at lunch or during extracurricular activities. My time in the school inspired me to go on to graduate school, to explore the ways in which the act of systemic discrimination affected my former students' sense of self, belonging, and understanding their political activism and ways they resisted the structures placed on them in school and society (Burkholder, 2013, 2018). But before I examined the school structures in an academic way, I failed these learners in my work as a justice-oriented teacher.

When I realized that my learners were being segregated in their school lives (separate lunch room, separate sports teams, separate extracurricular activities, separate classrooms and curricula), I worked to create a safe space within my classroom. I saw that safe space as a place where learners could be themselves and feel their identities were valued and supported. I did this work while ignoring the ways in which I was provided undue privilege in the school, to do this work, as well as in society, outside of the school. Looking back now, I wonder why it took me so long to see the ways that whiteness operated in this space, and the ways that I benefitted (and continue to benefit today) from whiteness.

**Revisiting my first classroom: Ashley.** My first classroom was in a small Dene First Nations school in the northernmost part of Alberta. Our school served roughly 70 students who are either Dene or Cree from grades K4 through 9. My first formal classroom served six full-time kindergarten students, and three part-time K4 students. I took this job fresh out of teacher's college when I was full of hope and believed I could, would, and had the responsibility to change the world. I did not consider what that really meant outside of the romanticized westernized idea of teachers such as Erin Gruwell, Mr. Feenie, and *Matilda's* Miss Honey. When I arrived in August, I quickly recognized the binaries of "them" the First Nations, and "us" the more sophisticated, harder working settler. All but one of the formal educators were settlers, and all of the educational support staff were First Nations, who were largely from the community within which I was working. I, however, chose to live in a neighboring town as I did not want to be further isolated, nor did I want to live where there was no immediate access to stores or a hospital.

It did not take long for me to see the inequalities being experienced by the community and the members who live there. I was quickly exposed to how prevalent food insecurity is in this particular First Nations, which aligned with Alison Blay-Palmer (2016), who states, “food insecurity levels in the Canadian North can be as high as 69% in Aboriginal communities” (p. 6). I learned how much poverty in First Nations communities is either unrecognized, hidden, or when brought up used as a way to blame First Nations people for their own shortcomings. This called me to action and to, as Marie Battiste (2013) demands, “[c]onsider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan—their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system” (p. 23). Through this experience it became evident that I had much to learn about Canadian policies and how to use my voice as an ally in Canada’s commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

## **Cellphilm**

Cellphilm is an emerging participatory visual research methodology that employs an everyday accessible technology—the cellphone—to address individual and community-specific issues to stimulate dialogue and social change (Dockney & Tomaselli, 2009; Dockney et al., 2010; MacEntee et al., 2016; Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2016). Cellphones exist as social objects, and their ubiquity in our culture plays a clear social function in relation to media consumption and dissemination (Stald, 2008). We have employed cellphones as filmmaking tools because we use cellphone filmmaking in our own lives. Casey has used cellphilm in her teaching and research practices, and Ashley has been a part of a cellphilm-making workshop that Casey put on in a graduate-level research methods class. Together, we engaged in the process of cellphilm in order to illuminate some commonalities and tensions between our work as white women teachers working in a multiethnic (Casey) and Indigenous-majority (Ashley) school. We describe the processes that we engaged in below. By creating and analyzing a collaborative cellphilm addressing our understanding of whiteness, positionality, and diversity narratives, we engage in “productive remembering” (Strong-Wilson et al., 2014, p. 442) to disrupt our previous assumptions.

## **Data Collection**

In December 2017, Ashley and Casey began a series of conversations about the commonalities and tensions between their early teaching experiences. Though they attended different teacher’s colleges in Atlantic Canada at different periods in time, Casey remembers learning about diversity and difference in uncomplicated ways in almost completely monocultural educational settings. Casey’s experiences of surface-level theorizing of difference in teacher’s college were challenged in her first teaching experiences in a multiethnic classroom in Hong Kong. Ashley recalled that she learned about difference and had her ideas challenged by critically informed white educators in her education program. She suggested that her white privilege and lack of deep historical knowledge were challenged (and continue to be challenged) in her work as an educator.

Despite framing and reflecting their experiences in teacher education programs differently within their teacher education programs and in their first classrooms, both Casey and Ashley recalled being provided undue privilege in relation to their whiteness. From these conversations, we decided to come together

and talk about the ways that we remembered learning about difference and how we came to have more complex understandings of difference, and how systems and structures—including schools—work to maintain unequal systems of privilege that support white hegemonies.

One afternoon, we decided to get together to investigate our memories through the production of a short cellphilm. We began by brainstorming about the words “difference” and “diversity” and we came up with a title for our cellphilm, “Learning About Difference and Complicating Diversity”: <https://youtu.be/iyuekdE6CCw>. When we began planning the cellphilm, we thought that a short two-minute time limit would be useful for the film. After brainstorming the terms, we decided to create a six-shot cellphilm. We wanted to use similar phrasing to tie our two stories together.



Fig. 1: Cellphilm storyboard

We created a storyboard where we decided how we might pair visuals with the narrative that we wanted to transmit. Then we expanded our scripts and began to shoot the images. Ashley wrote in a black pen on a large piece of paper, and Casey chose to use index cards. After we had planned the shoot and expanded our scripts, we began to shoot the images for the cellphilm.

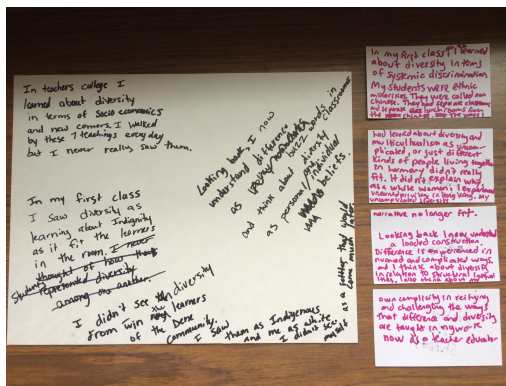


Fig. 2: Expanded narratives

First, Ashley filmed Casey as she wrote the title of the film in the time-lapse function of the cellphone. Then, together, we filmed elements of the university where Casey works and Ashley studies, including a lecture hall, a hallway that features the Seven Sacred Teachings, each of us holding a laptop computer in front of our faces, where we have each displayed an image from our first classrooms. The image is filmed from a distance so that the students could not be identified. Once we had assembled all of the imagery, we came back to Casey’s office and began to edit the cellphilm from an application housed on Casey’s phone. We sped up some images and slowed down others. We added a filter effect to make the lighting and images appear to have the same feeling. We recorded a voice-over in one take.

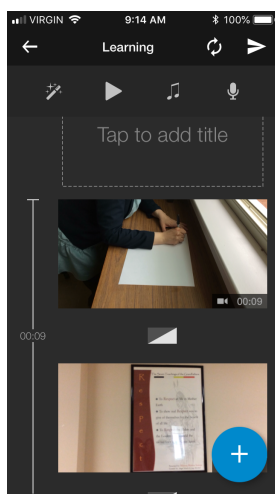


Fig. 3: Editing the cellphilm with an in-phone application

After we edited the cellphilm, Casey made some final changes. She added a background music track and added a filter to tie the colour of the individual shots together in an effort to make the cellphilm appear cohesive. She finalized the cellphilm, uploaded it to YouTube, and sent it to Ashley to receive her feedback. Once Ashley agreed that the cellphilm was ready, we worked collaboratively to analyze the cellphilm.

## Analyzing the Cellphilm

We provide a close reading of our collaborative cellphilm, attending to Rose's (2012) site of the image (or what Fiske [1989] refers to as the primary text)—or the ways that the cellphilm communicates visually. The work of John Fiske (1989), and later Gillian Rose (2001, 2012), provide a conceptual framework for analyzing the participatory visual data emerging from the project. Drawing on cultural studies theorist Fiske's (1989) textual analysis, it is necessary to understand that visual texts comprise multiple components: the audience text (how audiences understand a text in relation to their own experiences and situate the text in relation to other texts that they have consumed), the producer text (including all steps to produce the text), and the primary text (the text itself, which in Fiske's work spoke to television programs or series). In Fiske's viewpoint, these texts speak to one another, and cannot be analyzed as though they are in silos. Fiske argues that, like texts, social experiences are also interwoven in:

a vast interlocking potential of elements that can be mobilized in an unpredictable number of ways. Any social system needs a system of meanings to underpin it, and the meanings that are made of it are determined only to an extent by the system itself. This determination allows adequate space for different people to make different meanings though they may use a shared discursive repertoire in the process. The subject is not fully subjected—the sense we make of our social relations is partly under our control—and making sense of social experience necessarily involves making sense of ourselves within that experience. (p. 58)

We draw on Fiske's (1989) notion of textuality to refer to the way that the visual text is understood and changed by the spaces in which it is viewed, as well as what the images are composed of. As Fiske suggests,

the potential of meanings that constitutes our social experience must not be seen as amoeba-like and structureless...the emphasis on the power of the viewer to achieve certain meanings from the potential offered by the text can only be understood in terms of a textual power and a textual struggle that are remarkably similar to social power and social struggle. Making sense of social experience is an almost identical process to making sense of a text. (pp. 58–59)

Fiske's textual analysis has provided helpful guidance in the analysis of participatory visual texts, including cellphilms and participatory video (MacEntee, 2016; Milne, Mitchell, & De Lange, 2012; Yang, 2013). We take Fiske's practice of looking at texts to situate our own project—the creation and analysis of a cellphilm centered on teacher reflexivity, and thinking through notions of justice.

The analysis of the cellphilm is also anchored by visual theorist Gillian Rose's (2012) discourse analysis, which describes a way of analyzing visual work by attending to three sites: (1) production—or how, why, and by whom a visual text is produced; (2) image—which attends to the way that the visual text is composed; and (3) audience—which attends to the life of the visual text in relation to its unfolding meanings and relation to other texts when it reaches new audiences. Rose (2012) argues that each of these sites of the image are influenced by technological (how the text is made), compositional (what the text comprises), and social modes (how the text is situated in relation to other texts in the social world). We now turn to a close reading of the cellphilm, drawing on Rose (2012) and Fiske (1989).

## Emerging Findings: Looking Closely at a Collaborative Cellphilm

The cellphilm opens on an image of a person writing, “Learning about Difference and Complicating Diversity.” The camera begins further away and moves closer over a period of a few moments.



Fig. 4: Opening shot of the cellphilm

A voice-over reads the words that the person has written on the paper. The cellphilm fades to a medium tracking shot of the *Seven Sacred Teachings of the Grandmothers* that are hung in a hallway in a postsecondary institution in Atlantic Canada. A voice-over emerges as the camera tracks along the sacred teachings, “In teacher’s college, I learned about diversity in terms of socioeconomics and newcomers. I walked by these Seven Teachings every day, but I never really saw them.”

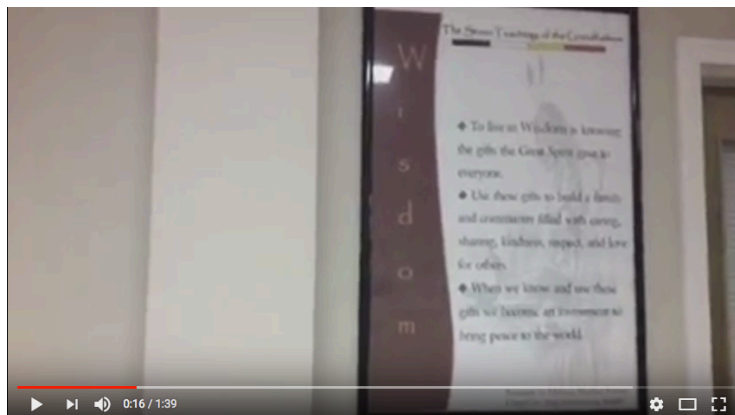


Fig. 5: Walking past, but not seeing the seven sacred teachings

The next shot, of an empty lecture hall, fades in as a new voice speaks, “In teacher’s college, I learned that multiculturalism meant people living and studying together, and learning from each other in a surface level kind of way.” The camera lingers on the empty seats in the lecture hall while a music track plays noticeably in the background. The next shot fades in: an image of a person holding a laptop computer, so that their face is obscured. The laptop is showing a picture of people gathered in two circles. A voice-over emerges,



In my first class, I saw diversity as learning about Indigeneity as it fit the learners in the room. I didn't see diversity within the learners from the Dene community. I saw them as Indigenous, and me as white. I didn't see myself as a settler.

The image fades out and fades back in on another figure that is also holding a laptop computer in front of their face. The laptop shows a posed school picture, where the figures are obscured.



Fig. 6: Recalling first teaching experiences

A voice-over begins,

In my first class, I learned about diversity in terms of systemic discrimination. In Hong Kong, my students were ethnic minorities. The ways I learned about diversity and multiculturalism as uncomplicated, or just different people living together, did not explain it.

The shot fades out and fades in on a drum and some Wolastoqiyik regalia displayed in a case. A voice-over starts, "Looking back, I now understand difference as a buzzword in the classroom. And I think about diversity as encompassing personal and individual beliefs." The shot fades into a picture of graffiti on the front of a business card. The voice-over emerges, "Looking back, I understand difference as a loaded construction. Difference is experienced in complicated and nuanced ways. And I think about diversity in relation to structural inequalities." The music and voice-over end as the screen turns black.

### **Moving Forward in our Teaching and Thinking**

Although we have not yet screened the cellphilm to audiences, we aim to show the cellphilm in future teaching experiences. Casey plans to show the cellphilm to her preservice teachers as she engages them in issues of accountability, pervasive whiteness, and thinking critically about the damage that can be done when teachers engage in uncritical multicultural approaches. She may also use the cellphilm as an example of how to make a cellphilm in workshops and research projects that she facilitates in the future. Ashley may also use the cellphilm in her own classroom with her learners, to show the ways that *even* teachers may make mistakes, and that we change the ways in which we think over time.



We believe that the process of making our ideas visual allowed us to think about the narrative and themes that we wanted to bring out in the cellphilm (e.g., difference and diversity) through a deep inquiry. We believe that this process of turning our experiences into visual representations allowed us an opportunity to show and read whiteness and diversity as a kind of multiliteracy practice. In looking back on our work as beginning teachers, both Casey and Ashley endeavored to teach relationally, with respect, and in service of learners. At the same time, we do this work as privileged settlers on unceded and unsundered territory—a lingering tension of the work that we do. Even as we attempt to move away from damage-centered approaches (Tuck, 2009), we acknowledge that we continue to do damage by ignoring the tensions relating to land theft, the prioritization of settler colonial histories, and ways of knowing within schools and universities. In analyzing our memories, our current practices, and the cellfilms, we found that we were unprepared for what Lather (2015) has described as the “messiness of practice-in-context” (p. 768), including how dominant Eurocentric ways of knowing and teaching rendered—and continue to render—many of our educational practices problematic. In reflecting critically and visually on our experiences, we offer a case study in how to read our past understandings in order to change the way we teach in the present, and act more responsibly in the future. We acknowledge that we continue to do this work within predominantly white settler institutions, including public schools and universities, in which we are both privileged and employed.

## References

- Adams, B. (2017). A review of critical race pedagogies in university diversity seminars and the multicultural curriculum. *Innovations in Practice*, 2(2), 5–16.
- Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanič, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*. London: Psychology Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). You can't be the doctor if you're the disease: Eurocentrism and Indigenous renaissance. *CAUT Distinguished Academic Lecture*. Retrieved from <https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/you-cant-be-the-doctor-if-youre-the-disease-eurocentrism-and-indigenous-renaissance.pdf>
- Blay-Palmer, A. (2016). Power imbalances, food insecurity, and children's rights in Canada. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 4(1), 117.
- Boylorn, R. M., & Orbe, M. P. (Eds.). (2016). *Critical autoethnography: Intersecting cultural identities in everyday life*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burawoy, M. (2003). Revisits: An outline of a theory of reflexive ethnography. *American Sociological Review*, 68(5), 645–679.
- Burkholder, C. (2013). 'Just the school makes us non-Chinese': Contrasting the discourses of Hong Kong's Education Bureau with the lived experiences of its Non-Chinese Speaking secondary school population. *Journal of Educational Research for Social Change*, 2(2), 43–58.

- Burkholder, C. (2018). DIY media-making for social change: Hong Kong's ethnic minority youth speak back to exclusion and call for social action through cellfilms. In S. Bastien & H. Holmarsdottir (Eds.), *Youth as architects of change: Global efforts to advance youth-driven innovation for social change* (pp. 155–174). London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2015). The things you do to know: An introduction to the pedagogy of multiliteracies. In *A pedagogy of multiliteracies* (pp. 1–36). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dockney, J., & Tomaselli, K. G. (2009). Fit for the small (er) screen: Films, mobile TV and the new individual television experience. *Journal of African Cinema*, 1(1), 126–132.
- Dockney, J., Tomaselli, K., & Hart, T. B. (2010). Cellfilms, mobile platforms and prodsumers: Hyper-individuality and film. *The citizen in communication: Revisiting traditional, new and community media practices in South Africa* (pp. 91–116).
- Dyer, C., & Choksi, A. (2001). Literacy, schooling and development. *Literacy and development: Ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 27–39).
- Emmitt, M., Pollock, J., & Komesaroff, L. R. (2006). *Language and learning: An introduction for teaching*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Fiske, J. (1989). Moments of television: Neither the text nor the audience. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreuzner, and A. Warth (Eds.), *Remote control: Television, audiences, and cultural power* (pp. 56–78). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (2005). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2012). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. (2005). Introduction. In P. Freire & D. Macedo (Eds.), *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (pp. 1–19). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hanson, S. S. (2004). Critical auto/ethnography. In S. Brown & S. Dobrin (Eds.), *Ethnography unbound: From theory shock to critical praxis* (pp. 183–200). New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Holladay, J.R. (2000). *White anti-racist activism: A personal roadmap*. Roselle, NJ: Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/on-racism-and-white-privilege>
- Lather, P. (2015). The work of thought and the politics of research: (Post)qualitative research. In N. Denzin & M. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of inquiry* (pp. 97–118). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- MacEntee, K. (2016). Facing responses to cellfilm screenings of African girlhood in academic presentations. In K. MacEntee, C. Burkholder, & J. Schwab-Cartas (Eds.), *What's a cellfilm?: Integrating mobile phone technology into participatory arts based research and activism* (pp. 137–153). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- MacEntee, K., Burkholder, C., & Schwab-Cartas, J. (Eds.). (2016). *What's a cellfilm?: Integrating mobile phone technology into participatory visual research and activism*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Madison, D. S. (2011). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milne, E. J., Mitchell, C., & De Lange, N. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of participatory video*. New York, NY: Alta Mira Press.

Mitchell, C., & De Lange, N. (2013). What can a teacher do with a cellphone? Using participatory visual research to speak back in addressing HIV&AIDS. *South African Journal of Education*, 33(4), 1–13.

Mitchell, C., De Lange, N., & Moletsane, R. (2016). Me and my cellphone: Constructing change from the inside through cellfilms and participatory video in a rural community. *Area*, 48(4), 435–441.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60–92.

Osler, A. (2015). The stories we tell: Exploring narrative in education for justice and equality in multicultural contexts. *Multicultural Education Review*, 7(1-2), 12–25.

Purcell-Gates, V. (Ed.). (2007). *Cultural practices of literacy: Case studies of language, literacy, social practice, and power*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Rowell, J., & Pahl, K. (Eds.). (2015). *The Routledge handbook of literacy studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Sheridan-Rabideau, M.P. (2008). *Girls, feminism, and grassroots literacies: Activism in the GirlZone*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Stald, G. (2008). Mobile identity: Youth, identity, and mobile communication media. *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 143–164).

Strong-Wilson, T., Mitchell, C., Morrison, C., Radford, L., & Pithouse-Morgan, K. (2014). Looking forward through looking back: Using digital memory-work in teaching for transformation. In L. Thomas (Ed.), *Becoming teacher: Sites for teacher development in Canadian Teacher Education* (pp. 442–468).

Teaching Tolerance. (2018). On racism and white privilege. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/on-racism-and-white-privilege>

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409–428.

Yang, K. (2013). A reflection on a participatory video project: Possibilities and challenges for promoting participatory cultures among adult learners. *The Urban Review*, 45(5), 671–683.



**Casey Burkholder** is an Assistant Professor at the University of New Brunswick, with a particular interest in critical teacher-education and participatory visual research. In choosing a research path at the intersection of citizenship, gender, inclusion, DIY media-making, and Social Studies education, Casey believes her work may contribute to “research as intervention” through participatory approaches to equity and social change.



**Ashley Frawley** is an MEd Candidate (Critical Studies) at the University of New Brunswick. Born and in raised in rural New Brunswick, she began her teaching career in a First Nations community in Northern Alberta. Ashley currently teaches at a First Nations community school in Fredericton, NB. Her thesis is focused on her work in First Nations communities as a settler and the implications with which it brings.

# Honoring Children's Ways of Knowing: A Story of Trust and Transformation in a Kindergarten Classroom

Keely D. Cline, Merlene Gilb, and Michelle Vaught

## Abstract

This article spotlights the transformation of a kindergarten classroom culture as told through the story of selecting and naming a class pet, emphasizing the teacher's understanding of children's ways of knowing and the role of trust in building an inclusive and equitable classroom environment. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory serves as a lens in understanding the teacher's efforts to build a culture respectful of each individual child, the group as it formed, and class's identity in the broader learning community. The seemingly simple story is considered through the concept of rich normality, which recognizes the potential of everyday moments and experiences.

How much positive attention do we give to the ordinary moments in our programs for young children in North America? (Cooper, 2012, p. 299)

Rich normality has long been used as a metaphor by Reggio educators to describe the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive environments to which they continually aspire, calling attention to the promise of ordinary moments. For it is the stringing together of ordinary moments that ultimately gives shape and quality to human life over time. (Cutler & McKillip, 2017, p. 25)

When Mrs. Vaught began her journey as a kindergarten teacher at a lab school, she did not foresee the transformational experiences awaiting her. On the first morning of kindergarten, some of the children in Mrs. Vaught's class shed a few tears as they watched their families leave. However, after the children went home in the afternoon, it was then Mrs. Vaught who shed a few tears, feeling she had made what she considered to be a "huge mistake." Mrs. Vaught had spent the two previous years teaching in a preschool classroom, becoming skilled at promoting a joy of learning in a classroom that embraced a constructivist philosophy. She had learned to listen to the children and to be responsive to their needs, interests, and inquiry; encouraging children to have ownership of their learning, to try new things, and to engage freely in exploratory learning. How was Mrs. Vaught going to stay true to this teaching style, one that recognized and honored learners' ways of knowing, and meet the individual needs of her diverse class (including dual language learners and children of a wide range of abilities) without bowing to pressures that have often made kindergarten more like a primary classroom? How would the children in her kindergarten class experience a culture of joy in learning in an environment open to exploration and discovery?

Here we present learning moments illustrated through descriptions of an exploration carried out by the children and through the expressed wisdom of Mrs. Vaught as it unfolded. Informed by the concept of rich normality, we present what on the surface is a seemingly simple story. However, it is, in fact, a sample of how ordinary moments were strung together to give shape and quality to the children's experiences as they grew and transformed, individually and as a group, within the ecology of their kindergarten classroom and beyond.

## Literature

### The Ecology of a Classroom

In a classroom, an ecosystem is a journey shared together. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) provides a meaningful framework for understanding transformational learning in a constructivist classroom. According to bioecological systems theory, a developing person is positioned within a set of nested systems that interact with one another, the most immediate of which includes settings such as family and school, and the more distant of which includes the wider community and socio-cultural context. Children are active participants in their development, influencing and being influenced by their environments. This theory acknowledges the importance of the passage of time, which may bring with it consistencies and changes.

In a constructivist classroom, each child's unique way of thinking and knowing is valued, not only as an individual, but also in relation to the other children, the teacher, the family, and the "wider world" (e.g., broader school environment, community, and greater society). Within the nested systems that are life, we, and others with whom we interact, naturally transform through interactions and shared experiences through learning that is not formally taught but evoked.

As children make connections within similar systems lived out in a classroom, ongoing and emerging opportunities for shared learning provoke problem-finding, thought, and prompt action toward making a difference in the world, or simply conveying to the "wider world" that something important is happening here. Embracing this democratic coexistence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lanzi, 2011) and idea of citizenship, learning is co-constructed with others from varied and valued perspectives. Learning, in this way, is not taught but evoked. Each individual (child and adult), and the learning (practices and procedures), is transformed as a result.

### Relationships and Trust

Learning happens through interactions. Theorists such as Vygotsky and Malaguzzi have long recognized that social learning emerges even before cognitive development (Gandini, 2012). Relationships are foundational in a learning community (Biermeier, 2015). Bowlby's (1973) proposal that sensitive caregiving in the context of the infant-caregiver relationship leads to a secure attachment has been extended to inform understanding of the teacher-child relationship. As viewed through this lens, children who feel emotionally secure with the teacher use the teacher as a secure base for exploring learning opportunities in the classroom (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Related, Erikson (1963) identified developing basic trust—reflecting a sense of faith in oneself and confidence in others—as the earliest psychosocial task in a person's development. Trust plays an essential role in teaching for transformation. To feel safe enough to reveal their true selves, including feelings and ideas, children must feel significant, accepted, and cared for within the classroom culture. Trust in the classroom emerges through meaningful interactions and relationships between both teacher and child, and between children. Children's emerging individual and group identities influence the environment and learning.

Therefore, in a constructivist classroom, trust is at the heart of all that is transforming—the child, the teacher, as well as the learning and knowing.

### **Rich Normality**

The concept of rich normality emphasizes the potential of everyday moments and experiences. Rich normality draws attention to the richness that can be found in all aspects of a classroom or learning environment—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). In each of these environments, the teacher sees the significance in and gives positive attention to the “small events” (Mitchelmore & Fleet, 2017, p. 64) and finds promise in them (Edwards et al., 2012). This promise comes in connecting these events that propel natural ways of understanding—connecting and letting the journey of learning build with children, families, and the “wider world.” Resulting long-term projects are fostered in nurturing harmonious and balanced environments where children blossom emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

What follows here is a description of a project that developed over the course of several weeks in Mrs. Vaught’s kindergarten classroom. This learning experience reflects the children’s expressed ways of knowing captured in the rich normality of everyday moments and experiences as the project unfolded. The children’s role and participation in the project is examined—individually, as a group, and in their connections to the “wider world”—through the teacher’s reflections and insights gained.

## **The Children’s Exploration: Selecting and Caring for a New Pet**

### **Overview**

The children in Mrs. Vaught’s kindergarten returned from winter break to learn that their beloved pet hedgehog, Harley, had passed away. Despite Mrs. Vaught’s concerns, she found that any grief that the children were experiencing seemed overshadowed by the excitement of getting a new pet. With Mrs. Vaught’s support, the children discussed and researched pet options and narrowed their list down to a leopard gecko or crested gecko. The class was part of the Horace Mann Laboratory School located on the campus of Northwest Missouri State University, and Mrs. Vaught organized a field trip to the university’s science department, giving children an opportunity to learn about, hold, and interact with these types of lizards. After this field trip, the children further discussed and voted on which lizard would be best for their class, selecting a leopard gecko.

With this decision made, the children researched the needs of leopard geckos and made a shopping list of pet supplies. The time finally came for Mrs. Vaught to purchase the lizard. Thanks to Mrs. Vaught’s documentation of what was unfolding on the class social media network, children’s families and other teachers at the lab school were also following the class’s progress. The children, as well as their “wider world” (i.e., family and lab school community), were anxious to meet the new lizard (see Figure 1)!





Fig. 1: The lizard, a leopard gecko, selected by the children after researching possible class pets for their kindergarten classroom.

## The Individual

**Meet Cylas.** *Cylas was the youngest child in Mrs. Vaught’s kindergarten class. While he demonstrated above-average verbal and language comprehension skills, his social and fine motor skills were less developed. At times, this made it challenging for Cylas to engage with his classmates. However, as illustrated in the following description, in the context of the Mrs. Vaught’s kindergarten classroom, Cylas was able to embrace his own ways of knowing and successfully engage with his peers and further establish an identity within his classroom. These same experiences simultaneously helped to build a stronger group connection among the children.*

After the new lizard arrived, the children spent time getting to know her. One concern that quickly arose was that the children would tightly gather around the lizard when she was out of her cage. Mrs. Vaught called a class meeting to discuss how the class could enjoy the lizard while ensuring her safety. The children came up with the idea of using blocks to build structures for the lizard to explore while she was out of her cage. In response to the energy of the children’s ideas, Mrs. Vaught supported additional opportunities to design and create structures. The children suggested adding carpet and including amenities to make the structures more comfortable, including making a small bed, toys, and even a toilet. Together, children continued to modify the designs and features of their structures, which grew in complexity over time.

One morning, Cylas, working independently, which was often his preference, initiated building a new rectangular structure for the lizard. Mrs. Vaught joined Cylas in a conversation about the structure, suggesting he build on to it. Cylas came up with the idea of building a lizard maze, and he then excitedly announced this to the class. Many children asked Cylas if they could help build the maze, and Cylas



accepted their requests. Cylas served as the director of the maze construction, providing leadership as decisions were made about the design.

In the past, if a large group of children joined him, Cylas would often become overwhelmed and leave the group or become overexcited and tear down group efforts, rather than work cooperatively. In this instance, neither happened. Rather, Cylas shined as a leader, using his excellent verbal skills to direct his friends in designing and creating the maze (see Figure 2).



Fig. 2: Cylas shines as a leader, serving as the director as a maze is constructed for the pet lizard.

### **Mrs. Vaught’s Wisdom: Focusing on the Individual**

Each child has the right to be respected for his or her uniqueness and extraordinary potential, manifested in distinct “rhythms of growth and development” (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 31). This is at the heart of Mrs. Vaught’s classroom culture and intentional in her daily practice. Learning is a social experience, and each child plays a unique role in a community of learners. Accepting that a child is capable and can become confident to think, share ideas, and work with others—unique to the child’s strengths—allows us to see each child not simply for what they can do, but for who they are. In the case of Cylas, he was accepted for who he was (and who he was becoming) as an individual, as well as who he was in the company of others. By focusing on each individual child and his or her nuanced ways of knowing and making sense of their world, Mrs. Vaught was able to understand and support the individual children’s needs as part of a diverse group of learners. She fostered an inclusive and equitable learning environment, one that recognized the special rights of all children and the unique and unrepeatable qualities each child brings to the collective learning and culture of a classroom (Dahlberg & Moss, 2006). Below are reflections and insights Mrs. Vaught gained in examining the role of the individual child in the project as it unfolded (see Figure 3).

### Considerations for Focusing on the Individual

1. Dedicate time to getting to know and respect each child's uniqueness, including his/her uniquely expressed ways of knowing, and allow each child to be his/her true self.
2. Be aware of the individual child's response to the environment (objects, situations, materials, etc.) in the flow of the day. Note his/her decisions and contributions as a way of expressing who they are and how they learn.
3. Recognize that the child is both a human "being" in the here-and-now, as well as someone on a path to "becoming" his/ her future self. Meet the child where he/she is and provide opportunities for growth and development.
4. Focus on the "real" not the "ideal" child.
5. Work to reframe what might be considered "issues." When understood (by the child, other children, and teacher), these "issues" can be seen as forms of diversity among children, valuable to the process of learning.
6. With this reframed understanding (i.e., seeing diversity rather than "issues") in mind, help each child find his/her voice and to see that this voice is heard and honored in the community of learners.

Fig. 3: Considerations for teachers when focusing on the individual child in project work.

## The Group

Returning to the children's maze-building, once the children were happy with the structure (see Figure 4), the lizard was given a chance to explore. The children now had a new problem—the lizard was not as excited to go through the maze as the children were for her to go through it. Gathered around the maze, the children generated and tested ideas about how to coax the lizard through the maze (see Figure 5). Sofiya blocked the lizard's way so she couldn't go back into the original rectangular structure. The lizard's only choice would now be to go into the maze. Tavian grabbed a mealworm to see if food would motivate the lizard. Neither of these attempts were successful in getting the lizard to move. Then, Elley started gently touching the lizard's tail to encourage her to move through the maze. The children found that this was effective and excitedly cheered. However, the children quickly realized that when they yelled or cheered, or if more than one person touched the lizard's tail at once, the lizard totally stopped moving. The children decided that they needed to be quieter to avoid scaring the lizard and that they would need to take turns "helping" the lizard through the maze. Negotiations continued, as did the exchange of ideas and solutions, much like the give-and-take of a family discussion.

For the next few weeks, Mrs. Vaught, recognizing the children's ways of exploration and the project that was forming, documented the learning journey. As a way of supporting the ideas originated by the children, she made a variety of blocks and open-ended materials available. Mrs. Vaught provoked the children's deeper inquiry, problem solving, and creativity through her questions and conversation as she, too, was part of the learning. The children, in turn, enthusiastically initiated constructing multiple configurations of the maze in a joyful exchange.



Fig. 4: A group of children negotiating configurations of the maze for the lizard.



Fig. 5: The children work together to generate and test ideas about how to coax their pet lizard through the maze.

### **Mrs. Vaught’s Wisdom: Focus on the Group**

When a group forms in the learning process, something new is created. The idea of the teacher as the giver of knowledge is replaced with the freedom of ideas and a flow of learning co-constructed with the children, embracing the chaos that results from children’s engagement in self-directed exploration with open-ended materials. Children are empowered as thinkers, contributing and collaborating with other points of view. These exchanges allow for children to develop authentic friendships reflected in caring, careful communication, and an openness to others, facilitated in a context that lends itself to inquiry, problem solving, and group interactions (Hong, Shaffer, & Han, 2016). The teacher becomes an active partner in the learning process—a keen observer of children’s learning for the purpose of identifying paths to guide further exploration in an environment where children work cooperatively toward common goals. In this story, as relationships drove the learning, there was a genuine respect for other children’s ways of knowing and an acceptance of the thoughts and ideas of others. Mrs. Vaught viewed her classroom as a family of learners, formed in a culture of trust and the shared enjoyment in the give-and-take of being together. Below are reflections and insights Mrs. Vaught gained in examining the role of group work in the project as it unfolded (see Figure 6).

<b>Considerations for Focusing on the Group</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embrace the concept of co-construction in teaching and learning, a concept that may get “lost” in the demands and culture in elementary classrooms. Refrain from being the giver of knowledge or solutions. Rather, respect and honor children’s ways of knowing and co-construct meaning with them. Discuss problems, generate ideas, and find solutions together.</li> <li>2. Provide access to open-ended materials as a way of enhancing shared interest, discovery, flexible thinking, and initiative between the children.</li> <li>3. Provide freedom in the flow of learning; embrace and find joy in the “organized chaos” of group exploration.</li> <li>4. Encourage the rhythm and repetition of groups as they form and re-form throughout project work, and archive a memory of this learning. What children learn how to do together today, they know how to do together tomorrow and beyond, strengthening their sense of togetherness and belonging.</li> <li>5. Drawing from the concept of “rich normality,” find the creative possibilities in everyday moments in the life of a classroom. What seems ordinary can become extraordinary in the formation of projects.</li> <li>6. Promote a sense of family in the classroom. Engaging in give-and-take within the context of a warm and emotionally supportive context inspires cooperation, and allows meaningful interactions to blossom.</li> </ol>

Fig. 6: Considerations for teachers when focusing on children working in groups in project work.

### **The “Wider World”**

Once Mrs. Vaught’s kindergarten class had their new pet, the lizard needed a name. The class had explored the concept of elections earlier in the fall after demonstrating interest in this topic as the presidential, state, and local campaigns were underway. These explorations included walking around the surrounding residential neighborhood, examining political signs in yards, as well as discussing the concept of voting. The class members applied their knowledge of elections to help determine a name for their lizard.



First, the class talked about possible names, generating a list of about 25 names. The class voted, narrowing the list down to four top choices: Poppy, Godzilla, Ella, and Valentine. Children discussed how to proceed, voicing that they wanted their families to be involved in making the important decision. This then turned into a discussion of inviting members of the children's "wider world" (e.g., grandparents, the entire lab school) to participate. Together, the children created a plan to engage others in the decision-making. The class set up a ballot box in the hallway outside of their classroom (see Figure 7). Children made posters inviting participation in the voting and hung them on the walls where the lab school community (e.g., other elementary students, teachers, university professors from the same university as the lab school, practicum students) could see them (see Figures 8 and 9). Children frequently invited others—children and adults—to come vote if they met them in the hall of the lab school.



Fig. 7: The ballot box in the hallway directed the school community to vote, including listing the suggested pet names from the children. Here a kindergarten child casts a vote with her father and younger brother.

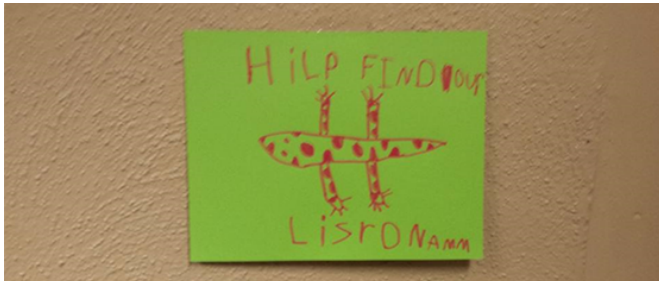


Fig. 8: The children invite the school community to vote on the pet lizard's name by posting signs on the walls around the building.

This sign reads, "Help find our lizard [a] name."



Fig. 9: A child proudly points to the sign she made to encourage the school community to participate in voting on the name of the class's pet lizard.

The children's enthusiasm about their voting project seemed contagious, spreading to the entire lab school community. There was a great deal of activity around the ballot box, and it seemed like the whole lab school was talking about the pet lizard and what her name would be. Mrs. Vaught also promoted the election through her documentation of the learning on the class's social media network, extending the voting opportunity to individuals who may not have been physically at the lab school on a regular basis. Family members posted comments to the page, asking if votes had been counted or if the name had been selected.

The class members' efforts to involve their "wider world" were far-reaching, exceeding the expectations of Mrs. Vaught and the children. When the time came to open the ballot box, the children were so excited that some were literally crawling into Mrs. Vaught's lap to get a closer look. Tallying the votes was full of suspense (see Figure 10). The class even found that there were some "write in" suggestions, including the name "Tractor" by the younger brother of one kindergarten child. The class, including the children who had voted for a different name, were pleased to learn that the name "Poppy" had received the most votes. The children invited members of the lab school community to come and meet their newly named pet. Mrs. Vaught also announced the pet's name on the class's social media network, and this announcement was met with many reactions and comments.



Fig. 10: The children take turns tallying the votes to determine their pet lizard's name.

### **Mrs. Vaught's Wisdom: Focus on the "Wider World"**

The world today, even to a young child, is more closely connected than ever before. In these learning moments, the exchange of information and resources that contribute to learning was both drawn into and extended beyond the classroom to the children's community and their families. These broader connections to a "wider world" not only informed others of the happenings within the classroom, but also invited the contributions that helped to transform the children's learning and project outcome through a bidirectional exchange. As a result of Mrs. Vaught sharing the learning journey through her documentation, everyone was drawn into the energy and anticipation of what was unfolding, or in other words, transforming. Emotional connections were sparked, and there was shared excitement and emotion surrounding the learning project. The children actively co-constructed their knowledge, identity, and culture in relation to others and the world (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). The children's project, now a part of their "identity," became "seen" in their lab school and community (their "wider world"), growing an understanding of and respect for children's unique ways of knowing. The culture of childhood and of learning was made visible, and the children were witness to this emergence. Below are reflections and insights Mrs. Vaught gained in examining the role of the children's connections to their "wider world" in the project as it unfolded (see Figure 11).

### Considerations for Focusing on the “Wider World”

1. Support the children in forming a group identity and in giving them opportunities to communicate that identity within the school and wider community.
2. Help children see their possibility and participation in the “wider world.” Trust the connections children make between relationships (academic and social) formed within and those that extend beyond the classroom walls. The smallest connections make for a more faceted bigger picture.
3. Make the classroom an inviting place for members of the “wider world” to visit, and help children to see that others are interested and invested in their efforts by providing opportunities to interact and communicate with the “wider world.” Embrace the energy of ideas as they flow (bidirectionally) from and into the classroom. Provide ways for children to share and for the class to draw in perspectives and participation from the “wider world” in the learning process.
4. Develop a process and habit of documenting learning. Make the documentation accessible, not only for the children, but also to their “wider world.” Documentation offers visible evidence of the different ways of knowing and expressing thinking and learning for all to revisit, reflect on, and take joy in.
5. Embrace the role of emotion in learning (now and lifelong). Recognize that emotion is evoked in relation with others and gives children power over their learning and how their knowing is expressed.
6. Recognize the power of transformational learning. When you let go of the need to control the direction and final outcome of a project, the children may take learning to places you could not have anticipated.

Fig. 11: Considerations for teachers when focusing on the children’s “wider world” in project work.

## Conclusion

On the surface, this is a seemingly simple story about selecting and naming a class pet. However, importantly, the events described here reflect a deeper, more complex narrative of transformation that spanned, not only throughout this project, but also across the year of kindergarten in Mrs. Vaught’s classroom. Mrs. Vaught started the school year concerned about her own transition from teaching preschool to teaching kindergarten. How was she going to stay true to the teaching style in which she believed, making sure to meet the needs of her diverse class of learners, without bowing to pressures that have often made kindergarten more like a primary classroom? How would the children in her kindergarten class experience a culture of joy in learning in an environment open to exploration and discovery?

It was, in part, through the processes of building trust and a continuing dedication to teaching for transformation that Mrs. Vaught found the answer to these questions. Though she initially doubted herself, Mrs. Vaught faced this new challenge and found freedom and acceptance through coming to trust in her own attunement to children’s way of knowing. Capturing the promise found in the rich normality of everyday moments lived out in the classroom, Mrs. Vaught cultivated an inclusive and equitable classroom culture—a true family of learners. She helped the children develop trust in themselves (through embracing their own unique ways of knowing), each other (through harmonized



and balanced group experiences), and the “wider world” around them. In doing so, Mrs. Vaught set the stage for a year of transformational learning, filled with exploration and discovery, for all. Each member of the learning community—children, teacher, families, and wider community—transformed. These experiences will forever touch the lives of those involved, because when something transforms it is changed, never returning to what it previously was.

## References

- Biermeier, M. A. (2015). Inspired by Reggio Emilia: Emergent curriculum in relationship-driven learning environments. *Young Children, 70*(5), 72–73.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The bioecological theory of human development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development* (pp. 3–15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris (2006). *The bioecological model of human development* (Vol. 1, pp. 793–828). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Cooper, M. (2012). Is beauty a way of knowing? In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation* (pp. 295–302). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Cutler, K., & McKillip, A. (2017). An innovative collaborative design project: Exploring the aesthetic dimensions of Reggio-inspired furniture. *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Emilia Exchange, 24*(2), 24–37.
- Dahlberg, G., & Moss, P. (2006). Introduction: Our Reggio Emilia. In C. Rinaldi, *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching, and learning*. London: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2007). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. E. (2012). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Norton.
- Gandini, L. (2012). History, ideas, and basic principles: An interview with Loris Malaguzzi. In C.P. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G.E. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation*, 3rd ed. (pp. 27–71). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Hong, S. B., Shaffer, L., & Han, J. (2016). Reggio Emilia inspired learning groups: Relationships, communication, cognition, and play. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 44*(1), 1–11.
- Howes, C., & Ritchie, S. (2002). *A matter of trust: Connecting teachers and learners in the early childhood classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lanzi, D. (2011, October). The values of the Reggio Emilia educational project. Paper session presented at the North American Study Group, Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Mitchelmore, S., & Fleet, A. (2017). The worlds of the very young: Seeing the everyday in small pieces. In A. Fleet, C., Patterson, & J. Robertson (Eds.), *Pedagogical documentation in early years practice: Seeing through multiple perspectives* (pp. 61–72). London: SAGE.

Rinaldi, C. (2013). Re-imagining childhood: The inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia. Government of South Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/reimagining-childhood.pdf>



**Keely D. Cline**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in the School of Health Science and Wellness, Division of Behavioral Sciences, at Northwest Missouri State University. Her professional and research interests include building supportive contexts for child development, including through parent-child relationships and early childhood classrooms. She is interested in cultural studies and progressive educational practices from the international community. Among her publications are ones that have focused on parent-child shared book reading among Early Head Start families, and the language and literacy environment at Filastrocca, an Italian preschool that has a special mission focused on books, stories, and the imagination.



**Merlene Gilb**, Ed. D., is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Saint Louis University. Her experience in education spans over 30 years and includes work in school administration, curriculum development, professional development, gifted education, and teaching at the preschool, elementary, and university level. A student of the Reggio Emilia Approach, she has visited Reggio Emilia, Italy several times as a participant in the U.S. Student and Professor Study Group. Her professional and research interests include teacher learning, leadership, and research; leading for change by inspiring innovative practice; and responsive curriculum design and models.



**Michelle Vaught**, M.S.Ed., is a teacher at the NAEYC-accredited Leet Center Preschool located on Northwest Missouri State University's (NWMSU) campus. She is also an adjunct faculty member for the university. Previous experiences include being a kindergarten teacher at the Horace Mann Laboratory School at NWMSU and an early childhood and elementary special education teacher. Michelle's professional interests include Reggio-inspired teaching strategies (has traveled to Reggio Emilia and participated in a U.S. Student and Professor Study Group), interest-based teaching strategies, social justice within the early childhood classroom, the roles of families within classrooms, and connecting the learning of theory and practice for practicum students.

# Perceptions That Early Learning Teachers Have About Outdoor Play and Nature

Beverlie Dietze and Diane Kashin

## Abstract

This study explored voices of early learning teachers engaged in discussions in an online outdoor play and nature pedagogy course. Three core questions were investigated that focused on early learning teachers' perceptions and practices of children's access to quality outdoor play and nature experiences. The results support previous research that indicated that teachers' perceptions, experiences, values, knowledge, and attitudes influence children's outdoor play experiences. The findings suggest the need to increase access to professional learning that contributes to early learning teachers enhancing their confidence, awareness, and intentional programming, which results in shifting attitudes to fully embrace outdoor play and pedagogy.

## Background

The early childhood education profession across Canada is undergoing numerous changes and the landscape continues to evolve. New governmental policies and curriculum frameworks have changed the terrain. There are more opportunities for families to access diverse early childhood education programs and there are expanded professional learning experiences for early learning teachers (Dietze & Kashin, 2016). At the same time, there is an increased awareness about the need for children to have extended access to outdoor play (Gomboc, 2016; Hyvonen, 2011). Childhood is undergoing overwhelming change, including the loss of access to outdoor play and the freedom to explore and discover without adult intervention. Childhood is increasingly becoming an indoor culture. These changes, combined with a new generation of early learning teachers entering the profession, many of whom have limited experiences in nature (Crim, Desjean-Perrotta, & Mosley, 2008; Ernst & Tornabene, 2012; Gustafsson, Szczepanski, Nelson, & Gustafsson, 2012; Gustavsson & Pramling, 2014), is adding to the relevance of the discussion that calls for more support for early learning teachers in their outdoor play practice. There appears to be consensus in the literature of the importance of early learning teachers having access to and in acquiring credentials and competencies that reflect current evidence-based practices (Douglass, Carter, Smith, & Killins, 2015; Royer & Moreau, 2016) reflective of outdoor play pedagogy.

Play has long been the foundation of early childhood education (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a, 2019b; Leggett & Newman, 2017; Torkar & Rejc, 2017). Now, there appears to be a growing consensus across disciplines on the importance of outdoor play becoming more explicit in postsecondary early childhood education training programs and in professional learning programs. Early learning teachers benefit

from understanding how outdoor play pedagogy provides a framework that can nurture children's desires to act upon their curiosity, to explore, experiment and in making discoveries about their ideas, the environment, and of themselves (Torkar & Rejc, 2017; Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012).

Approximately 60% of children living in Canada (Sinha, 2014) attend child care centres. The outdoor play space, programming requirements, and duration of time recommended for children to have actual outdoor playtime vary from province to province and from one jurisdiction to another. Generally, governmental approval bodies examine the outdoor play space of early learning and child care centres for fall zones and safety, rather than for the play potential that could occur in the space (Cooper, 2015, Leggett & Newman, 2017).

Despite research that clearly articulates how outdoor play has the potential to influence children's development, including contributing to fostering values, attitudes, skills, and behaviours towards themselves, others, and their environment, many early learning and child care programs are challenged to provide intriguing and stimulating outdoor environments (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). This may be due in part to limited resources (Cooper, 2015; Leggett & Newman, 2017; Wyver et al., 2009) and the lack of access and training available to early learning teachers that is specific to outdoor play pedagogy and programs. Online learning opportunities are gaining attention as an effective way to support early learning teachers in having access to professional development (Stone-MacDonald & Douglass, 2015).

As a way to understand early learning teachers' perceptions about outdoor play and nature, it is important to listen to and hear their voices about their experiences, challenges, barriers, and aspirations for outdoor play programming. It is in this context that this paper presents results of a recent study of comments made by early learning teachers in online discussion boards found in an Internet-based outdoor play course. To the best of our knowledge, this online outdoor play course is the only one of its kind in Canada where early learning teachers collaboratively share their ideas, perspectives and articulate their recommendations for change to the view of advancing outdoor play pedagogy and practice.

## **The Outdoor Play Course**

Designed for early learning teachers and emerging early learning teachers studying to practice in the early learning profession, a 36-hour open-access course was developed by two researchers/educators with extensive backgrounds in research and in facilitating professional learning related to outdoor play. The course consisted of 12 open-access modules that focused on an array of topics including why outdoor play is the hallmark for children's development, the adult's role in outdoor play and learning, designing outdoor play spaces, place-based education, nature pedagogy, and environmental sustainability. The asynchronous delivery model comprised various means of participant engagement in the modules, including the reviewing videos, PowerPoint slides, images, click-and-reveal features, and discussion forums.

The intent of the course was to provide participants with outdoor play pedagogy, theory, and application strategies to support the achievement of praxis. Freire (1970) defined praxis as, “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (p. 126). Theory applied to practice could result in transformation of play and learning experiences for children. Children could have more time for outdoor play. Ideally, by transferring theory to practice, the quality and depth of the experience children have during outdoor play would also increase. Grounded in the premise that quality outdoor play experiences for children involves self-directed and hands-on experiences in and with nature, a concern for the authors was whether an online environment would lead to participant engagement and transference of theory to practice. Addressing this concern occurred from the analysis of the answers given by the participants to three core questions. The first question was, “Is the nature-based early childhood education movement and forest and nature movement influencing your program/practice?” The second question explored was, “What is your role in advancing the outdoor play movement?” The third question was, “What are the barriers and challenges of the outdoor play portion of your program?”

## Methodology

### Research Methods and Participants

This qualitative study was completed as part of a research project funded by the Lawson Foundation and conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set out by the Government of Canada’s Tri-Council Policy for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The research was approved by a Research Ethics Board at a postsecondary institution. All participants provided their informed consent. As part of the research study, participants were required to complete a pre-course and post-course survey. The pre-survey provided demographics of participants including gender, age range, educational background, and work experience. As a way to maintain anonymity, the researchers only had access to the tag name that each participant used to sign into the course.

Data was collected from the examination of three questions that were embedded in the discussion forums of the modules. While some questions generated more discussion than others, all responses provided the researchers with insight into the perspectives that participants have on specific aspects of children and outdoor play.

### Heuristic and Narrative Inquiry

This qualitative research was influenced by Moustakas’s (1990) heuristic, narrative inquiry process. The heuristic inquiry paradigm explicitly encourages researchers to acknowledge the importance of the involvement and passion of the voices of participants (Hiles, 2001). Narrative inquiry is grounded on the premise that we come to understand and give meaning through story (Trahar, 2009). The researchers gained new insight into the state of outdoor play and nature play by listening to the voices of the early learning teachers through the stories that they shared and the exchanges that occurred in the course discussion forums.

Examining the voices of the participants provided researchers with a deeper understanding of the early learning teachers' perspectives, challenges, and their recommendations for advancing children's outdoor play experiences. As inherent in the heuristic methodology, the process contributed to the researchers making discoveries and engaging in the exploration and interpretation of participants' experiences. Building on this exploration metaphor, the study subscribes to the interpretive paradigm articulated by Spradley (1980). He compares interpretive researchers to explorers who are trying to map a wilderness. In his analogy, he suggested that the main point of the activity is to describe the findings.

Considering the narratives posted in the forums allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the particulars of the participants' points of view. The articulation of the knowledge acquired serves to offer the reader who has an interest in expanding the quality of children's outdoor play experiences with insight into the current thoughts and perspective of early learning teachers. It helps readers to think about what possible strategies for advancing the quality of children's outdoor play experience can be derived from these perspectives.

## **Analyzing the Data**

The researchers examined the comments posted by the participants for each question. Using a constant comparison method, common key words and themes were sought within the posts. This led to the examination of the data to determine what variables were present, recognizing that the specific backgrounds and experiences of participants were unknown. With this constant comparison strategy, recurring patterns in the posts surfaced and themes emerged. At that point, the researchers shared their thoughts and questions with each other to determine the discoveries that each researcher had made about the themes and perspectives. They also examined the comments that correlated with the literature on outdoor play and pedagogy, preservice training, and professional learning.

## **Findings**

The research questions were intended to invite participants to reflect upon current practices and perspectives related to outdoor play. The questions generated a range of responses. The intent of the initial exploration examined if the nature-based and forest and nature movement that appears to be building momentum across Canada is influencing the outdoor play practice of the participants in this study. The nature-based and forest and nature movement principles include adults advocating for and promoting outdoor play that supports children in acting upon their inquiries, experimentation and daily play in the same space/land for long periods of time, and in having new spaces to explore (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a). The first question that participants responded to was, "Is the nature-based early childhood education movement and forest and nature movement influencing your program/practice?"

Two hundred and seven responses were examined for question one and summarized in Figure 1. Of the total number of responses, 61% of the respondents identified that to this point the movements were not influencing either their personal practice, the employment setting, or their work with early learning students or professionals in the profession. A common theme expressed among those

participants was that their childhood experiences were much more of an influence in their practice than this movement. They suggested that as the child, their own exposure to outdoor play was as impactful. Others indicated that their place of employment and the attitudes of fellow teachers determined how outdoor play was positioned within their programs. Another prominent theme that emerged was that participants associated the lack of outdoor play space and materials as being a core contributor to early learning teachers not wanting to be outdoors.

Just over 10% of participants identified that the movements and the related research gave them tools that they could use to support families in understanding why outdoor play is important to children's development. Twenty-five percent identified that this course had made them aware of the nature-based and forest and nature movements. One of these participants suggested that it was not necessarily the movement which influences, but rather the need for children to be free, active, and able to enjoy nature, as it was meant to be!

I had a home daycare for 4 years, until I became director of a centre, of 47 children. When I was on my own, playing outdoors was important. However, I realized that the teachers who I now supervise do not value the same type of play as I do, which I find very discouraging. We need to be models and leaders, we need to show children what the outdoor life has to offer. I'm into this Outdoor Play Revolution!

Three participants identified their roles as early learning consultants. They indicated that they were seeing a large number of centres intentionally expand their outdoor playtime and experiences. In the words of one of these consultants, the forest and nature school movement

has become a popular topic of conversation with the many schools that I work with. Teachers are reaching out for help on how to adapt their practice and utilize outdoor spaces more regularly and more intentionally. Many teachers are concerned with policy, litigation, parent concerns, and logistics. I find that many willing teachers are reluctant to take play and learning outdoors because there are hurdles in place that are a legacy from the decline in outdoor play.

Similarly, more than 80% of the respondents identified that the more they engaged with children outdoors, the more benefits they were seeing for the children and for themselves such as happier children, more pro-social engagement among children, and a reduction in the amount of adult intervention required during the play.

Two participants identified themselves as college faculty teaching in early childhood education programs. They indicated that although they were including more outdoor play curriculum in their programs, they were not seeing a significant increase in outdoor play or in the quality of the outdoor play programming in the field. Five participants enrolled in college or university courses at the time of taking the outdoor play course indicated that there had not been any curriculum presented associated with outdoor play or nature play.

Seventy-five participants did not explicitly answer whether the movement was or was not influencing their practice. However, more than 50% of the participants suggested that challenges of weather, the demands that families make on early learning programs to focus on academic programming, the fear

of children becoming ill from the weather, and the lack of ministry policies negatively influenced their desire to increase outdoor play.

More outdoor play has benefits to children.	80%
The movements are not influencing practice.	61%
Challenges and barriers negatively influencing.	50%
Did not specifically answer the question.	36%
This course has provided awareness of the movements.	25%
The movements provide tools and research to support practice.	10%
Consultants who noticed awareness of the movements amongst centres.	1.5%
Faculty seeing more outdoor play curriculum, but not significant change in the field.	1%

Fig. 1: Responses to Question One – Is the nature-based early childhood education movement and forest and nature movement influencing your program/practice?

As noted by Ross, Nicol, and Higgins (2007), teachers’ in-depth perspectives about their role in changing practice, particularly in the case of advancing outdoor play, is important. As part of their role, Royer and Moreau (2016) suggested that the psychological well-being of early learning teachers, such as their feeling of competency and desire for involvement, influences practice. This reinforces the importance of emerging and early learning teachers having exposure to outdoor play pedagogy both in their formal schooling and as part of their professional learning options.

In response to the second question, “What is your role in advancing the outdoor play movement?” 131 responses were examined, which revealed key themes that provide insight into areas requiring attention, if we wish to advance outdoor play pedagogy with and for children. These are rounded off and summarized in Figure 2. More than 90% of respondents indicated the need to bring more visibility to the importance of outdoor play. They suggested this might include providing families with education, experiences, and examples of how outdoor play supports children’s learning. More than half of the respondents identified the need to support families in understanding the benefits to children in having access to and opportunities for daily outdoor play. Further, these respondents advocated for them to have information that could easily be provided to families on topics such as the importance of children having the freedom to play and get dirty, and the differences between healthy, risky play, and play with hazards to share with families.

Fifteen participants identified that with an increase in immigrant and new Canadian families in their centres, there was a need to have appropriate resources in place to facilitate supporting those families in understanding the relationship of outdoor play to healthy development and in reassuring them that there were safety measures in place. Three respondents gave examples of refugee families who expressed their past concerns about children being outdoors because of issues such as land mines. Other examples given included supporting families from warmer countries in understanding that children do not get sick from cold weather or rain. Others suggested that new families to Canada wanted their children to focus on learning English, so they were ready for school. These families assumed children having structured



experiences indoors with teacher-directed instruction would achieve this, rather than occurring during outdoor play.

The next most significant theme participants identified revolved around their personal practices that needed rethinking in order to advance children's outdoor play. Fifty-six percent of the respondents suggested their need to increase their observation skills and frequency of observations of children during outdoor play. They suggested this would contribute to them understanding children's interests and experiences. The comments suggested that the participants viewed their role in conducting observations as an advocacy because of how the results could influence the types of experiences and materials offered to children. Just over 88% of the respondents indicated that they now view their lack of planning for and knowledge about outdoor play as a professional challenge resulting in missed opportunities for children. Some suggested because their past view of outdoor play was as free play that did not require planning, a new revelation occurred during the course that had them thinking about how planning and provocations would change children's outdoor play experiences. As participants discussed reframing their practice, more than half of the respondents indicated the importance of increasing more intentional programming. This would require changing the materials in the outdoor environment, beginning with replacing the plastic toys with more natural materials. As well, observing children in their play would inform them how to increase the possibilities for learning. More insight would be gained about place-based learning and materials that could be used to scaffold children's experiences, which would provide opportunities for co-construction of learning among children and teachers.

Fifteen percent of the participants documented the need for them to become stronger advocates for children to have the time, space, and materials to follow their curiosity and interests, rather than the strict schedules used to manage the day-to-day routines. One respondent suggested the first step in advocating for outdoor play would be to change adult and children's attitudes and opportunities for outdoor play. She noted this would fuel children's curiosity and influence both children and adults wanting to be outdoors. More than 60% of participants expressed their need to have more opportunities to learn about how to become a better role model and advocate for outdoor play. Some suggested that a starting point might be to work toward refocusing negative attitudes that their fellow colleagues have about outdoor play so that as a team they could collectively advocate to change children's outdoor play experiences. As one responded articulated,

something that can interfere with outdoor play is the attitude of the educator towards outdoor play, scheduling, or additional expectations. I believe that as a team these things can be worked out to ensure that children have ample time to play outdoors.

Others suggested that to make significant changes to their current outdoor play practice, that they needed support, guidance, and resources from their supervisors.

One hundred and twenty-one respondents indicated that they personally needed to learn more about the theory and application of outdoor and nature play pedagogy. Some suggested this was missing both in their formal training programs and in current professional learning options. Many identified the need for more information about what types of play are acceptable during the outdoor play portion of the program.

For example, 118 participants made mention of not knowing the difference between risky play and hazard until engaging in the modules. Others suggested if early learning teachers do not have the background to effectively program for the outdoor environment, they might not have the comfort and confidence to support children in embracing and engaging in a variety of experiences, including risky play. This affects the depth and breadth of the experiences extended to children. Others discussed their lack of comfort in supporting children in play that involved more active, adventurous experiences. They felt unprepared to be able to defend the play, especially in the event if children get hurt (Brussoni, Ishikawa, Brunelle, & Herrington, 2017). Some questioned how much support they would receive from their administration and from families if children had an accident during outdoor play.

More than 70% of the participants identified that they had not been familiar with the process of conducting a risk-benefit assessment of potential experiences until this course. Such gaps in knowledge and practice reinforce the benefits of early learning teachers having access to continuous professional learning (Carroll-Lind, Smorti, Ord, & Robinson, 2016).

There is a need to learn more about the theory and application of outdoor and nature play pedagogy.	91.5%
There is a need to bring more visibility to the importance of outdoor play.	90%
There is a need for professional development as prior to this course the difference between risky play and hazard was unknown.	90%
The lack of planning for and knowledge about outdoor play as a professional challenge resulting in missed opportunities for children.	88.5%
Until the course, lack of awareness of risk-benefit assessments.	70.5%
There is a need to have more opportunities to learn about how to become a better role model and advocate for outdoor play.	60.5%
There is a need to increase observation skills and frequency of observations of children during outdoor play.	56%
There is a need to support families in understanding the benefits of daily outdoor play and having more information would be helpful.	52%
There is a need to become stronger advocates for children to have the time, space, and materials to follow their curiosity and interests, rather than the strict schedules.	15%
With increase in new Canadians there is a need to have appropriate resources to support families in understanding the relationship of outdoor play to healthy development.	11.5%

Fig. 2: Responses to Question Two – What is your role in advancing the outdoor play movement?

Many factors influence the quality of outdoor play and nature environments and children's experiences. Some common factors affecting early learning quality include budgetary concerns, staff/child ratios, environmental factors, leadership, and the values that families, early learning teachers, and the programs embrace (Leggett & Newman, 2017; Dietze & Kashin, 2016; Douglass et al., 2015). Participants in this study added additional considerations as they relate specifically to outdoor play environments and nature play, such as the administrator's role, the need for continuous professional learning and collaboration amongst colleagues.

The final question examined 189 responses related to the barriers and challenges that were influencing their program. The participants were asked to respond to, "What are some of the barriers and challenges of the outdoor play portion of your program?"

Several themes evolved within this discussion forum. One of the most significant barriers cited by more than 90% of the participants was around the beliefs and lived experiences with the provincial licensing guidelines and the liabilities if children get hurt. Some participants suggested that they were required to remove climbers, water tables, and barrels when government regulations and licensing requirements changed on what was deemed safe and acceptable for licensing. As well, in some instances licensing officers required the natural places for puddles to form in the space to be filled in with products such as mulch. These changes resulted in children's outdoor play spaces being sterile, flat ground environments, and having limited materials (Leggett & Newman, 2017). Another barrier cited frequently was the attitudes of families as it relates to outdoor play. Eighty-eight percent of the participants suggested that they have been witness to families complaining about children being outdoors in the cold or other unfavourable weather conditions due to potential illness. Another common complaint cited was that families expressed concerns if children were spending too much time outdoors because outdoor play would not provide children with the expected academic skills needed to enter kindergarten or grade one. Moreover, participants suggested that families did not want children being dirty at pick-up time.

As outlined earlier, another barrier that was prevalent in the responses related to the attitudes of coworkers. More than 66% of respondents indicated that there was inconsistency in children having access to outdoor play, the types of play that children were allowed to engage in, the number of children that could be in particular play spaces, and the duration allocated for outdoor play. They suggested the attitudes of coworkers strongly influenced these inconsistencies. A small percentage of participants suggested that although their space and geographic locations could be viewed as a barrier or challenge in offering outdoor play, with the right teacher attitude and support from administration, quality outdoor play experiences could be accomplished.

A significant barrier cited was licensing guidelines and the liabilities if children get hurt.	90%
Families complaining about children being outdoors in the cold or other unfavourable weather conditions due to potential illness was included as a barrier.	88%
Attitudes of coworkers affected the consistency of children’s outdoor play experiences.	66%
Even with less than ideal space, with the right attitude and support quality outdoor play can happen.	2%

Fig. 3: Responses to Question Three – What are some of the barriers and challenges of the outdoor play portion of your program?

## Discussion

In this study, we examined three core questions that early learning teachers discussed as part of a specialized course on outdoor play and pedagogy. This study provides insight into some of the current perspectives that early learning teachers, consultants, and faculty in college and university programs have on outdoor play in a Canadian context. Although in many Canadian jurisdictions there is a movement toward children having nature-based and forest experiences in their daily lives, this study shows that the tenets of these movements are not explicit in early childhood education training, job requirements, programming, or practice with children. Given the indoor migration of childhood, outdoor play should be implicit. To make this change, supporting an awareness is required.

A variety of aspects influence early learning philosophy, programming, and practice, including government policies, preservice education, access to professional development, and working conditions within centres (Hartz-Mandell & Umaschi, 2016). These all contribute to the quality in early childhood education programs. It appears from this research that to change programming, practice, philosophy, or values, the effectiveness of the change depends on both internal factors such as staff attitudes, supervisor support, staff knowledge, desire to change practice, and families using the facility (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a; Grimwood, Gordon, & Stevens, 2018; Cooper, 2015). External factors that influence children’s access to and opportunities for outdoor play include college and university training programs that early learning teachers complete, and the accessibility of specialized professional learning (Connors-Burrow, Patrick, Kyzer, & McKelvey, 2017; Hartz-Mandell & Umaschi, 2016). In addition, government policies as they relate to the time children spend outdoors, programming expectations, outdoor play environmental conditions, and the interpretations of policies and processes are major components that require further exploration (Leggett & Newman, 2017; Cox, Hollingsworth, & Buysse, 2015).

The majority of the respondents acknowledged two key areas requiring attention is providing families with information about how outdoor play, in all kinds of weather, and how it supports children’s development. Family attitudes about outdoor play, based on early learning teachers’ experiences, have considerable influence on programming, experiences, and attitudes of both children and early learning teachers in their practice and advocacy for outdoor play. Early learning teachers are in a unique

position to influence family attitudes. The results of this study indicated a need for resources to support their role as advocates for outdoor play.

For many participants, the online course provided them with opportunities to gain new knowledge about outdoor play; for others, the experience seemed to identify and solidify areas of their practice that they could strengthen, such as observation and documentation. Staff education, preservice training, in-service professional learning, and staff confidence in planning and facilitating outdoor play experiences are cited in many studies as important factors in advancing new programming. Although participants identified limited information about the types of gaps in their knowledge about outdoor play pedagogy and nature play (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a), it is reasonable to believe that this may be due in part to outdoor play pedagogy being new to their practice. Furthermore, positioning outdoor play pedagogy as an explicit type of programming is newer to the literature and is necessary (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a, 2019b; Leggett & Newman, 2017; Gustavsson & Pramling, 2014). Participants expressed excitement about their new learning and the opportunities to bring it to practice. With external factors addressed and consistency amongst educators in beliefs and values about outdoor play, children will have increased access to outdoor play.

It is interesting to note that there was more emphasis placed on the importance of shifting staff attitudes about outdoor play than specific comments related to the outdoor play space, environment, and availability of materials. One reason for this may be that if staff have positive attitudes and are enthusiastic about outdoor play, then the environment will evolve to support children's outdoor play. This could also suggest that when staff embrace outdoor play and pedagogy, that new views on the perceptions of environmental constraints are developed. New views could lead to a greater understanding of the possibilities inherent in outdoor play environments and an enthusiastic desire to provide these for children.

## Conclusions

If the outdoor play and nature movement is to transfer to early learning environments, there is a need for early learning students, teachers, and supervisors to have access to individual and team professional development that will support them in learning together and engaging in new practices that emphasize outdoor play pedagogy and nature play (Dietze & Kashin, 2019a).

Teachers' perceptions, experiences, values, knowledge, and attitudes influence children's outdoor play experiences. This study explored how the lived experiences of early learning teachers affect their current practice. It suggests that new knowledge can contribute to reframing current practices that support them in developing new practices that foster outdoor play. With gaps identified and barriers addressed, there is a profound interest in expanding outdoor play. The teachers' voices draw attention to the perceived and real challenges that they experience. Their voices give insight into how early learning teachers can advocate for change in policies and practices that will support children in having access to and opportunities to engage in quality outdoor play experiences.

This study reinforces the need for early learning students, early learning teachers, and administrators to have access to professional learning that deepens their understanding and practices of why children require consistent access to outdoor play spaces, experiences, and role models that embrace and cherish outdoor play. The critical question now is how to incorporate the voices of early learning teachers in fostering change that results in gaining new knowledge about outdoor play, increasing advocacy, and the quality of the outdoor play environments that ultimately support children in having opportunities for and access to quality outdoor play experiences.

## Summary

It is evident there is a growing consensus on the importance of outdoor play becoming more explicit in postsecondary training programs and professional learning programs among early learning teachers. In order to do so, the findings from this research suggest increasing awareness of the benefits of outdoor play, improving the confidence of early learning and child care teachers, increasing intentional programs, and creating a shift in perceptions of and attitudes towards outdoor play.

## Recommendations

**Provide online learning and training opportunities.** Many early learning programs are challenged to provide intriguing and stimulating outdoor environments partly due to limited resources and lack of access to outdoor play pedagogy and programming training available.

**Increase awareness of the benefits of outdoor play.** Educate and support families, coworkers, and government agencies in understanding the benefits of children having access to outdoor play daily by providing examples of how outdoor play benefits children's learning.

**Improve confidence in early learning and childcare teachers.** Early learning teachers may not have the background to effectively develop programs for the outdoor play environment (i.e., not understanding the difference between risky play and hazard). By providing access to professional learning, opportunities that support learning, and engaging in outdoor play practices, early learning teachers will develop comfort and confidence in embracing outdoor play and nature environments.

**Increase intentional programming.** Past practices viewed outdoor play as free play without planning; to rethink outdoor play practice would require early learning teachers to engage in intentional observations and in changing the materials in the outdoor play environment, starting with replacing plastic toys for more natural materials.

**Create a shift in perceptions of and attitudes towards outdoor play.** Collectively advocate for outdoor play with governments, families, and coworkers. With the right attitude and support from administrators, quality outdoor play experiences will be accomplished.

## Acknowledgments and Grant Information

The authors acknowledge that financial support for the research was provided by the Lawson Foundation. The contents of this article do not necessarily represent the policies or perspectives of the Lawson Foundation or are endorsed by the Lawson Foundation.

## References

- Brussoni, M., Ishikawa, T., Brunelle, S., & Herrington, S. (2017). Landscapes for play: Effects of an intervention to promote nature-based risky play in early childhood centres. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 54*, 139–150.
- Carroll-Lind, J., Smorti, S., Ord, K., & Robinson, L. (2016). Building pedagogical leadership knowledge in early childhood education. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 41*(4), 28–35.
- Connors-Burrow, N. A., Patrick, T., Kyzer, A., & McKelvey, L. (2017). A preliminary evaluation of REACH: Training early childhood teachers to support children's social and emotional development. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45*(2), 187–199.
- Cooper, A. (2015). Nature and the outdoor learning environment: The forgotten resource in early childhood education. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education, 3*(1), 85–97.
- Cox, M. E., Hollingsworth, H., & Buysse, V. (2015). Exploring the professional development landscape: Summary from four states. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 32*, 116–126.
- Crim, C., Desjean-Perrotta, B., & Moseley, C. (2008). Partnerships gone WILD: Preparing teachers of young children to teach about the natural world. *Childhood Education, 85*(1), 6–12.
- Dietze, B., & Kashin, D. (2016). *Empowering pedagogy for early childhood education*. Pearson Education Canada.
- Dietze, B., & Kashin, D. (2019a). *Outdoor and nature play in early childhood education*. Pearson Education Canada.
- Dietze, B., & Kashin, D. (2019b). *Playing and learning in early childhood education* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education Canada.
- Douglass, A., Carter, A., Smith, F., & Killins, S. (2015). Training together: State policy and collective participation in early educator professional development. *New England Journal of Public Policy, 27*(1), 5, 1–13.
- Ernst, J., & Tornabene, L. (2012). Preservice early childhood educators' perceptions of outdoor settings as learning environments. *Environmental Education Research, 18*(5), 643. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13504622.2011.640749?journalCode=ceer20>.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos]. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Gomboc, K. (2016). Back to nature: Exploring the potential for implementing the Norwegian idea of outdoor days in the Slovenian school system/V naravo: Iskanje možnosti implementacije norveske ideje učenja izven učilnice v slovenski solski sistem. *Revija za Elementarno Izobraževanje, 9*(4), 123–138.

- Grimwood, B. S., Gordon, M., & Stevens, Z. (2018). Cultivating nature connection: Instructor narratives of urban outdoor education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 41(2), 204–219.
- Gustafsson, P. E., Szczepanski, A., Nelson, N., & Gustafsson, P. A. (2012). Effects of an outdoor education intervention on the mental health of schoolchildren. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 12(1), 63–79.
- Gustavsson, L., & Pramling, N. (2014). The educational nature of different ways teachers communicate with children about natural phenomena. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(1), 59–72.
- Hartz-Mandell, K., & Umaschi, S. S. (2016). Classroom coaching for professional development in early care and education. *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter*, 32(4), 1–7.
- Hiles, D. (2001). Heuristic Inquiry and Transpersonal Research. Paper prepared for CCPE, London, October 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.psy.dmu.ac.uk/drhiles/Hlpaper.htm>
- Hyvonen, P. T. (2011). Play in the school context?: The perspectives of Finnish teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 36(8), 49–67.
- Leggett, N., & Newman, L. (2017). Play: Challenging educators' beliefs about play in the indoor and outdoor environment. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(1), 24–32.
- Little, H., Sandseter, E., & Wyver, S. (2012). Early childhood teacher's beliefs about children's risky play in Australia and Norway. *Sage Journals*, 13(4), 300–316. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2304/ciec.2012.13.4.300>
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ross, H., Nicol, R., & Higgins, P. (2007). Outdoor study of nature: Teachers' motivations and contexts. *Edinburgh Research Explorer*, 39(2), 160–172. Retrieved from [https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/31169856/CHRISTIE\\_Outdoor\\_Learning\\_Provision\\_in\\_Scottish\\_h\\_schools.pdf](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/31169856/CHRISTIE_Outdoor_Learning_Provision_in_Scottish_h_schools.pdf)
- Royer, N., & Moreau, C. (2016). A survey of Canadian early childhood educators' psychological wellbeing at work. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 44(2), 135–146. Retrieved from <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/springer-journals/a-survey-of-canadian-early-childhood-educators-psychological-wellbeing-YH9zMnj0BK>
- Sinha, M. (2014). Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the general social survey, child care in Canada. *Stats Canada*, (6). Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2014005-eng.pdf>
- Spradley, J. (1980). Participant observation. *The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research*, 53(4), 260.
- Stone-MacDonald, A., & Douglass, A. (2015). Introducing online training in an early childhood professional development system: Lessons learned in one state. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 43(3), 241–248.
- Torkar, G., & Rejc, A. (2017). Children's play and physical activity in traditional and forest (natural) playgrounds. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 3(1), 25–30.



Trahar, S. (2009, January). Beyond the story itself: Narrative inquiry and autoethnography in intercultural research in higher education. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1).

Wyver, S., Tranter, P., Naughton, G., Little, H., Sandseter, E., & Bundy, A. (2010). Ten ways to restrict children's freedom to play: The problem of surplus safety. *Sage Journals*, 11(3), 300–316. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2304/ciec.2012.13.4.300>



**Beverlie Dietze** is the Director of Learning and Applied Research at Okanagan College in Kelowna, BC. She engages in a variety of early childhood education related researcher projects that focus on outdoor play, professional learning models, and teaching and learning strategies. She has been a conference presenter and keynote speaker both nationally and internationally. She is the author and coauthor of several textbooks and peer-reviewed articles. Beverlie's educational background includes a Bachelor of Education, UNB, Masters of Adult Education, St. Francis Xavier University and a PhD, University of Toronto.



**Diane Kashin**, RECE, is a Professor in the Bachelor of Early Learning and Community Development degree program at Algonquin College, in Ottawa, Ontario. She is involved in research on outdoor play and nature pedagogy and has been a conference presenter and keynote speaker provincially, nationally, and internationally. She is the author of several textbooks and peer-reviewed articles. Her educational background includes an Honours B.A, York University, an early childhood education diploma, Seneca College, a Masters of Education, and Doctorate of Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.



# Remembering Childhood Play

Alexandra Fidyk

## Abstract

In looking back to childhood, and what constituted daily life, a case is made for unique ways of knowing that unfold through play, place, and tradition. A closer look at the relationship between childhood memory and the particularities of place, suggests that adult creativity, a sense of psychological stability, and an attitude of wonder, even experimentation, are vital outgrowths. The loss of play from the realm of the child is considered a contributing factor to the current trauma epidemic within our society. How might returning to imagination, the body, free play, and the ecology of relationship renew the ways we live and make meaning, in addition to the ways we heal and become more whole?

## Remembering Childhood Play

Imagination and the body together are how children grow and heal.

~ Dennis McCarthy (2007), *"If you turned into a monster"* (p. 17)

Trauma studies confirm a powerful truth for education: "fear destroys curiosity and playfulness. There can be no growth without curiosity and no adaptability without being able to explore" (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 350). When teachers are stretched beyond capacity by large classroom enrollment, and increased diversity and complexity of individual student needs, they are more readily overwhelmed. Add constant external monitoring via standardized testing and outcome accountability which influence pedagogy and assessment, and we must ask: how are children to develop ways of knowing inclusive of and inherent to play, imagination, negotiation, and wonder? For these ways of knowing and becoming are fundamental to childhood and require a spaciousness of time and attitude. Central to both imagination and body is play, a rare activity both outside and inside of school. Indeed, we have appropriated play from children and youth and left them with an inadequate substitute—organized, scheduled, play-dates or none at all (Teitel, 1999). Contributing factors to this situation include corporate models affecting the organization and aims of education, individualized family units separated from place and extended family members, as well as societal values refigured by neo-liberalism. Today, the population among us most readily able to play is adults, and often those who are retired, if they have the means. A generation ago play was the exclusive domain of children. Now adults play and kids don't.

When I grew up in rural Saskatchewan, it was common for kids to have chores indoors (dishes, dust, sweep, cook) and out (collect eggs, water and feed the animals, cut grass, weed, milk the cows). When done, we did homework or played (which included creative activities). Our chores encouraged curiosity, experimentation, and risk-taking. They taught us knowledge, skills, and values for we not only

tended the cows, but also we witnessed them, attuned to them. If something unusual occurred, we noticed it—that included breeding, birthing, and dying. Many summers were spent either helping friends finish chores or them me, and then off we went on bikes, riding around the countryside for five or six hours, with no water bottles, no cell phones, no plan, and no communication with parents until we arrived home. Often, we would ride 10-plus miles on a Saturday afternoon—a regular occurrence as there were no restrictions on these adventures. As Matt Hern (2007) describes, these were “unfettered days . . . running around, riding our bikes beyond our parents’ call, messing around in fields, always far from adult supervision” (p. 43). Our parents were busy so when our chores were done, we had complete freedom to roam on bike, foot, or horse. There, too, were enough kids of similar age that we could meet midway at a farm and play scrub (softball when there are not enough players for two teams) till the sun began to set, then everyone fled for home on bikes. The local rule: home before dark. We had a sense of safety and stability with place—a psychological freedom and comfort—because we belonged to it and in some way, place—the Sandy Road, the gravel roads between the Hetchlers, Tyackes, and Garnetts—belonged to us. We grew up by this rhythm; we explored, risked, questioned, played, and taught each other things that not all parents did. It was our real education in many ways.



Fig. 1 and 2: Becoming acquainted with a newborn lamb and calf

I started driving both the Chev half-ton (stick shift) and tractor at nine years of age. I still remember having to stand up to push the clutch to the floor on that Massey. Many Saturdays were spent picking rocks and roots with my older brother, sister, and dad. I’d drive tractor using the hydraulics for the front-end loader because I was not big enough or strong enough to pull tree trunks and carry stones. We would return filthy and exhausted, blackened—face, hands, and clothes—from the char and loam. For many summers, we did this weekly—until that part-of-the-section was “clean” land. This labour was part of the responsibility of living on a farm. We didn’t earn money for it, and we would never have imagined saying “no.” There was no allowance in those days as such activity was imbedded in a particular way of life. Besides, there wasn’t much to buy in

the 70s with only one or two general stores in town. If I wanted clothes, I sewed them, including jeans, dresses, and swimsuits. I also sewed for others—doll clothes, children’s clothing, even prom dresses—and earned money this way from elementary through high school.

Weekends included activities with aunties, uncles, and cousins from either mom’s or dad’s side. Sundays were days of rest and were always spent with family and nature, being active, and with lots of picnics. I felt as comfortable swimming in a lake, walking the pasture, or tending the animals as I felt in the house, as there was little time spent indoors except for eating and sleeping. In winter, my dad would remove snow from a local pond, a neighbour would haul in bales, and surrounding families would spend Sundays and evenings skating, cooking wieners, and drinking cocoa. In the summers, with cousins and neighbour kids, we swam, rode horses, and played ball, hide’n seek, anti-I-over, cops’n robbers, and stroke-a-back. In the winters there was sledding, tobogganing, skiing, and lots of indoor games—Cribbage, Checkers, Chess, Rap-rummy, Rumoli, Yahtzee, and so on. Doing quick addition; calculating the odds, sequence, and probability; prioritizing strategies; and tracking cards were basic skills learned at a young age, and practiced to an older one, with multi-generations playing Kiser, Whist, and King Pedro at several tables during the holidays. Play animated us and so our lives.

Sibling negotiation was an ongoing reality as I was the middle of five living sibs. We had to share, take turns, sometimes go without, and always look out for one another, often not tattling as that could bring reprimand to all. Life called for continuous imagination and innovation—turning pots and pans into drums, buildings, or witches’ cauldrons—because there was no Lego, Easy-bake ovens, or Toys R Us. Rocks, sticks, and broken dishes became a number of things depending on the day and the imaginary play we assumed. Too, there were endless mud pies, adorned with branches, bones, feathers, berries, and stones—a recipe that was passed among cousins, sisters, and neighbour-friends—a staple for our father for more than a decade (as I have three sisters). It was a rich imaginative and imaginal life that never permitted boredom or aloneness.



Fig. 3: Plastic play-structure transformed through imagination into a chuckwagon with a team of horses



Play builds confidence and resilience—both of which arise from agency. “Play is a safety valve; it enables a child to get rid of his feelings, and a child’s feelings often shock parents” (Hern, 2007, p. 43). Parents, despite their urge to interrupt and “correct” the play, “should not interfere” (p. 43). In addition to emotional release, play allows the working out of difficult situations—that is, more satisfactory resolutions via reiterations. Play encourages creative and critical thinking of both the divergent and convergent forms. “The importance of play, and the imperative to let children figure things out on their own,” writes Hern, “has been obscured and layered over by a noisy cultural demand for supervision and maintenance” (p. 43).

Because of limitless potentialities, I had free rein in the shed with the grinder, welder, and vice; in the barn with horses, cows, and bales; or in the house baking, crafting, and sewing. Each place was its own kingdom, with a wealth of subjects and its own governance. In a flash, Shep, the loving German Shepherd (family dog of my childhood), could become whatever he was needed to be—a prince, dragon, or faithful companion. Boundaries kept us safe *and* encouraged us to imagine, build, and discover. Stories told about the child who . . . or the neighbour who didn’t . . . instilled just enough fear that we knew to stay back from augers, to turn off machinery before touching it, and to be cautious around animals. Yet, we had enough trust and safety in our relations with our environment to jump in without careless thought for knowing had been deeply engrained through personal and vicarious experience, creating boldness, and fostering perseverance.



Fig. 4: Beloved dog, Buck, is sentinel over all play

It was a given that nature was integrated with human life—even writing this as if it was a thing acquired is faulty. *It always already was*. Stated more accurately, there was no separation between Nature and human existence, it was one and the same; yet, we did not have influence over Nature. It shaped us and so we were second. Such relationship with Life not only included place, but also animals, insects, weather, and trees. And, while not as primary for me, the same could be said for inanimate things like the hoe, whose handle was familiar or the reins of a bridle that were well known. All things were imbued with deep reverence and respect, creating within us a firm footing in life. A foothold, which for me became the basis of adopting Buddhism and then process philosophy as orientations in my teaching and research. That is, this symbiosis filtered not only into daylight consciousness, but also “into a living sense of a dynamic relationship” with Nature wherein disease and death also dwelt (Cobb, 1959, cited in Chawla, 1990, p. 19).

The effects of such childhood memories have been explored by various authors including Theroux (1980), who remembers the cockleweeds and their effect in day-to-day terms:

Could it be, and this is the question of a speculative, unmarveling adult, that every human being is given a few sights like this to tide us over when we are grown? Do we all have a bit or piece of something that we instinctively cast back on when the heart wants to break upon itself and causes us to say, “Oh yes, but there was this,” or “Oh yes, but there was that,” and so we go on? (p. 55)

To that relationship, Lewis (1960) owed “a certain fund of calm within myself . . . which I am able to draw upon in an emergency” (p. 36). For Spender (1951), who spoke of the exceptional harmony of his childhood setting, it “enabled me to retain throughout life a central calm and happiness, amid violent divisions of my own nature” (p. 311). And perhaps most eloquently for Thurman (1979),

I had the sense that all things, the sand, the sea, the stars, the night, and I were one lung through which all of life breathed. Not only was I aware of a vast rhythm enveloping all, but I was a part of it and it was a part of me. (p. 226)

He further adds, these experiences

gave me a certain overriding immunity against much of the pain with which I would have to deal in the years ahead when the ocean was only a memory. The sense held: I felt rooted in life, in nature, in existence. (p. 8)

Based upon autobiographies read throughout a long lifetime, Edith Cobb, in an essay (1959) and book, *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* (1977), claims that communion with a place evokes elation. Emphasizing the importance of remembered encounters with the landscape in childhood, she traces a line of influence that nature—the trees, tumbleweed, and terns that creative thinkers encountered as children and the quality of such encounter—has upon their thought as adults. “Their thought, in turn, affects the course of our culture” (Chawla, 1990, p. 19). That is, at the root of creative unfolding and advance, are the conservative effects of remembered landscapes. And further, their relationship with nature served as a touchstone for creative renewal.





Fig. 5: Young child at home with his pony and farm surroundings

“A renewal of relationship with nature as process” (Cobb, 1959, p. 539) means openness to a process from both sides of nature—death and hardship as well as birth and delight. It is reasonable to suppose that some of the effort they inspire are “attempts to perpetuate the essential conditions of this relationship” (Chawla, 1990, p. 19).

Such living ingrained, within my sibs and I, an unspoken awe for the patterns, wisdom, and traditions of life, while remaining open to the unpredictable and emergent. For example, when Baba insisted on putting fresh cow manure on a bad bruise or cut, we willingly stuck out our leg. Only in present reading have I learned that manure’s microbial components included antibiotic-like qualities (Mucz, 2012, p. 59). Just as wild animal fats were used in home remedies to treat skin problems (p. 59), and milk (raw) was especially important for respiratory and digestive problems (p. 57). *We existed because of regard for Other*—that is, we were all tied up together through interdependence, relational connectedness, and relational accountability with place. We survived by virtue of *knowing with* animals (both domesticated and not), land, and weather. And, in turn, we have flourished because of such insights and continued renewal via the fecund particularities of place, especially in regard to creativity—the rich, raw material for writing, and reflection as well as a practiced way of perceiving the world—a habit of both being and seeing. As Cobb and others have suggested, the legacies of ecstatic memories alone are notable: meaningful images, profound relationships, an internal core of calm, a sense of integration and oneness with nature, and for many, a creative disposition (Chawla, 1990, p. 22).

For Diane Ackerman (1999), the “ecstatic form of play” is “deep play” (p. 12). She adds, “in its thrall, all the play elements are visible, but they’re taken to intense and transcendent heights” (p. 12). She also calls it “transcendent play”—a deeper form of play, “akin to rapture and ecstasy, that humans relish, even require to feel whole” (p. 12). As such, this quality testifies to “*how* something happens, not *what* happens”; thus, activities like creative process, risk-taking, “*communitas*” (with imaginal figures, animals, nature), and some sports—bale leaping and horseback riding—involve the “sacred and holy” (p. 16). Importantly, Ackerman turns to the ancients to differentiate between “rapture and “ecstasy”—the former, literally, being “seized by force” as if caught in the talons of a hawk or “raptor”; and the latter, for the

Greeks, “meant to stand outside oneself”—yet, deeply through self so as to join with Other, in a fleeting encounter (p. 16). Said otherwise, “rapture is vertical, ecstasy horizontal” (p. 15); ecstasy connects with other entities on the ground, not in the sky.



Fig. 6: Deep play—bale leaping (with Buck overseeing on a bale in the background)

As kids, our conversations included comment on wind and animal behaviour. If something seemed out of place, we asked about it and explored it as a collective query. If the wind switched to the east or southeast, it would bring rain. When chickadees and white-tailed deer fed early in the day and for longer periods, a storm was coming, and when coyotes howled at night, it signaled continued good weather. There was a symbiotic relationship with every element among which we lived. Such knowing also included our farm animals, for when the dog rolled it meant rain and we’d tell our parents immediately, leading to quick work with haying or picking garden bounty. Often others’ decisions regarding hay were verified by a phone call to my mother to ask about forecasted rain. To this day, my mom, 82, has throughout her life and her mother’s before her, tracked hoarfrosts on a yearly calendar. Recorded as light or heavy, six months to the day meant rain. Just as the first thunderstorm in spring, plus 110 days pointed to the first killer frost. When I was young, this kind of wisdom was a typical thread through conversation, be it with grandmothers, between neighbours, or across a local community as still witnessed among expat Saskatchewanians. Today, we have lost the art of reading nature’s signs and with it the kinship and grounding of an ecology of relationship.

Too, play and work often coexisted. Our chores and games required lots of physical movement, mostly free, but also the kind that built muscle, stamina, and discipline. They demanded commitment because

one action depended on the completion of another and the gestalt meant survival. The daily walk to bring the cows home from pasture was accompanied by a narrative of heroic conquest. As I made the journey across the slough, the quest required only stepping on the hummocks and always sidestepping stinging nettle. To miss a hummock was death by alligators or gladiators. So there was risk involved, both real and imaginary, and the necessity to muster up the courage to carry on. This attitude did not supersede the necessity to feel what was happening in the moment and to know what was required—but that too, taught us *to work at the edge of our abilities*—perhaps these experiences contribute to what taught me to set high yet attainable expectations for my students, the encouragement and push to excel. To this day, I can still touch the deep cellular fear that needed to be confronted in order to get into the pen with a bull or bring one home from pasture. These trips often included loving talk with the animal and a pact made with the divining creative principle, both agreements made to ensure my safety.



Fig. 7: A trusted, familiar friend, Cisco (horse), encourages bravery and balance

In relation to the realm of play, our parents played with us as did two sets of grandparents. Cricket, scrub, catch, skiing, and snowmobiling were activities led by our father during which our mother would read in the rare quiet of the house. When we were younger, our mom played in the house with us as this age and place was her domain. However, they worked as a team—both strict, insisting on good manners, respectful speech to our friends' parents, and all neighbours. As rural life was isolating, we had to rely on each other so things were shared, goods bartered and traded, and strong social relations were established and maintained.

The way of life of the family farm was strengthened by regular visiting, which included meals, games, dancing, and rye and coke—that is, for the adults only and then, well into the evening. Visiting included the whole family coming to your house (or you going to theirs) so both adults and kids developed sustaining relationships. Visiting was a well-timed staple until I left home a few weeks after high school graduation. Visiting also included intergenerational conversation, socializing, and storytelling. In general, any adult could correct any kid—adult-word ruled and they stuck together. If you did something bad, you knew that if caught, you would get it twice, as one set of parents would tell the other. Visiting educated in select ways. We were taught to listen, to wait our turn, be respectful, be patient, be kind, be helpful—that is, always ask what you can do for another, even if you arrived after a meal, you were expected to pick up a tea towel and dry dishes. We were taught to step up, help whoever and wherever it was needed. I remember especially enjoying stories of when my mom and her older brother, Uncle Lawrence, were kids—they were incredible, magical even—the chestnut mare (who lived to be 28 years of age) who faithfully cared for them, walking to school during bitter snowstorms. The kids, bundled-up-blind-in-blankets, knew when to dismount because the horse would stop.

My father was is a musician. There was live accordion music all the time. Other musicians stopped by weekly with violins, banjos, mandolins, and guitars, so it was typical to spend many evenings dancing around the house with the dog howling outside. Dad also played in a band that entertained in community halls so I grew up dancing polka, two-step, butterfly, waltz, and schottische. I loved watching the farmers transform with Brylcreem, dress pants, and polished shoes or cowboy boots. It seems a dream now, these first-generation Eastern European farmers turn graceful leads as they swung their partners through the air, their own feet barely touching the shiny, waxed, wooden dance floor. Even in the dance hall, when not twirling at the front by the stage, the kids were in the kitchen helping to prepare the midnight lunch.

Everyone in the area attended, young, old, disabled, diseased, forlorn—but they were not seen like this—everyone was a neighbour and was known by name. We learned empathy, compassion, appreciation, and grace. I especially remember learning the feeling of gratitude—it was a palpable thing that I could feel whenever there was a community gathering. Despite individual hardships, losses, and heartbreaks, everyone danced, visited, and ate. I recall on the drive home asking why someone was like this or that and in response being told a story about something that happened to him or her or their parents—the stories were sad for they were about misfortune, calamity, or transgression. From a young age, the stories and lives of others taught me that in this wide web of relations, there were hard fates and sorrowful endings, and for every grace granted, gratitude was crucial. The justice of kismet along with Nature's lawfulness was a given—it was not good or bad—it was. To many, this code might seem cold and impersonal, but it kept us close to the pulse of Life. It kept us humble. And it kept our hearts open. Life didn't unfold as we wished or wanted. It was is much more complex and indeterminate. Life itself taught the impermanence of things.





Fig. 8: Joyful child who loves her dog, Norm, and learns trust and belonging through him

Stories were used to both socialize and subvert—that is, some revealed opportunities beyond the norm. While many of my relatives lived familiar lives, I had a few exceptional female cousins. One in particular piqued my curiosity. She had gifted me with a small doll with auburn hair and green eyes. My other dolls were blond-haired and blue-eyed and somehow my scissors always found their way into the silky, whitish manes. But this doll with soft tan skin, I loved. It was the only gift that I remember receiving from her, yet my mom says she often gifted. She visited at Christmas but everything else about her was mysterious, foreign. She had joined the Canadian Armed Forces when she was young, trained as a registered nurse, and lived on base in Labrador. In hindsight, I suppose this doll, who shared a resemblance with me, would have been experienced as if my cousin saw me. That is, I was seen. Perhaps more by her than by my mother, because why else would I get a blond, blue-eyed doll year after year for Christmas. I remember crying my eighth year when I received yet another from my mother. Surely, it was a mistake—this doll must have been meant for my younger sisters, as I did not want it. In fact, the brown doll was one of only a few things that were still stowed safely away, surviving all these years in a trunk stored on the family farm.

Today, I live across from a block that is open green grass with several robust 60-year-old spruce and tamarack. The park backs onto woodland and a creek. It hosts multiple ball diamonds, with a skating rink at one end and a curling rink at the other. In the latter, I see mostly retired adults, and in the former, I see parents drive up with kids and hockey gear. I rarely ever see kids in the park and there are never families—playing. There is organized softball but no pick-up games of scrub, no kids batting the ball around, no parents and kids playing catch, or using the backstop for practice. There are two young families on my avenue who have walked over a few times to swing their young children. However, I see no kids playing, or hanging around even though there are a junior high and two elementary schools within a few blocks. In fact, I am struck by the lack of play in my neighbourhood. I never see kids with bikes, Frisbees, or toys on the grass or in the sandboxes. Mostly adults walking their dogs use the park.

What has happened to play? Play in relation to places that lay a claim upon us—like the farm, fields, and roads of my youth—and to places constructed exclusively for urban play—like parks and playgrounds?

In *Homo Ludens (Man at Play)*, Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (1949/2016) defines play as the central activity in flourishing societies. The Latin word *Ludens* derives from the verb *ludere*, which is cognate with the noun *ludus* (OED, *Ludens*). *Ludus* has no direct equivalent in English, as it simultaneously refers to sport, play, school, and practice. Linguistically, “[p]lay is a thing by itself” (Huizinga, 1949/2016, p. 45). Further, the “play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness” (p. 45). Huizinga takes the view that “culture arises in the form of play, that it is played from the very beginning” (p. 46). Even the activities that aim at satisfying vital needs, such as hunting, “take on the play-form” (p. 46). It is through such playing that society expresses its interpretation of life and the world. Taken further, he sets play and culture side by side, discusses their “twin union,” but insists that “play is primary” (p. 46). “All the basic factors of play,” individual and communal, he argues, “are already present in animal life”—

to wit, contests, performances, exhibitions, challenges, preenings, struttings, and showings-off, pretences and binding rules. It is doubly remarkable that birds, phylogenetically so far removed from human beings, should have so much in common with them. Woodcocks perform dances, crows hold flying matches, bower-birds and others decorate their nests, song-birds chant their melodies. Thus competitions and exhibitions as amusements do not proceed from culture, they rather precede it. (p. 47)

Huizinga identified five characteristics of play: it is free; it is not “ordinary” or “real” life; it is distinct from “ordinary” life both as to locality and duration; it creates order; it is connected with no material interest, and from it no profit can be gained. Of note, is the first characteristic: “free,” perhaps more precisely, “freedom.” By “free,” Huizinga means without compulsion, but he also means without constraints, with the spur-or-the-moment spontaneity that most of us can remember. Supervised, organized play, for Huizinga, is “play to order,” lesser play at best; at worst, not really play at all.



Fig. 9: Free play, deep play—sister and brother bale leaping—and learning to trust their own bodies

But more and more supervised play is exactly what kids are getting. Bicycle helmets for children have become commonplace. Although when I see adults on European-style bicycles, with helmets, the image strikes me as peculiar. Many of my summer memories as a kid were with bikes. I had claimed an old, blue, ten-speed that got stuck in higher gears and had no brakes. I must admit running those narrow tires over rough gravel roads built both grit and tenacity. However, that bike was responsible for a thrill of a lifetime and much valuable conversation. One summer I had the idea to ride up Glendenning's hill—a very steep quarter-mile hill that ran out over a washed-out road covered by creek-bed rocks. We pushed up that hill, and one by one let it rip. It was free-falling, no brakes, legs stuck out in both directions, and delicate balancing on one-inch tread as I raced down that graveled hill. I remember squealing, but I don't recall whether it was rush or fear that forced sound out of me. Despite potentially injuring myself, it was exhilarating—an unbelievable feat made real—"ecstatic, absorbing, rejuvenating" (Ackerman, 1999, p. 17). We didn't do it again, but the wild freedom of that event has lasted for decades, remaining part of my cellular self.

I wonder what the mean age is of kids (in urban and suburban areas) allowed outside alone? Even with friends, the age has risen to the point where, in many cases, it excludes the traditional definition of "kids." F. Scott Fitzgerald's definition of freedom was a child riding a bike on the street without adult supervision. More recently, LeBron James, on the topic of bikes, said in an interview: "It was a way of life! If you had a bike, it was a way to kind of let go and be free." To demonstrate his commitment to this childhood love, when he "helped open a brand-new public school for at-risk children" in his hometown, Akron, Ohio, he pledged not only "a University of Akron scholarship to every student who graduates," but also his family foundation pledged "to provide a free bicycle and helmet to every student" (Gay, 2018, p. 1). He said this in the interview: "Me and my friends, when we got on our bikes, we would just ride," he recalled.

Sometimes we would even get lost, because we'd be gone for so long. But there was a sense of joy and comfort. There was nothing that really could stop us. We felt like we were on top of the world. (p. 1)

The number of kids riding bikes on streets these days is a fraction of the number of adult riders. When I was a kid, an adult riding a bike was an odd sight to marvel. Today, it's adults riding, not kids.

Do you remember the phrase, "Can \_\_\_ come out to play?" This once familiar phrase did not refer to an organized sport, but simply to play. It was spontaneous and it was fun. We couldn't tell anyone what we were going to do—perhaps build a fort—but the world in which that fort would be constructed was one that would surface in spontaneous, imaginal, free play! Negotiated in that moment among the friends present—through collaboration, compromise, and communal efforts. But today, kids have their activities arranged, planned, and often supervised. Despite ample evidence for play's necessity, "it has not affected how we educate or parent" (McCarthy, 2015, p. 17). In fact, "today most children rarely have ready access to the outdoors and the unencumbered play that this allows" (p. 16). What does this do to our psychosocial emotional development? What happens to the development of the imaginal and symbolic realms if living and learning becomes scripted? The "free time" of children has taken on "a social formality that would have done a Victorian matron proud," writes Jay Teitel (1999)

in “The Kidnapping of Play” (p. 58). He argues that adults have taken over play for themselves: “Abducting play is only the first part of our crime; holding play hostage, and then returning it to its owners in adulterated form is part two.” He adds: “Not only do kids play less than they used to; they also play differently” (p. 56). More and more, over-planned play, like over-supervised play, is what kids get. And, it certainly does not have the necessary element of “free”!

When I return to summer Sundays of my childhood, we didn’t know what the day would entail. Come rain or shine, my mom would pack picnic hampers, and thermoses of hot and cold drink. Fishing rods and tackle, ball gear, and swimming clothes would be loaded in the back of our long, buttercup yellow, station wagon. We often went to Kipabiskau Lake (Provincial Regional Park), but the drive there was never predictable. We had this game where my dad would take back roads, off-roads, farm roads, and meander through the countryside—somewhat headed in the direction of the destination, but the trips were always filled with wonderment and surprise. Through my parents’ conversations, their observations, questions, arguments, and comments—speaking of crops—quality, production, variation—as well as insects, wild flowers, plants—we developed powers of deduction and prediction by attending the particularities of place. “Sense and thought, observation and deduction, this simple two-step process is the key to transforming [an event] from mind-numbing to synapse-tingling” (Gooley, 2014, p. 3). Likewise, they fostered a sense of adventure even in our backyard. These days had both planned and unplanned elements. Most importantly, they maintained an element of spontaneity. Yes, there were limits in time and space, so to separate it from the ordinary, but no limitations were set on impulse or vision.



Fig. 10: Ease, comfort, and play—“Let’s kiss the fish!”



Has play as we knew it ended?

Has the world really changed so much? Or have we?

I consider the rows of cars dropping off one or two children at a time at school. Can kids not walk to school—if they live within reasonable distance? Is their safety really threatened when walking in a multi-age group? Or unaccompanied by an adult?

I remember my parents telling me that if a stranger came along on the road when I was biking, to get off and walk the bike. I recall being quite uncertain about this advice and asked, “what do I do if the person stops?” “If they need directions or info, answer, but if they attempt to get out of the vehicle, drop your bike and run.” Again perplexed, as my bike was a hand-me-down and the only one my size, I grew worried that I would lose it. “Run?” “Yes,” my dad said, “Leave the bike and run like hell across the field. He won’t catch you.” Despite feeling apprehensive about leaving my bike, some kind of alarm was set off in me, something that had never been there before. From then on, there was a mild sense of restriction when riding around the countryside on bikes. But vehicles were few during the day, so for the most part, this activation settled, yet remained a sixth sense toward danger. No doubt this safeguard was given during the 80s when stats were released in Canada about child abductions. I expect my parents thought that whatever we might encounter, we could probably handle. We had grown up developing life skills that prepared us for the unexpected—a kind of natural navigation for being-in-the-world. Thinking ahead, imagining multiple scenarios and ways through, experimenting with trial and error, as well as improvisation, described our daily life. Preparing for possible danger with strangers wasn’t really any different. Who could have imagined that I would actually use this instruction 20 years later in Cairo when chased by two young men. When I realized that running down the street wasn’t going to save me, and certainly, I couldn’t outrun them, I made a sharp perpendicular turn, looked into four lanes of heavy traffic, and headed directly into it.

Does it not seem plausible that in order to have a healthy school, a healthy society, we must raise children who can safely play and learn via their imaginations? “What would our school systems look like if all children and youth could attend well-staffed schools that cultivated cooperation, self-regulation, perseverance, and concentration” (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 350) as opposed to “focusing” to pass exams? Consider the typical cuts from school budgets: drama, theatre, band, music, chorus, physical education, art, even recess, and anything else that involves movement, play, and other forms of joyful engagement. Not only are these subjects absolutely essential to our overall health—that is, emotional, physical, mental, social, and spiritual development—but also they are the very things needed to support traumatized children and youth. As D. W. Winnicott (1971) offered, “It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the Self” (p. 25)—that is, the spaceless, timeless aspect of our deepest being.



Fig. 11: Simple delight in playing with kittens and perhaps “a creative reaching-out”

Correspondingly, J. L. Rose (2015) argues from her use of deep sand in therapy, “play [is] an irreducible and completely necessary state of being” (p. 53). In tracing the word “poetry” in Greek to create; build, she uncovers it as “dream” from the Saxon for “joy, mirth, music”; “revolution,” to turn, wallow, with “wellspring,” which shares the same root as “play,” to engage oneself, to pledge, “epiphany,” and to shine. By extension, “play encompasses poetry as a creative dive towards the core of self and of the world” (p. 53). Further, “play encompasses dream as the unbounded emergence from that personal and collective core” (p. 53). For Rose, in working with children who often come to play more or less disembodied due to trauma or developmental challenges, she advises that when the therapist joins in play, it involves listening, watching, and wondering. Then participation follows, not by way of interpretation, but rather by “whole-hearted companionship” (p. 54). So if the child can come to “fully know or trust his own body, his own feet,” this is where dream and poetry can be integrated, “brought to the ground, fully claimed and internalized, . . . [whereby] the revolution inherent in play can heal, with the awe-inspired turn to full embodiment, the healing wallow, the return to the wellspring” (p. 54). Simply stated, “in play, revolution is storytelling seeded in dream, emerging as poetry” (p. 54).

Today trauma is a major public health issue, “arguably the greatest threat to our national wellbeing” (van der Kolk, 2015, p. 348). Might the loss of play have contributed to the increased prevalence of trauma among children and adults? According to trauma expert, Bessel van der Kolk (2015), “the greatest hope for traumatized, abused, and neglected children is to receive a good education in schools where they are seen and known, where they learn to regulate themselves, and where they can develop a sense of agency” (p. 351). To be seen and known requires being in relationship. It requires the other to be present, embodied, and able to separate what is personal and what is not so as to actually see other, and see without judgment. When a child does not have to defend or protect, she can genuinely free-associate—imagine and play. It is out of this state, Winnicott claimed, that “*a creative reaching-out can take place*” (1971, p. 75, his emphasis). The “creative reaching-out” of playing, which he understood as the search for self—creative activity as the search for self—contributes to an integrated sense of self when another reflects back that play. For Winnicott, play, reflected back by a friend or teacher, is the creation and validation of a meaningful relationship with the world. That is, when awareness of one’s inner reality, and elements of external reality, unite in a safe and trustworthy environment with another who “sees you”—the individual can come together and exist as a unit [that is, as a *whole*], not as a defense against anxiety but as an expression of I AM, I am alive, I am myself. From this position everything is creative. (p. 76)



Fig. 12: My sisters, friend, and I on a summer ride down the Sandy Road—35 years later

“More than anything else,” declares van der Kolk (2015), “feeling safe with other people defines mental health”; safe relationships are “fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives” (p. 352), this includes relationship with place and animals. The critical challenge in a learning environment is to “foster reciprocity” (not equal but mutual): sincere hearing and being heard; really seeing and being seen by other people. Addressing the effects of trauma in kids begins with fostering safety, establishing predictability, and ensuring teachers’ capacities to see, hear, and know them. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that, “having a good support network constitutes the single most powerful protection against becoming traumatized” (p. 210). In the same manner, “traumatized people recover in the context of relationships” (p. 210). “Not being seen, not being known, and having nowhere to turn to feel safe is devastating at any age, but it is particularly destructive for young children, who are still trying to find their place in the world” (p. 88). In our living and teaching, we would be well served to look back to our youth, so to reemphasize what gave us comfort and freedom, yet also what taught us risk-taking, responsibility, and wonder. We must remember where we played, what we played, and with whom we played (imaginary, real, animal, or human)—for these elements are the root of our being—so to foster similar conditions for kids today. To create or restore a sense of wholeness in a person, we need to welcome imagination and the body in both play and pedagogical spaces.

## References

- Ackerman, D. (1999). *Deep play*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Chawla, L. (1990). Ecstatic places. *Children’s Environments Quarterly*, 7(4), 18–23.
- Cobb, E. (1959). The ecology of imagination in childhood. *Daedalus*, 88, 537–548.
- Cobb, E. (1977). *The ecology of imagination in childhood*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Gay, J. (2018, August 6). The LeBron James Interview About Bicycles. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-lebron-james-interview-about-bicycles-1533561787>
- Gooley, T. (2014). *The Lost art of reading nature’s signs*. New York, NY: The Experiment Publishing.
- Hern, M. (2007). *Watch yourself. Why safer isn’t always better*. Vancouver, BC: New Star Books.
- Huizinga, J. (1949/2016). *Homo ludens*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lewis, C. D. (1960). *The buried day*. New York, NY: Harper.
- McCarthy, D. (2007). *“If you turned into a monster” Transformation through play: A body-centred approach to play therapy*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- McCarthy, D. (Ed.). (2015). *Deep play: Exploring the use of depth in psychotherapy with children*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mucz, M. (2012). *Baba’s kitchen medicines: Folk remedies of Ukrainian settlers in western Canada*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

Rose, J. L. (2015). The keys to the world: Revolution and epiphany in deep sand. In D. McCarthy (Ed.), *Deep play: Exploring the use of depth in psychotherapy with children* (pp. 53–58). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Spender, S. (1951). *World within world*. London, UK: Hamish Hamilton.

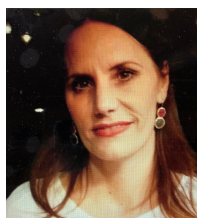
Teitel, J. (1999, April). "The kidnapping of play." *Saturday Night* (pp. 55–60). The Rockport Co., Inc.

Theroux, P. (1980). *California and other states of grace*. New York, NY: William Morrow.

Thurman, H. (1979). *With head and heart*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

van der Kolk, B. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. New York, NY: Routledge.



**Alexandra Fidyk**, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. A transdisciplinary scholar, she teaches curriculum studies, advanced research, and special topic curriculum seminars in analytical psychology, mythopoetics, and trauma studies. She is a certified Jungian and somatic psychotherapist.

# The First Peoples Principles of Learning: An Opportunity for Settler Teacher Self-Inquiry

Kelly Hanson

## Abstract

In 2016, the province of British Columbia introduced a redesigned K-6 curriculum. Undergirding this plan is the learning philosophy, the First Peoples Principles of Learning. This paper is written from the perspective of a settler teacher as she engages in self-study research to develop her understanding of the curricular plan. The author describes her emerging self-awareness as opening to a deeper understanding of her Euro-American worldview, cultural narratives that maintain gaps between settler teachers and First Peoples perspectives, and how ongoing self-inquiry is a way to improve as an educator.

## Background

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) (FNESC, 2014) is the learning philosophy underpinning British Columbia's (BC) recently redesigned curriculum. The FPPL are nine principles that explain what a First Peoples approach to learning is: *supports, involves, recognizes, and embeds* (FNESC, 2008/2014, Appendix A). Posters displaying the principles are found across BC in learning spaces such as K-12 classrooms, school district board offices, and faculties of education. Yet, despite the prolific access to the principles, there is uncertainty amongst many teachers regarding how to enact the principles. In part, the challenge is that the FPPL is not a set of lesson or unit plans, but rather a guide that requires teacher understanding to translate the principles into choices about what is important to learn and how to be responsive within their own contexts (Chrona, 2015). As a settler educator during this time of curricular transformation, I wondered what kinds of learning conditions and supports I would need to better understand the principles. I questioned how I could humbly, and without appropriation, live the principles through my teaching practice.

Finding ways for all teachers to embody First Peoples approaches to learning across the province is important. At present, First Peoples children and youth across Canada experience a consistent lack of consideration of their perspectives in public schools, which has a significant, detrimental impact. Tanaka (2016) writes,

Too often, habits of the dominant culture are privileged to the exclusion or detriment of other cultural ways of knowing brought into the classroom by students. In Canada, in the case of Aboriginal learners, this presents a particularly poignant case: as one of the fastest growing student populations, Aboriginal learners continue to face significant struggles in school disproportionate to those faced by the larger student body. (pp. 5–6)

By weaving FPPL into all aspects of the curriculum, the BC Ministry of Education (2015) attempts to acknowledge the deep value of First Peoples perspectives (pp. 6–7). Now, it is up to educators to act out the needed changes to their pedagogy that will recognize, embrace, and make accessible First Peoples content and perspectives for all students.

The intention of this article is to share my learning as a way to inspire more conversation about how teachers from all cultures and backgrounds can engage in self-inquiry as a way to better understand and live the principles in their classrooms. From the beginning of my inquiry, I realized there was not one way for settler teachers to learn, but I believed that developing greater self-awareness and grappling with the teaching tendency to “teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998, p. 1) was an important starting point. According to Palmer, good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of teachers who are aware of the influence of their inner life on their teaching relationships (p. 12). In my experience, self-awareness that is developed through the mindful interrogation of my beliefs, blind spots, and taken-for-granted understandings renews my capacity to engage students more fully and honestly by making sound connections between students and subject matter (Hanson, 2017, pp. 6–7).

My self-inquiry into the FPPL challenged my inner world and ways of knowing. Identifying my settler standpoint and how this lineage was fraught with acts of injustice toward First Peoples raised much uncertainty and discomfort for me. I felt I was continually falling short; the little I knew about First Peoples history, culture, and perspectives made me feel self-conscious as I tried to live up to my responsibility to learn and grow my teaching practice to support FPPL. However, rather than embracing the reluctance and crisis of confidence that went along with honestly positioning myself centrally in my inquiry, I aimed to create a meaningful, accessible account of my learning that could sensitize readers to some of the issues of settler teachers engaging in First Peoples curricula. Rather than be shrouded in silence for fear of *getting it wrong*, I decided to give voice to my situated ways of knowing—a practice that involved me restoring my fear. To shift my language and my mindset, I drew on Martusewicz’s (2001) description of *openings* to describe my experiences, rather than shortcomings. Openings are the possibilities for growth and renewal that are created through the ongoing, interpretive, nature of sense-making. Martusewicz describes that an opening is the result of a process that creates more connections in our understandings. She writes,

Opening requires the constant reinvention of thought and consequently the freedom of thought. For educators interested in social justice, this requires that we understand the potential in our relations with students for infinite creation of new ideas... It also requires that we recognize those forms, behaviours, and processes that might shut down or block these creative possibilities. (p. 10)

For me, the openings created through my self-inquiry foregrounded an appreciative, life-giving commitment to learning more. In what follows, I describe how rather than resisting the revised curricula by continuing to teach in my own style, as is often a teacher’s response to curricular change (Broom, 2016, pp. 722–723), I learned about myself in relation to the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I chose not to ignore what I did not know or understand, and I opened to an awareness of my



Euro-American settler worldview, to common cultural narratives that maintained gaps between settler and First Peoples content and perspectives, and to ongoing inquiry.

## Opening to the First Peoples Principles of Learning

The First Peoples Principles of Learning were developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), an independent, nonprofit organization comprising 111 members from diverse First Nations communities working on behalf of First Nations education in BC since 1992. Grass (2017) describes that FNESC continually aims to develop a variety of unique structures and strategies for First Peoples education and to do so they present a united voice based on common understandings and beliefs held among the many diverse nations (p. 4).<sup>1</sup>

Initially, FNESC created The First Peoples Principles of Learning to support the course, *English 12 First Peoples* (FNESC, 2008), which explored First Peoples literature. The FPPL were a support to guide BC teachers to consider beyond *what* we teach, through the lens of *how* we teach. For example, reading a First Peoples story followed by a multiple-choice comprehension quiz does not approach learning through attending holistically to the unique mind, body, spirit, community, and land relations that are integral to how students read and interpret the world.

The principles led teachers and students to learn through stories while making connections to their own identities, and with the opportunity to follow the consequences of actions. Almost a decade after the creation, the principles were used to inform the provincial curricular reform (BC Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 6–7). Thus, all curricular content has the opportunity to be explored through an understanding of learning as developing connectedness and reciprocal relationships. Relationships that reveal themselves, over time and with patience, through memory, story, and history (FNESC, 2008/2014).

The approach to learning described in the FPPL resonated with me as a teacher who has aimed to live education as a holistic endeavor. I trace the kinship I have felt back to my childhood experiences with schooling and continual relocation. Beginning at an early age and continuing until my high school graduation, my family moved within Canada and internationally. Experiences of displacement added complexity to my sense of my identity, belonging, and my (dis)connection with school. Although I always loved to learn, my time in classrooms taught me that school is separate from life at home and from my other lived experiences. From the perspective of the new student, I learned that classrooms can deny and silence the multiple, holistic experiences of children by overemphasizing the cultural norms of the dominant society. These early memories of being a newcomer and outside of the taken-for-granted culture of the different schools I attended were integral to how I engaged in teaching and learning as an adult and why I came to see myself as a teacher who intends to be responsive to her students and their biographies and histories.

However, as I learned more about what it meant to be a settler educator and about settler relationality, the common ground I initially experienced with the principles gave way to my understanding that there is much for me to learn about the nature of the First Peoples Principles of Learning and my relation to



them. Regan (2010), a settler and former residential schools claims manager, shares that settlers must undergo their own process of decolonization by which they change the way that they see themselves and the way they learn (p. 11). She also writes, “my own deepest learning has always come when I was in unfamiliar territory culturally, intellectually, and emotionally. It seems to me that the space of not knowing has power that may hold a key to decolonization for settlers” (p. 18).

For me, knowing myself as a settler educator was part of embracing an unfamiliar territory and a new way of seeing my identity. Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel (2014) explain that a settler is a person who is named by “virtue of living and owning land appropriated from Indigenous peoples, as well as exercising and seeking rights that are collectively denied to Indigenous peoples” (p. 13). By calling myself a settler educator, I learned to describe myself in specific relation to land and contemporary Euro-American knowledge. More specifically, I moved away from myths of settler Canadians as primarily peacemakers and acknowledged the destructive legacy of destroyed, ignored, and devalued Indigenous experiences. As a settler educator, I have had the privilege of teaching in accordance with a naturalized worldview that does not easily recognize the responsibilities of settlers and the extent of settler injustices. Veracini (2011) explains that, “settlers do not discover: they carry their sovereignty and lifestyles with them... As they move towards what amounts to a representation of the world, as they transform the land into their image, they settle another place without moving” (p. 206).

By asking questions about my settler relationships, my understanding of myself began to *unsettle* or, put another way, *open*. I became open to the realization that despite the experiences growing up that I thought helped me recognize the gaps between school and home and my strong desire and commitment to child-centered learning, I still needed to reimagine who I am and who I want to be through the lens of being a settler. Without attempting to shed my privileged settler ways of knowing, I was at continual risk of contributing to a reproduced settler worldview that involved inherited, preconceived expectations that were outside of my awareness.

### **Opening One: Everyone Has a Worldview**

Understanding that a First Peoples approach to learning is holistic and strength-based, led me to ask myself what are other approaches to learning in schools by contrast? This question was an opportunity to consider the “privilege of not having to know, name, or otherwise mark [my] subjectivity and positionality relative to the ongoing project of settler colonialism” (Cannon, 2013, p. 22). As I reviewed the principles, I called into question how learning is approached through a dominant culture lens in my classroom. While I do not relish binary thinking, I began to map my understanding of the FPPL by recognizing and naming the implicated worldview in *all* approaches to learning. The following chart draws contrasts between a dominant, Euro-American approach to learning described by Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor (2013, p. 21) with the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC).

<b>Dominant Approach to Learning</b>	<b>First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC)</b>
Learning is competitive, individualistic. The goal of learning is to get a job.	Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
Knowledge is transmitted. Students work independently. Teaching and assessment are separate.	Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
Learning is teacher-to-student focused. Teacher chooses what student learn.	Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions. Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
Euro-American knowledge focus.	Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
Focus of learning is on a single discipline, in a linear fashion.	Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
Students are ranked according to predetermined criteria.	Learning involves patience and time. Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
Teacher is the expert and all-knowing.	Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Fig. 1: Contrasting worldviews in teaching and learning

I share this comparison because my settler privilege of not having to name my worldview was challenged when I contrasted the two side by side in Figure 1. Before I had juxtaposed what is considered to be a dominant approach to learning with the principles, I lacked an appreciation of the differences between the two and a language to reflect how my beliefs and practices are part of the dominant view.

Making my settler worldview visible was an opportunity to create an authentic bridge to the First Peoples Principle of Learning, rather than develop FPPL within my existing dominant framework of learning. With greater awareness of distinctiveness, I moved away from what Battiste (2011) calls “cognitive imperialism”—a universalized approach to knowledge that denies the multiple of ways of knowing that students bring into schools. I agree with Battiste’s assertion that cognitive imperialism is a form of racism that is characterized by a lack of understanding of the complexities of modern thought by marginalizing all non-Western forms of thinking. Battiste writes that cognitive imperialism is “forced assimilation... ‘white-washing’ the brain” (p. XIX) and Nishnaabeg scholar Simpson (2014) offers an example of the forced assimilation she experienced in schools,

My experience of education from kindergarten to graduate school was one of coping with someone else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was neither interested in my homeland, my language or history, nor my Nishnaabeg intelligence. No one ever asked me what I was interested in nor did they ask me for my consent to participate in their system. (p. 6)

Seeing the classroom through Simpson’s description of her school experiences, I challenged myself to recognize the ways that I have mistakenly promoted, and thus protected, colonialism by not making explicit that I am always teaching in relationship to a worldview. For example, as opposed to recognizing the role of Indigenous knowledge, I have normalized and reproduced my settler perspective through homogeneous accounts of history, science, and geography. I have taught practices of mapping and naming in geography with such certainty that there was little to no opportunity for students to question

these Euro-American epistemologies. I have done this despite my commitment to inquiry and holistic education. Comparing worldviews helped me to articulate how universalized approaches to knowledge validate one source of knowledge and power and are a form of cognitive manipulation used to discredit other knowledge bases. My inquiry into the FPPL was an opportunity to challenge the normalcy of the dominant worldview in order to serve the needs of all students moving forward.

## Opening Two: Interrogating Narratives That Divide

Understanding differences in worldview was important to my self-awareness. However, I have also learned we can be negatively divided by our differences through the stories we tell in schools. Donald (2012) describes that storytelling in Canadian society has developed through colonial frontier logic; a mythological narrative that began with perceptions of fur-trade forts as sites of equal opportunity in Canada. Colonial frontier logic posits that everyone had the opportunity to build the forts that grew into what settlers describe as civilization. Through such storytelling, Canadian students have been taught to celebrate civilization processes such as the fort and to see them as the standard for progress and development wherein “European Global Exploration= Trade= Settlement= Cultural Diffusion= Civilization= Progress= Freedom= Economic Prosperity= Development” (p. 96). As the story goes, once the inside of the fort is established, it is maintained, protected, and privileged, and those outside the fort are understood as having lacked a desire and ability to progress and develop. Importantly, for the ongoing perpetuation of colonial frontier logic, anyone who tries to reject this story is understood to be against freedom and economic prosperity and, thus, these settler narratives and perspectives “have calcified into reductive mythologies that substantiate colonial claims of entitlement and superiority” (Decter & Isaac, 2015, p. 102).

As I have discussed, The First Peoples Principles of Learning describe learning as dependent upon connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place. Through awareness of divisive cultural narratives, such as that of the colonial fort, I learned to better honour FPPL by sharing stories in my classroom that illustrate how settlers and First Peoples have a “long history of contact, collaboration, cooperation, integration” (Scott, 2013, p. 35). One way to share stories to this effect is through Indigenous Métissage, which is a method of story inquiry that,

Involves the purposeful juxtaposition of mythic historical perspectives (often framed as commonsense) with Aboriginal historical perspectives. The ethical desire is to reread and reframe historical understanding in ways that cause readers to question their own assumptions and prejudices as limited and limiting, and thus foster a renewed openness to the possibility of broader and deeper understandings that can transverse perceived cultural, civilizational, and temporal divides (Donald, 2009, pp. 5–6)

Over the course of my inquiry, I read a variety of Indigenous Canadian literature that depicted how First Peoples cultures, perspectives, and histories developed in relationship to settler societies. Donald (2012) offers that within the emergence of an awareness of connections and relationships resides a needed, “new or renewed ethical framework that clarifies the terms of which we can speak to each other” (p. 103). Further, he describes *ecological imagination*—when community members see themselves as

part of the living system of the world, and see each other, not as the same but as interconnected, as an indicator of such an ethic (p. 103). With an ethic of ecological imagination, balance and reciprocity are key, and either/or frameworks including insider/outsider and us/them binaries are abandoned. Moving forward, I hope I can inspire such imagining with my students through how we experience relationships between diverse groups of people in our classroom storytelling.

Looking back at my inquiry, I notice that when I explored my dominant worldview I focused on differences, but when I considered fort logic, I challenged myself to imagine my relatedness to the principles. It seems that over time, I moved beyond either/or frameworks to embrace narratives where the complexity of shared histories is centralized. As I paid attention to how my thinking changed, knowledge was revealed to be in constant motion and constructed as my interpretation of my identity and experiences collided. With reflection, new questions and new understandings of the principles were possible.

The final opening to share is the importance of inquiry as an ongoing process. It is my stance that all arrived at (and inherited) understandings should facilitate opportunities for further listening and inquiry. Thus, while attention to worldviews and cultural narratives increased my understanding of FPPL, there is always much more to learn.

### **Opening Three: Inquiry as Ongoing**

My self-inquiry was dependent on learning with others. I learned about myself as I discussed the First Peoples Principles with members of my district Indigenous Education department, attended community workshops, and engaged with educational theories. For me, collaboration is at the heart of ongoing inquiry. It is not a tool for problem-solving, but rather an act of reorienting my thinking again and again through relationship making and dialogue. Within my interchanges around FPPL, there was great healing and growth that was not necessarily about the inclusion of First Peoples perspectives to repair loss or damage, but was the result of a move towards what Hargreaves and Jefferess (2015) describe as, “a transformed order of social relations” wherein reconciliation of settler and First Peoples perspectives is “always beginning” in the present moment and context (p. 208).

In my inquiry, collaboration was an example of a “transformed order of social relations” (Hargreaves & Jefferess, 2015, p. 208) because through my interactions I embraced my teacher learning as interdependent with the ever-changing needs, perspectives, strengths of my communities and students. I was not looking for ways that colonialism could be solved through expertise. Rather through active collaboration and ongoing inquiry, I experienced reconciliation as a human endeavor that is always incomplete and thus always required ongoing attention and awareness to context. I was not looking to become an expert, but rather focused on growing personal qualities such as attunement, mindfulness, and question asking.

Further, the sentiment “always beginning” (Hargreaves & Jefferess, 2015) is important to my experience. The term brings to mind the contemplative, mindful, perspective of a beginner’s mind that supports ongoing inquiry. Beginner’s mind is a way of looking at the present moment without bringing forward

assumptions and habits that already are established. When I looked at my understanding of FPPL through the lens of beginner's mind, the following questions emerged as a daily practice:

- How is what I am teaching related to nurturing well-being for myself, my students, our community, and the greater world?
- Where am I learning, and what is my relationship to this land? How do these relationships represent the consequences of our actions?
- How am I considering multiple generations in my learning?
- To what extent am I considering and appreciating Indigenous knowledge in my teaching and learning?
- What stories am I learning from, sharing, and creating?
- What is my relationship to time? Am I acting with patience?
- Who am I at this moment and who do I want to be?

By asking these questions again and again in my teaching context, I hoped to continually move away from habitual ways of teaching that reproduce settler worldview and fort narratives through the obscuring and marginalizing of First Peoples content and perspectives. Without such ongoing questioning, awareness can stagnate and the possibilities of nurturing the strengths and identities of students in meaningful ways that connect them to their communities and the natural world will be missed. I do not believe that there is one best way to achieve such awareness; attention to worldview, story, and inquiry have been mine, but learning takes many paths. However, I do know that teachers' responsiveness to the learning needs of First Peoples students and communities is critical to the future learning of all and, thus, this conversation must continue.

## **Reciprocating the Gift of First Peoples Principles of Learning**

The FPPL is not a stand-alone addition to the classroom but a shared foundation, a gateway to paying closer attention to learning from identity, land, story. I have imagined that the curricula that will emerge from points of contact between teachers, students, and FPPL will foster ethics that are based on new understandings of more equitable ways to embrace learning in schools. The FPPL presented me with an opportunity to examine my teaching practice and, by extension, what Hargreaves and Jefferess (2015) call the "frameworks by which non-Indigenous peoples imagine themselves, and the nation" (p. 204). Engaged with self-awareness, the principles were a guide to improve my capacity to build bridges between myself and my students and I am grateful for the gift to learn that FNEESC has given me and all teachers. However, this is not a simple exchange. I draw upon the language of gift as a final reflection on what I have learned about the past and future of settler relationality through my inquiry because the term "gift" holds within it some of the complexities that I have shared throughout this discussion and that I think are important to highlight again.

Historically, the gifts offered by First Peoples to the early settlers were accepted in ways that disadvantaged and harmed First Peoples for settler gain. This is not only the context of the past; Tuck and Yang (2012) examine how settler relationality continues to harm Indigenous efforts of decolonization.

[Decolonization] is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of 'helping' the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for the struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for these efforts. By contrast, decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. (p. 21)

Tuck and Yang explain that metaphorical discussions of decolonization are merely efforts to alleviate settler guilt and responsibility without giving up land, power, or privilege, without having to change much at all. Part of accepting the gift of FPPL is embracing the critiques of settlers who, inappropriately, search for closure of the losses of First Peoples.

The ongoing risk of being critiqued for my engagement with FPPL has challenged me, for as Regan (2010) describes,

Sometimes we are offered a gift that we are reluctant to accept. Perhaps we do not recognize it as a gift because it feels like a burden, like a heavy responsibility that we don't quite know how to carry, and we are afraid we will do so poorly. (p. 18)

Through daily, committed action, and growing understanding, I am learning not to respond defensively to critiques, but rather to consider and notice how I can learn from any critique as a way to further disrupt my thinking. In the end, welcoming critique has been one of the most valuable parts of the gift. So, while I may not believe that I seek to reconcile my feelings of guilt or discomfort, as suggested by Tuck and Yang (2012), it will be helpful for me to continually be aware of such a possibility while working with the FPPL in ongoing ways.

My embrace of critical perspective is also an embrace of creative possibilities. My inquiry ignited in me a hopefulness for the future of First Peoples Principles of Learning and this imagining also drew upon the concept of gift. Twenty years ago, Battiste (1998) described how a First Peoples curriculum is like a seed in autumn that can sprout into the beginnings of decolonization in education. The growth of such curricular plans has been slow, but the seeds are now planted, and they have created ripples of change in my teaching practice. The First Peoples Principles of Learning were a vehicle towards a changed teaching practice that focuses on the holistic nature of children and their ways of learning. Thus, despite our history, the *gift* of FPPL has an opportunity to be understood as more than an exchange; it can be a way of seeing all there is to be deeply grateful for. As Kuokkanen (2007) describes,

Instead of viewing the gift as a form of exchange or as having only an economic function, I argue that the gift is a reflection of a particular worldview characterized by a perspective of the natural environment as a living entity which gives its gifts and abundance to the people if it is treated with respect and gratitude. (p. 61)

Offering my self-inquiry to my community is imbued with a desire to reciprocate and respectfully engage the FPPL, so that it can be a gift with no bounds that provides sustenance as needed. For me, respectful action and appropriate acknowledgment of the authorship of the principles started with self-inquiry and will now continue through actions of decolonization supported by the naming of worldview, and changes in how I tell stories that I have outlined. Through ongoing inquiry, I look forward to learning from my

colleagues as they articulate their own *understanding* of FPPL and expect that from the intersections and tensions of these diverse theories, new co-created openings for action and understanding will become accessible.

## Note

1. FNESC also recognizes that the principles and the concept of a First Peoples approach to learning is a prompt to begin or continue a conversation as there is no one pan-First Peoples approach to learning (Chrona, 2014).

## References

- Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach to Aboriginal knowledge, language, and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1), 16–26.
- Battiste, M. (2011). Cognitive imperialism and decolonizing research: Modes of transformation. In C. Reilly, V. Russell, L.K. Chehayl, & M. M. McDermott (Eds.), *Surveying borders, boundaries, and contested spaces in curriculum and pedagogy* (pp. xv–xxviii). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education and First Nations Education Steering Committee (2008). English 12 First Peoples Integrated Resource Package (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/documents.htm>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2015). *Introduction to British Columbia's redesigned curriculum*. Retrieved from [https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/curriculum\\_intro.pdf](https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/curriculum_intro.pdf).
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2016). Official redesigned K–9 curricula. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca>
- Broom, C. (2016). Power, politics, philosophy, and reform: A historical review of curriculum reform, academia, and government in British Columbia, 1920 to 2000. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 48(5), 711–727.
- Cannon, M. J. (2013). Changing the subject in teacher education: Centering Indigenous, diasporic, and settler colonial relations. *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, 4(2), 21–37. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cpi/article/viewFile/19109/1516>
- Chrona, J. (2015). First Peoples Principles of Learning. Retrieved from <https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com>
- Decter, L., & Issac, J. (2015). Reflections on unsettling narratives of denial. In G. L'Hirondelle Hill & S. McCall (Eds.), *The land we are: Artists & writers unsettle the politics of reconciliation* (pp. 96–129). Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books.
- Donald, D. (2009). Forts, curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian relations in educational contexts. *First Nations Perspectives*, 2(1), 1–24.
- Donald, D. (2012). Forts, colonial frontier logics, and Aboriginal-Canadian relations: Imagining decolonizing educational philosophies in Canadian context. In A. Abdi (Ed.), *Decolonizing philosophies of education* (pp. 91–111). Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publisher.



First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). (2008). *English 12 First Peoples teacher resource guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.fnesc.ca/learningfirstpeoples/efp/>

First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). (2008/2014). *Poster First Peoples Principles of Learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.fnesc.ca/resources/publications/>

Grass, S. (2017). The First Nations Educational Steering Committee and the First Nations School Association's Indian Residential Schools and reconciliation teacher resources. In J. Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiiem, & J. Hare (Eds.). *Learning knowing sharing: Celebrating success in K-12 Aboriginal education in British Columbia* (pp. 4–14). Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association.

Hanson, K. (2017). *Mindful community: Possibilities for teacher professional learning*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Hargreaves, A., & Jefferess, D. (2015). Always beginning: Imagining reconciliation. In G. L'Hirondelle Hill & S. McCall (Eds.). *The land we are: Artists & writers unsettle the politics of reconciliation* (pp. 96–129). Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books.

Kuokkanen, R. J. (2007). *Reshaping the university: Responsibility, Indigenous epistemes, and the logic of the gift*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Martusewicz, R. (2001). *Seeking passage: Post-structuralism, pedagogy, ethics*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press

Okanagan Nation Alliance (2013). *Go back to the root: A learning resource on Syilx families*. Westbank, BC: Okanagan Nation Alliance.

Palmer, P. (1998). *Courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Sanford, K., Williams, L., Hopper, T., & McGregor, C. (2013). Indigenous principles decolonizing teacher education: What we have learned. *In Education, 18*(2), 18–34.

Scott, D. (2013). Teaching Aboriginal perspectives: An investigation into teacher practices amidst curriculum change. *Canadian Social Studies, 46*(1), 31–43.

Simpson, L. (2014). Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 3*(3), 1–25.


Snelgrove, C., Dhamoon, R., & Corntassel, J. (2014). Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 3*(2), 1–32.

Tanaka, M. (2016). *Learning and teaching together: Weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into education*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1*(1), 1–40.

Veracini, L. (2011). Telling the end of the settler colonial story. In L. Pilkington & F. Bateman (Eds.), *Studies in settler colonialism: Politics, identity, and culture*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

## Appendix A



**FIRST PEOPLES** **PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING**

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.


Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.



Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.



For First Peoples classroom resources visit: [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)





**Kelly Hanson** has spent over a decade working as a public middle school teacher in British Columbia and Ontario. She is currently a faculty advisor and a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia. Kelly's PhD research explores intersections between indigenizing curriculum theory and teacher education and the lives of teachers.



# Understanding Tension-Filled Tenure Track Stories: Currere, Autobiographical Scholarship, and Photography

Sandra Jack-Malik

## Abstract

In this paper I utilized the currere method and my experiences as a tenure track hire. Currere provided a framework that allowed me to remember and then engage my ways of knowing and immerse myself in supportive contexts. Specifically, I was able to deepen my understandings, learn, imagine up, and over time shift my tenure track stories. The complex, sometimes hegemonic institutional narratives embedded along my tenure track, regularly resulted in tension. In response to the tension and because of my enactment of the currere, I was able to remember and reflect on what I know and value, think about who I am and who I am becoming, including who I want to be as a professor. This work includes photographs because once I gave myself permission to play, taking, viewing, and manipulating pictures became part of my shifting tenure track identity stories.

## Background

I sometimes wonder why particular stories linger and others do not. Is it because the stories compress and contain possibilities and profundity or is it that they offer continuous, moving links between who we were, are, and who we are struggling to become, our shifting identities. (Jack-Malik, 2018, p. 199)

Increasingly, I suspect stories are the sinew that provides core strength and binding as I struggle to compose a coherent life. Stories afford a look back, offering deeper and sometimes new understandings of an embodied person in social moments as she moves through time. Stories also hint at possible futures. If one is willing to do the multifarious and challenging work of inquiring into stories, they can become interlocutors of potential and understanding.

Knowing this and living with protracted, tension-filled tenure track stories, my goal is to deepen understandings of my experiences with an aim to shift my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) so they reflect my ways of knowing and who I am and who I am in the midst of becoming.

I used Pinar's (1994, 2010) currere to inquire through an autobiographical lens as well as his notions of emancipatory reaggregation and self-shattering. I included photographs I had taken because taking and viewing photographs were aesthetic experiences that lead to subjective and social reconstructions (Greene, 2001). Greene described art-as-event, highlighting the eventfulness of art and suggesting a space for the "subjective dimension of our knowing" (p. 11). Once I gave myself permission to play, I purposefully sought out the solitude of being on the land. I hiked rugged coastal trails, took photographs (see Figure 1), later studied and played with the images; all these things I did on my own. I did them to



create disjunctive spaces alongside the tension, spaces for self-reflection. Pinar (2010) wrote, “the person undergoing such experience can break free of one’s socially determined location, one’s subject position” (p. 2). Pinar suggested such moments could lead to self-shattering where “boundaries of the self dissolve into the aesthetic experience that extricate us from submersion in the banal, the provincial, and presses us into the world” (p. 2). Sometimes I experienced taking, viewing, and manipulating photographs as a nonword-like language that pressed me to attend to alternative interpretations, while magnifying and increasing possible future stories.



Fig. 1: In search of safe, light-filled places

Mabou Beach on a cold, windy, winter day. I saw a sun-flooded space and walked towards it. The light shifted as the clouds and sun jockeyed. I wanted to move forward only in light; however, watching the wind and clouds block and then allow light, I knew it was impossible. How then could I move forward safely?

Using *currere* I remembered and examined early curriculum making (regressive), named and thought deeply about the interdependent nature of my interests and histories (progressive), analyzed what is, what was, and what could be (analytical), and wondered about who I am in this moment and how the work I do contributes to who I am and who I might be. This is the final synthetical step. *Currere* allowed me to articulate and then enact my desire to embed myself within supportive contexts to interrupt tension-filled tenure track stories and live out new ones.

Slattery (2018), when operationalizing autobiographical inquiry, wrote, “the goal is to free the self from the petrified connections forced onto the self by a repressing society, repressed memories, or normative methodologies” (p. 193). Using Pinar’s *currere*, he named the synthetical step, “prolepsis.” He described proleptic experiences as those that, “transcend linear segmentation of time and create holistic understandings of past, present and future simultaneously” (p. 185). Using Pinar’s *currere* and Slattery’s notion of proleptic experiences, I will describe how photographs and an invitation to “play with stories” (Cordi, 2014) resulted in narrative fluidity, where I remembered and experienced myself as unafraid, playful, and joyful. In the midst of my joy-filled play and with the help of many, I pushed at the

boundaries of tension-filled tenure track stories, such that I grasped, valued, and mobilized my ways of being, allowing me to live out other tenure track stories.

The purpose of this inquiry then is to generate a new relation between tenure stories and self. I understand this to be important because:

through the subjective reconstruction of academic knowledge and lived experience – as each informs the other – we enable understanding of the public world as we discern our privately formulated way through it. In small ways and sometimes large, neither stays the same. (Pinar, 2012, p. 45)

In addition, I know myself amongst other things as an educator and always an active learner, two sides of a single coin, impossible to separate. This autobiographical research therefore is in part my story as a student of tenure track.

### **Understandings of Stories, Curriculum Making, and Shifting Identities**

During my doctoral studies, I was invited to think about curriculum and stories in ways that were foreign to me. Curriculum was outcomes listed in binders, organized by grade and subject, and my identity was singular and mostly fixed. Through four years of studies my understandings shifted; I awoke to other conceptions of curriculum and other ways of attending to story. I came to appreciate, “people shape their daily lives by the stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Furthermore, my understanding of curriculum changed. I now live and work within a view of curriculum as a course of life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). As I understood and as I tentatively interacted socially, I appreciated that I wanted to belong within communities. Slowly amidst tension and with considerable support, I, an introverted outsider, moved inside social, cultural, and institutional narratives and lived out new stories. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr (2010) offered a different view of tension. They wrote, “we began to understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (p. 82). I brought these understandings to my tenure track journey.

### **I Willingly Stepped On**

I put myself on tenure track; I leapt on with my experiences, “the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry—narrative or otherwise—proceeds” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38). These experiences included an understanding that, “it is the lived experience of curriculum—Currere, the running of the course—wherein the curriculum is experienced, enacted, and reconstructed” (Pinar, 2011, p. 1). I accepted the position knowing, “the stories we live and tell are profoundly influenced by the lived and told narratives in which we are embedded” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 1). For me, these embedded narratives included stories from the academy, individual personalities, a dismissed university president, a potential faculty strike, a provincial teachers’ work to rule, and a cross-country move.



**Regularly feeling inadequate.** Along my track I encountered complex experiences. I spent too many hours preparing courses and evaluating assignments, learning how to use the library, and learning how to navigate the university and the various departments. In the fall of year one, my inbox was inundated with emails from the faculty association outlining issues related to the pending strike and detailing my picket line duties. I observed behaviour that was unfamiliar to me in a professional environment. I fielded emails from students, practicing teachers, wanting to know why the university was taking their teachers' union to court. I received three review letters detailing my mediocre first-year performance. There were moments when my tenure track went soft, unable to shore up the relentless weight of demoralizing tension. I regularly felt submerged in inadequacy. Why was my competence diminishing? "Many faculty members find the probationary period and tenure review process a period of high pressure because of limited time to meet mandated expectations in research, teaching, and service and establish a solid research agenda" (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011, p. 42).

As I staggered along, I heard a cacophony of women, each voice belonging to a successfully tenured colleague. I listened; however, I could not transact (Rosenblatt, 1938) meaning (see Figure 2). While attending a workshop, two tenured women spelled it out.

### **Tenure Lament:**

We are waiting for you.

We have been where you are; we know it is crushingly inflexible.

We lived it: exhaustion, exclusion, rejection and marginalization.

It can be traumatic, and it can rekindle cruel memories.

On our side, you will reconceptualize.

You will have time to reflect on and value your past.

Things are better, easier; you will breathe more deeply. You may even take a vacation.

Occasionally you will lay your head on the pillow and sleep the sleep of the righteous.

Your autobiography will include racehorse, rider and multiple races; your curriculum-making will be a noun and a temporal verb.

We need you on this side; we are looking forward to welcoming you.

Hold on. (S. Jack-Malik, personal communication, June 2018).



Fig. 2: Tenure lament

"It's a miserable inheritance," said Wilbour, gloomily" (White, 1952, p. 37).

The Canadian Association of University Teachers and Catano et al. (2007) conducted a national survey of 1470 participants from 56 Canadian universities. They reported, "stress in academia exceeds that found in the general population" (p. 3). Berg and Seeber (2013), having read the study, wrote, "we shifted our thinking from 'what is wrong with us?' to 'what is wrong with the academic system?'" (p. 2).

## Ready to Step Off

In the winter of 2018, I began to contemplate resignation. I could not imagine another semester of working seven days a week, each more than 70 hours. I was confused; there were days, classes, and moments when I felt I was making a contribution. However, other days I was drowning in tension. "I have recurring feelings of... uncertainty, frustration, because I don't feel... like I can do all the work, much less do the quality kind of work that I would like to do" (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011, p. 41). Moreover, I was frustrated when female professors, whom I respected, said, "hang in there, things will improve." Every time I heard those words, I wanted to scream, "What about this moment? What do I do right now to dial down the oppressive tension?" I read Hochschild (2011) and wondered how to continue:

... how a provincial might come to the university and become a full professor, he might have the following advice: enter graduate school with the same mentality with which you think you will emerge from graduate school. Be confident, ambitious, and well aimed. Don't waste time. Get a good research topic early and find an important but kindly and nonprejudicial benefactor from whom you actually learn something. Most important, put your all into those crucial years after you get your doctorate—in your twenties and thirties—putting nothing else first then. Take your best job offer and go there no matter what your family or social situation. Publish your first book with a well-known publisher and cross the land to a slightly better position, if it comes up. Extend your now-ambitious self broadly and deeply into research, committee work, and editorships to make your name in your late twenties and at the latest early thirties. If somewhere along the way teaching becomes the psychic equivalent of volunteer work, don't let it bother you. You are now a full professor and can guide other young fledglings along that course. (p. 18)

I saw myself reflected in one sentence: “find an important but kindly and nonprejudicial benefactor from whom you actually learn something” (Hochschild, 2011, p. 18) and an idea came to me (see Figure 3). I reached out to my doctoral supervisor, D. J. Clandinin, who suggested possibilities. One email included a call for proposals to The Currere Exchange, 3rd Annual Retreat and Conference (2018), which invited professors and citizens “interested in curriculum and cultural studies to affirm, connect, and refresh their personal, scholarly, and social action agendas.” My agendas were hazy because I am “perpetually behind immersed in abstract institutional parameters and a relentless to DO list that continually morphs, shifts and grows” (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011, p. 48). I decided before resigning I would give myself this opportunity. I wondered how attendance might influence me. I submitted a proposal; it was accepted. I read Pinar’s (2012) description of currere. He wrote, “... the method of currere provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction” (p. 44).



Fig. 3: Suggesting a path

“Charlotte was naturally patient. She knew from experience that if she waited long enough, a fly would come to her web; and she felt sure that if she thought long enough about Wilbur’s problem, an idea would come to her mind” (White, 1952, p. 67).

## Step 1: Regressive

When I remember elementary and secondary classrooms, the thickest memories are of being dumbfounded by things I did not understand. I was routinely “pulled up short” (Gadamer, 1993), unsettled, wondering who I was as an individual and as a member of various groups. Pulled up short was not grounded in power or proficiency; rather, it was a proclivity for self-questioning and doubt (see Figure 4). Kerdeman (2003) states, “when we are pulled up short, events we neither want nor foresee and to which we may believe we are immune interrupt our lives and challenge our self-understanding in ways that are painful but transforming” (p. 294). I recall Social Studies classes when we watched black-and-white movies of endless piles of skeletons bulldozed into graves and doused with powder following World War II; pulled up short. Observing classmates having sex while on a camping field trip; pulled up short. Sitting with the History teacher, while he smoked; pulled up short. I do not recall a teacher helping me to understand what I experienced or examine my beliefs and assumptions. It never occurred to me to ask questions about things that were unfathomable. Years later as my teacher identity developed, I pulled these memories forward. They helped me know the importance of questions.



Fig. 4: Remember my girl, if you are willing to look, one can see and know?

I have grade six report cards with strikingly familiar comments: “Sandra is not meeting her potential” and “Sandra must learn to remain in her seat and speak only when spoken to” (S. Jack-Malik, personal communication, 1970). When I look at these report cards, handwritten, I imagine the pendulum of education. When penned, a good student was one who could sit quietly and speak when addressed. I never had a chance; a chatty child, I could neither sit still nor remain quiet.

I am the youngest of four children. My siblings created their own school narratives. In response, I was the youngest child of that family and at other times, I was his or her sister. I had a capacity for and a keen desire to engage in high-speed, one-upmanship repartee; this skill and proclivity were not a promising fit for classrooms of the 1970s. On good days, I engaged subject matter in Geography, History, and English because there were human stories, conflicts, and moral matters. I met interesting characters; I read often and widely. Some teachers had a broad view of students and an appetite for discussion.

Sitting in upper-level Math class, I knew I was ill equipped. I lacked knowledge, and while prepared to do the work, I did not know how. Repeating a grade nine Math course never occurred to me. Over time and because of my weaknesses, I learned to be disinterested. This took longer in Science because I experienced understandings of the natural world as compelling. I spent hours exploring the land between the lake and the escarpment. In grade nine and ten science, much of what I experienced on the land was the content of the class. Science class helped me understand what I experienced when I explored. In addition, it helped me link the immediacy of what I observed to larger issues. The loss of land at the end of the street was part of larger environmental concerns and plans of action for the eroding shorelines of Lake Ontario. This learning was compelling. I was eager to get to class, engage, and participate in regularly scheduled field trips. I was “operating within a discipline that held my attention that offered a series of fascinating puzzles” (Malin, 2018, p. 33).

This remembered eagerness has me wondering about my tenure track: teaching, research, publication, and service. Is any of it compelling; does any of it make me eager to engage? How do I separate tension from things that engage? How can I teach classes where students feel safe and are eager if I cannot create safe spaces for myself? I remember invitations declined in efforts to check items off my tenure to-do lists.

When days get long, lonely, intense, stressful, or otherwise too hard, I benefit from play. I take my camera, find a friend and go on the land, or play my fiddle or make art. Why did I decline invitations and why have I chosen not to play on my tenure track?

## **Step 2: Progressive**

Pinar's next step in the currere process is progressive. One "imagines possible futures including fears as well as fantasies of fulfillment" (Pinar, 2012, p. 46). More of the same, another year of coming up short. Teach research, publish, serve, repeat, and do it all while swimming in tension.

Looking forward I could step off tenure track; I could resign. At the height of my privilege, this is an option. It is not, however, what I want. I think about teaching, learning, and students, and I know I am contributing. In September, I will teach courses to my third cohort. My pedagogical work is improving because, increasingly, class discussions see us engaged in the "cultivation of independence of mind, self-reflexivity, and an interdisciplinary erudition" (Pinar, 2012, p. 34). I think about relationships I worked to nurture and after two years, these efforts are beginning to grow roots while providing scaffolding to new experiences. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to secure research grants that will finance studies set to begin in September; I would like to participate in both. There is also the possibility I will not be renewed; occasionally and secretly I experience this possibility as a releasing of omnipresent stress.

## **Step 3: Analytic—The Lived Reality**

There are teaching moments when interwoven story threads, mine, students, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1970) have my embodied self, humming in familiar familial discomfort. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) wrote,

we began by suggesting that curriculum might be viewed as an account of teachers' and students' lives together in schools and classrooms... it is a view in which the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process and in which teacher, learners, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction. (p. 392)

My dynamic interaction includes a metaphorical fist reaching towards me, eliminating the carefully constructed distance between the present moment and my biographic past, my early familial curriculum making (Clandinin et al., 2010). Sometimes it triggers when I cannot find something I prepared. Other times it occurs when I say something that I wish I could take back or when I make a mistake. Alternatively, it happens when a student makes a comment or behaves such that I am unceremoniously cast into a space my embodied self remembers as requiring hyper-vigilance. The frequency of these experiences increased along tenure track.

Slowly, thoughtfully, reading, reflecting, and counselling, I appreciated sometimes I am able to identify moments where the interwoven story threads of teacher, students, subject matter, and milieu, Schwab's (1970) curriculum commonplaces of unfolding experiences deliver me to endured childhood memories. Increasingly, I can persist in silence without reacting (see Figure 5). I feel alert to possible trouble;



however, I know my interpretation is but one and there are others. Once or twice, I persisted so completely I imagined the moment as benign. Increasingly, I can be quiet and let students fill the spaces with wonders and thoughts. This developing capacity to persist represents learning. I value it, and in reflection, I understand I am learning this along my tenure track.



Fig. 5: "The afternoon passed, and evening came. Shadows lengthened. The cool and kindly breath of evening entered... Astride her web, Charlotte sat moodily eating a horsefly and thinking about the future. After a while she bestirred herself" (White, 1952, p. 75).

#### **Step 4: Synthetical**

We welcome a new cohort of preservice teachers each spring. I try to avoid travel; however, I left my teaching to attend the Currere conference and I met a man who during a presentation shared the following:

##### **Permission 2 Play Pledge** (see Figure 6)

By Kevin Cordi (2014)

"I give myself permission

To have fun.

To take risks.

To make mistakes.

To Play

With my thinking

my choices

my direction and development  
to suspend  
what I know  
so I know more  
I give myself  
Permission  
To fail, succeed, and play again.  
I have the right to shape  
My stories.  
I am the crafter and creator.  
I am imaginative and supportive  
I know through  
Play  
We understand our stories  
And our stories become alive.  
I give myself Permission to Play."



Fig. 6: Play

"Play?" said Templeton, twirling his whiskers.

"Play? I hardly know the meaning of the word."

"Well," said Wilbur, "it means to have fun, to frolic to run and skip and make merry" (White, 1952, p. 29).

As I listened, Dr. Cordi invited his audience to play. He bade us to participate in a production. Some colleagues slouched and pushed back their chairs; I did not. I was willing. I gave myself to the experience; I became the steel engineer asked to evaluate the wreckage of the Titanic. I felt the loss of survivors.



I knew when I spoke, I had to translate complex engineering terms, allowing families to comprehend how and why the ship sunk. Choosing words carefully, mindful of sorrowful eyes and struggling to hold the grief-stricken families within my gaze, I spoke.

When Dr. Cordi moved the production to the next scene I closed my eyes, lingering with the weight of the surviving families. Behind closed eyes, I breathed deeply. Images and memories from childhood summers, Sunday evenings when a gaggle of neighbourhood friends performed plays for our families came to me. I was frog, sitting on a dark green, hand-sewn, felt lily pad, making ribbit noises. Play completed, the children came on stage, bowed and hurried into the arms of families. I remembered and felt how earnest and happy we were.

A second glance, I saw tears, arguments, and heartbreak, all part of the build-up to the performance. Some weeks a child got the part she wanted and other weeks she learned to wait and give another a turn. When a family and their children went on holiday, our plays suffered. When the wealthy family vacationed, sets and costumes were less. I saw mothers and fathers soothe, reprimand, and help.

In the midst of these memories, I appreciated the complexity. We were learning; our parents were teaching us to persevere, contribute, take turns, be empathetic, compassionate, and to experience the joy of seeing work through to completion. Their presence at the productions was also a lesson in community. Each week the play occurred in a different backyard and each week parents lugged lawn chairs, set them up and became perfect audiences. hooks (2003) wrote, “just as the family is often the training ground for life in community, it is the place where we are first given a sense of the meaning and power of education” (p. 117).

Dr. Cordi’s invitation to play, and remembering childhood plays, I experienced what Slattery (2018) described as a “rupture in psycho-social understanding of self and (inter) relationships leading to prolepsis” (p. 185). Slattery defined a proleptic moment as, “any experience that transcends linear segmentation of time and creates a holistic understanding of the past, present, and future simultaneously” (p. 185). I knew I could not continue along tenure track. Slattery wrote, “a proleptic integration of time and memory irreversibly jolts the foundational perspective of self in relation” (p. 186). I acknowledge I allowed my tenure to become a journey where I was increasingly unrecognizable. Tenure track silenced me, caused me to lose my words and walk with a perpetual heaviness. I stopped doing things that sustained me; I grew increasingly desperate about my inability to thrive as a professor. Desperation had a direct relation to increased isolation. Moreover, what resulted was an amplified emotional distance between self and tenure. I disconnected from my work, demoting it to playless, joyless perpetual to-do lists. I detached from people, activities, and communities that I know sustain me. I was regularly frustrated and unhappy.

The contradiction for me is that I am eager to teach, learn, research, publish, and serve. Like a stealthy northern hunter on the land to track and stalk life-sustaining prey, I work best when I am slow, steady, watchful, engaged, and appreciate setbacks as part of the process. I do not understand how to read the signs of the academy. I do not know what is being signalled, nor do I know how to appropriately clothe

and shelter myself from what can be oppressive power relations that structure dealings between those who are tenured, those who are not, permanent employees, and support staff. I find myself in the midst of battles, individual interests, and personality skirmishes that have nothing to do with me; however, they become part of something I want, need, or a decision I am attempting to make. In addition, when I am on the land, I know the priority; I respect nature, therefore safety is paramount. Once safe I let the land soothe me. Tenure track, I am uncertain of the priorities, therefore the endless to-do lists suffocate who I know myself to be. Most often, I prioritize teaching and mentoring because students represent the future of public education. Giving teaching the priority can result in little focus on nourishing the other elements of my job, resulting in ramped-up tension.

According to Slattery (2017), if we are to interrupt this narrative, we must “re-member our bodies and re-connect our lives if erasure is to be resisted and overcome” (p. 189). Dr. Cordi’s dramatic production, revisiting childhood play, a proleptic moment, and writing my way through this currere have helped me understand the past two years through different lenses.

There is a steep learning curve to becoming a successful university professor. The more I focussed on self and judged myself as inadequate, the more insular, secretive, and hidden I became. I was desperately trying to live out stories of competent university professor; however, I was doing so with to-do lists as my guide, not in relationship with self and others. I recalled and then returned to journals from my doctoral studies where I read descriptions of vulnerable moments when I purposefully stepped inside a community in my efforts to live out who I was struggling to become; a woman living within a number of rich and supportive social contexts. When I completed my doctoral studies, I was certain I would not return to a solitary, without community, life. Precisely what I have done on tenure track.

I returned from the currere conference and I continued thinking, writing, reflecting and I went back to hiking and taking photographs. I received an email asking for quantitative researchers to share their findings on the University radio station. I replied and asked about qualitative research. I was invited to host the show. During the second interview I was reminded of why I want to remain on the tenure path. The interviewee, L. Potvin, also a tenure-track assistant professor, spoke movingly about mistakes, hard work, joy, contributions, and gratitude for the work she gets to do. Then a nursing colleague, J. L. Kuhnke, asked about working together and she helped with a grant application. Moreover, in a recent conversation with my dean, she encouraged me to think about what I would need to continue. These experiences resonated with me because I acknowledged they are stories where I stepped towards and within communities of support.

The four stages of the currere process have provided meaningful learning through the provision of reflective lenses to look at my tenure-track lived experiences (see Figure 7). Listening to voices, past, present, and future, I was afforded space to make a “mindful inquiry through which one can harness the power of contemplation, reflection, introspection, and imagination” (Baszile, 2017, p. vii). The currere process, returning to the land with camera in hand, the photographs and many contributors have allowed me to reimagine myself within the larger educational socialization phenomenon of tenure track.

Kincheloe and Pinar (1991) argued, “autobiography can confront the meaning of a given world, reject it, reformulate it, and reconstruct it with a social vision that is authentically the individual’s” (p. 21).



Fig. 7: Tell me a story

“Tell me a story, Charlotte! Said Wilbur, as he lay waiting for sleep to come. Tell me a story!” (White, 1952, p. 101).

Engaging in currere provided me a language and structure that allowed me to make meaning from my tension-filled tenure track and to know a tenure track hire is a title that is useful when it includes consideration for professor as neophyte: teacher, researcher, writer, student, and learner. Pushing and pulling recursively and temporally allowed me to shatter and then reaggregate (Pinar, 2004). By attending to my own learning, I redirected my tenure track and poked at the boundaries of my future stories of becoming a university professor. I feel a desire to set aside the tension of the first two years. I want the tension-filled stories to become remote and, at some point, transmute into stories that serve. I look forward tentatively. The hard work I did whilst a doctoral student to step within communities is a frame on my life that I never again want to lose because it keeps me walking a good path, embedded with others. I will continue to study literacies, identities, teacher preparation, and inclusion. Moreover, because of this work I will include reflective practice as part of my research agenda. Tenure track has opened a new area of interest: how to welcome and support new faculty and staff members. Finally, I decided to continue because the pain of regret often results in complex, powerful, and temporal shaping influences and the pain of effort always assures me I am indeed struggling to compose a meaningful life. My goal moving forward is to return to joyful and playful communities. Returning to the land, camera in hand, is the first step.

## References

- Bailey, L. E., & Helvie-Mason, L. (2011). Evolving strategies and emerging selves: Two junior faculty reflect on the road to tenure. *Vitae Scholasticae*, 28(1), 41–65. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-277674725/evolving-strategies-and-emerging-selves-two-junior>
- Baszile, D. T. (2017). On the virtues of currere. *Currere Exchange Journal*, 1(1), vi–ix.
- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. (2013). The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy. *Transforming Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 6(3), 1–7.
- Catano, V., Francis, L., Haines, T., Kirpalani, H., Shannon, H, Stringer, B., et al. (2010). Occupational stress in Canadian universities: A national survey. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 17(3), 232–258.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as curriculum maker. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of curriculum research* (pp. 363–401). New York, NY: MacMillan.
- Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, M. S., Murray-Orr, A., Pearce, M., et al. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Orr, A. M. (2010). Negotiating narrative inquiries: *Living in a tension-filled midst*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 81–90. doi:10.1080/00220670903323404.
- Clandinin, D.J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry mapping a methodology* (pp. 224–245). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. 1999. *Shaping a professional identity. Stories of educational practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed., pp. 477–487). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cordi, K. (2014). *Playing with stories* (1st ed.). Marion, MI: Parkhurst Brothers Publishers, Inc.
- The Currere Exchange, 3rd Annual Retreat and Conference (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/events/2105621463002519/>
- Gadamer, H.G. (1993). *Truth and method*. New York: NY. Continuum.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar: The Lincoln Centre Institute lectures on aesthetic education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hochschild, A. (2011). Inside the work of male careers. In A. Garey & K. Hansen (Eds.), *At the heart of work and family: Engaging the ideas of Arlie Hochschild*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community a pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Jack-Malik, S. (2018). Stories, curriculum making, and tension as support for identity shifts: A narrative inquiry. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 11(2), 199–210.

Kerdeman, D. (2003). Pulled up short: Challenging self-understanding as a focus of teaching and elearning. *The Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, 37(2), 293–308.

Kincheloe, J. L., & Pinar, W. F. (Eds.). (1991). Introduction. In J. L. Kincheloe; W. F. Pinar (Eds.), *Curriculum as social psychoanalysis: The significance of place* (pp. 1–23). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Malin, J. (2018). Researching myself: Researcher of research engagement. *Currere Exchange Journal*, 2(1), 32–39.

Pinar, W. F. (1994). *Autobiography, politics and sexuality: Essays in curriculum theory 1972-1992*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Pinar, W. F. (2010) Note on a blue guitar. *Journal of Educational Controversy*, 5(1), 1–9. Retrieved from <https://cedar.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1117&context=jec>

Pinar, W. F. (2011). Introduction. In *the character of curriculum studies: Bildung, currere, and the recurring question of the subject* (pp. 1–21). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. New York, NY: Appleton-Century.

Schwab, J. (1970). *The practical: A language for curriculum*. Washington, DC: National Education Association, Center for the Study of Instruction.

Slattery, W. (2018). “I am nature”: Understanding the possibilities of currere in curriculum studies and aesthetics. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 14(3), 184–195. [doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2017.1398696](https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2017.1398696)

White, E.B. (1952). *Charlotte’s web*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.



**Sandra Jack-Malik**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Cape Breton University in Nova Scotia. She teaches curriculum and instruction courses in English Language Arts to elementary and secondary preservice teachers. A qualitative researcher, her primary interests lie at the intersections of literacies and identities and the pedagogies that support students to close achievement gaps. She is also interested in the experiences of preservice and in-service teachers as they work to support struggling students and the implications these understandings can have on teacher education programs.



# Reflexivity as a Process for Coming Into Knowing

Karen McGarry

## Abstract

Acting reflexively implies a “self-critical and self-conscious stance” (Glass, 2015, p. 555) of recognizing myself within a research process as an intentional participant-practitioner of generating knowledge. This article attempts to reveal visual evidence across a landscape of textual references and material implementations as a process of the *what* and *how* of knowing. My aim is to affirm the intentionality of my reflexive praxis as a way of knowing and becoming through committed intertextual inquiry and discovery.<sup>1</sup>

## Reflexivity as a Process for Coming Into Knowing



Fig. 1: *What if I look inside?* April 2018, mixed media on canvas, 8 x 10 in.

My portrait reveals and conceals an identity at times struggling to find a place of acceptance and understanding for an unconventional reflexive praxis. The two facial profile images represent aspects of one identity—one working within acceptable limits and expected practices, and the other engaging in an alternative, less predictable manner. Set beneath the canvas surface, the two identities peel away at ideas, uncovering concepts related to intentional discovery. Looking inside is how I might learn to know, opening a door to potential believability and play as a site for intertextual becoming.



*What if I look inside?* Both figuratively and literally? What does a researcher look like; is there “an identity” encapsulating a researcher and what they might look like? Not a literal look, of course, but a figurative one: an attempt to envision what the processes of researching, thinking, pondering, puzzling might look like if it could be observed and examined. As an arts-based researcher, I often find myself outside the scope of the traditional research practices of statistical significance, sample sizes, and generalizable outcomes. Resultingly, I am regularly in a position of needing to defend, define, or explain my work as research. For those unfamiliar with arts-based research, it is understandable to question such practice, and search for how, as a practitioner, I can call such training “research,” especially when it assumes such an unlikely façade. An arts-based researcher utilizes transdisciplinary and intertextual approaches to investigate a research question or hypothesis (Leavy, 2015), a process that can detour from traditional qualitative or quantitative research. Even within arts-based research there are subtle distinctions and classifications for inquiry practice. For example, within arts-based inquiry methods, there is an additional classification of research practice known as *A/r/tography*, blending the practices of artist/researcher/teacher into one investigative body. As an artist and an educator, my methods share in this distinction, yet, as Leavy posits, the “umbrella category” (p. 5) of arts-based research/researcher can be assumed by this author, in this article, since my professional persona envelops all three identities. No matter the classification, central to this argument is the appreciation that, in arts-based research, the arts are fundamental and significant to the research process, and the contributions these practices provide are intentional and generative.

The arts are often used to bolster research practice, as a method of evoking ideas that can then begin conversations (Eisner, 2012). These conversations then might lead to an actual research process following either qualitative or quantitative methods, for example. In such a process, the arts can be supportive, even instructive, for informing how to approach a research topic or question. For me, however, the arts are not a method of informing my research—they are an intentional pathway of my research. In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey (1934) wrote: “Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations” (p. 2). Whether digging below the surface or building upon one, my research reveals a deliberate investigative pathway of discovery, lucidity, and an elicitation that guides knowledge acquisition. Through arts-based inquiry, research questions find answers that often lead to further questioning and discovery, yet these processes generate owned or embodied knowledge, gleaned through a self-reflexive experiential praxis as a process of becoming.

This article attempts to reveal a glimpse into an arts-based research process literally, by locating the research in methodologies and philosophical positions that can illuminate how my work is generated, and figuratively, by revealing examples of a reflexive process of inquiry across a landscape of textual references and material implementation. My aim is to show what my research might look like and to affirm the intentionality of my reflexive praxis as a way of knowing.

## What Am I Trying to Study?



Fig. 2: *Mapping a terrain without a map*. February 2018, mixed media collage on paper, 7 x 10 in.

Mapping out a direction can be daunting, especially if you've lost your way or don't know where you are. Like a *dérive*, you meander through a place with a foreign map. It looks right. It has streets and locator dots for cities and sites of special interest. But you are not there. While struggling to understand your setting, you come upon new venues, like those already familiar, yet decidedly different. The experience is awakening, enlivening. You decide to stay, to use your mapping system as an adventuring guide for an undetermined destination.

Thomas Kuhn (1962) wrote his scientific revolutions book the year I was born. I did not read it until I was 30 years old; it shifted my learning process and my thinking about knowing. It was the first time I read the word *paradigm* and it began a long, iterative process of reading and writing with a dictionary companion. Kuhn's notions are sticky and complex, yet I refer to his words often because they scaffold a framework for organizing my thoughts. My own paradigm is messy and incomplete, evolving from contemplating experiences (reflection), seeing myself as a part of those experiences (reflexivity), and framing the experiences in some form—a story or narrative, a body of research, a book, sculpture or drawing—to make meaning happen (praxis).

Presently, my paradigm is like a map with connecting, meandering roads dotted with place names. Sometimes the roads intertwine or meld into each other, other times they veer off and avoid contact. The place names comprise a list of ideas that continually percolate and remind, morph and renew. Some of these place names include: believability, bricoleur, dialogism, discourse, equality, equity, feminism, gesture, identity, intersectionality, narrative, play, praxis, professionalism, reflection,

reflexivity, subjectivity, symbols, teachers, touch, utterances, visual, and voice. This simmering list nests inside my paradigm, waiting for discovery to reveal an interconnected purpose and “after a revolution,” to “work in a different world” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 135). One such world may develop at the intersection of gesture, utterance, and voice, and reveal a pathway of knowing that crosses textual distinctions to illustrate the *what* and *how* of communication through varied expressive systems. And what might happen at the intersection of symbol and believability, or equity and discourse? These imaginable intersections await, even beckon, and invite knowing.

My inquiry process often begins with an invitation to know more. A word or an idea from a book or an article may ignite a desire for creative exploration. For example, the map image in Figure 2 reflects the notion of the *dérive* as proposed by Guy Debord in 1956 (Knabb, 1995). I was interested in expanding on Debord’s theory of drifting, wanting to create an image that would interrupt and confuse any natural drift for the sake of visual patterning. This image started by cutting a map page into narrow strips and then weaving them together, negating the functionality of the map face. Over the woven map, I placed images of badge symbols cut from a Girl Scout’s Handbook (Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 1955) depicting animals and agriculture and adhered them to the surface, locating positions on the map face as points of interest or large cities. Over the entire page, I adhered a piece of dress pattern paper as a translucent layer to both mask the surface and create a uniform appearance. Then, I drew lines connecting badge sites to propose paths, or ways to know this image by suggesting directions or guidelines, visually mapping the image’s surface. As I reflect on the image, the compositional elements appear to drift across the surface and suggest possible narrative interpretations of a process. I imagine a potential viewer wondering about the envisioned communicative intent and how the artist constructed a story-like model inscribed with meaning. The image locates a place to ponder, without a key or a clue toward a specific reading, but offering a site potentially uncovering an archetype for learning to inquire about knowing.

Kuhn (1962) speaks to the notion of a paradigm as “an accepted model or pattern” (p. 23), shared as an understanding of a process or state. Arts-based research, for example, might represent a model of a communicative method. As a state of communication or being, a paradigm has potential to describe, inform, and evolve through processes of reformulation or retrofitting. A revolution in a paradigm occurs when there is an incompatibility within paradigm states (p. 93), enough to suggest an evolutionary development that results in a paradigmatic shift in knowing and understanding. In art education, for example, Discipline Based Art Education (Delacruz & Dunn, 1996), introduced in the 1980s, represented a shift in the formal processes of teaching and learning in the arts, partly in response to the increasing need for accountability and evaluation of student learning in all discipline structures. This shift, and others like it, necessitates a new mapping system, pathway, or plan that can represent how a new paradigm might be conceptualized. Similarly, mapping a learning trajectory may offer insight toward the *what* and *how* of a research plan as a communicative device for developed knowing as one moves between paradigms equipped with new information or insight. In posing the question, “What am I trying to study?”, my aim is to map a plan of action that investigates how knowing is revealed through a series of query points and connecting lines that consider an intent for knowing.

The visual variations within my arts-based inquiry methods, reveal multiple pathways toward knowing, introducing new knowledge reflecting alternative paradigms as constructive, even awakening.

Such a constructive action plan may disclose potential benefits for arts-based inquiry as a generative process of reflexivity and informed praxis for teacher education, for example, emphasizing mapping inquiry as centered in embodied knowing. Could this embodied knowing generate active reflection—reflexivity—as illustrated in Figure 2? Might teacher education become a site for bridging learning across and through texts, each part scaffolding the next, blending their edges until they share a compositional framework of inquiry toward informed knowing? By creating reflexive visual texts, I begin to construct parts of an artist/researcher/teacher identity through overlays of guiding information generating potential pathways of knowing. The overlay information consists of materials and ideas intersected by choices and decisions to articulate intentional praxis. Using the overlays as guides to map a professional identity may reveal an educator who is open, present, and responsive to individual experiences of the self and of others. Within connected praxis, identity formation may be revolving as an emerging paradigm, always already becoming.

## What Helps to Guide Research?

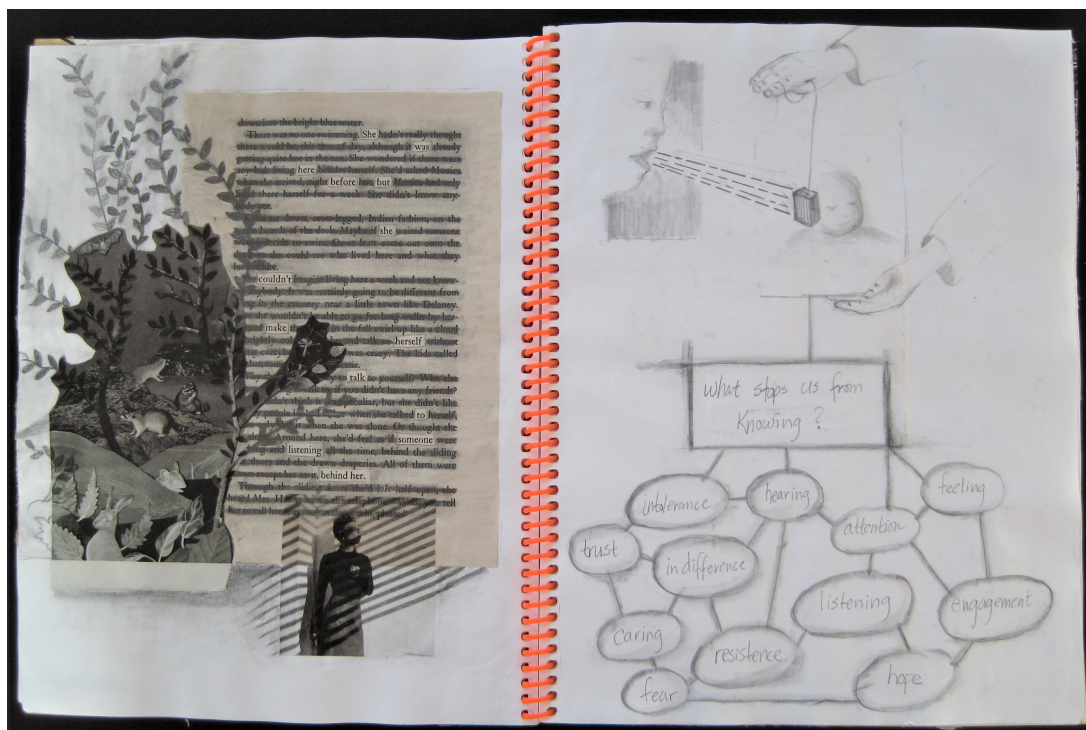


Fig. 3: *Choosing to participate*. April 2018, watercolor, pencil, and collage on paper, 16 x 11 in.

Words heard, seen, written, spoken, all have the potential to instigate response. Whether we make the choice to participate in dialogue is another issue and one we wrestle with in daily dialogic negotiations where we reveal and conceal, express and share, or redact information depending on our level of participatory engagement.

Just like written or spoken language, visual language is learned and taught, enhanced, even mastered, through practice, repetition, and committed application; it can act as a guide toward knowing. In making images or objects, I come to know and understand my experiences within a process of discovery and learning. The tools incorporated during making are often familiar and direct—they allow me to communicate through a known tongue, realized through explicit engagement and use, learned over and through time. The materials selected, reveal a voice or dialect, sometimes soft or subtle and other times stern or focused, for communicating ideas uncovered in a research process. They become the phenomena that reveal and guide my sense of self within an active, creative process as experiential knowing.

Aspects of knowing that extend from participation within dialogic encounters, highlight the intent of Figure 3. The two-page spread illustrates visual and verbal communication across the spiral binding. The left side began with a found poem—a device for constructing prose out of a page of text through redacted mark-making. The found poem describes a failed encounter for potential dialogic interaction with others: “She was here before, but she couldn’t make herself talk to someone listening behind her.” The words selected reinforce the participative qualities of engaged dialogue, or a lack thereof. The overall collage locates the poem between two magazine photographs, one depicting an animal diorama and the other, a woman in a dramatically lit interior. Both photographs supported my use of drawing to extend the features of foliage and of cast shadows to blend background with foreground: the foliage is drawn to cover or connect the lines of redacted text, while the cast shadows mimic the graphite lines used to redact the unessential words on the page. The intention was to equate listening as an overlapping and interconnected process of any dialogic encounter, as depicted more directly, or graphically, in the opposite page posing the question: What stops us from knowing? Here the intent was to show how dialogue may be halted by external forces, suggesting a web of words that may both deter or enhance a sense of knowing, depending on personal subjectivities or experiences. By selecting collage and graphite, my intent aimed at revealing my personal inner dialogue as a dialectic phenomenon.

Phenomenology, according to Hammersley (2012), refers to how we see or know things as related to our experiences or “how people see or experience themselves in their world” (p. 9). The dialogue produced between myself as maker, the object as product, and the viewer as a participant, helps to shape an experience and offer a pathway of knowing within my world. Elliot Eisner (2012) once wrote, “Knowledge creation is a social affair” (p. 11); it is a process of knowing that arts educators can tap into multidisciplinary dialogue between modes of learning, knowing, researching, becoming. Educators can establish lasting partnerships of participatory activity with other education colleagues that dispel and negate learning silos, moving toward interconnected sites of learning that honor ways of knowing in social contexts. Learning in and between disciplines extends knowing into a “transdisciplinary” realm, as Cindy Foley discussed in a TED talk (2014), aiming to reinforce how we come to know and appreciate learning pathways when the potential for understanding includes multiple tracks for knowing content (McGarry, 2018). Content, which may be mere ideas or thoughts surrounding certain phenomena, strives to wrestle a conceptual premise or framework for knowing by thinking across and through embodied knowledge toward becoming.



My reflexive making processes center on deliberation of concepts stemming from a postmodern, experiential phenomenological framework. Contemplation is both vital and significant within a postmodernist approach to knowing, and it has the potential to value ideas or concepts that often surpass finished products (Encyclopedia of Art, 2018). This postmodern practice relies on a method that places value on informed and intended praxis—ideas are considered, researched, and argued, and, the application of making methods stems from an intentional and deliberate code of material knowledge. The works exist on a transmediated plane—traversing written, spoken, and visual languages—all interlinked through the contemplative process. A postmodern philosophy also requires a “multilingual” (Eisner, 2012, p. 10) methodology for revealing a learning process through constructive media manipulation, coupled with levels of subjectivity (Heron & Reason, 1997), recognizing ourselves in context: a reflexive realization of knowing. Within that realization, however, lies a supporting cast of frameworks whose mission it is to ground, sustain, and provide context for how those pathways toward knowing are shaped, formed, and preserved.

### How Are These Guides Supported?



Fig. 4: *Can I see my hand for the trees?* February 2018, mixed media collage on paper, 8 x 9 in.

That’s what makes guides so tricky—you never know if you can trust them and if you do extend that trust, how far are you willing to commit? Sometimes guides impair clarity and obscure the very thing you are trying to see. Other times, they offer a sense of direction, a pathway toward endurance. Choosing to blend methods of guidance can achieve enhanced visibility and even facilitate affirmation and trust in the process—your process.

If I identify within a postmodernist phenomenological framework, how does this stance inform my identity as an arts-based researcher? A postmodern stance suggests an identity as a “meta-symbol through which we construct and reconstruct our version of the world” (Rolling, Jr., 2013, p. 132). Through any process of construction or re/deconstruction, I gain knowledge by experiencing phenomena in my world. Therefore, these philosophical guides appear interlinked, conjoined in an action of assembled meaning making and, as suggested by Michael Crotty (1998), “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (p. 9), potentially through engagement in a knowing process. Constructionism offers a view of reality that is assembled through experiences shaped by interaction with individual societies and cultures that use symbols to name and resource ideas. Arts-based research expands how symbols communicate within a context of ideas assembled to reflect personal, social, and cultural significance.

In assembling the image in Figure 4, the first marks I made on the page were the dots that eventually stippled the shape of a hand. I chose to draw a hand to reference the direct association between mark-making and the artist’s hand; however, as I am right-handed, and the drawing is of a right hand, the drawing might suggest that this is not my hand image on the page, but one drawn from a photograph or from a model. There is a dialectic at play in this image between a depicted reality and an artist’s intent. The image title reflects this dialectic: in asking if I can see my hand for the trees, I highlight the tension at play within the elements in the composition. The title also reflects a play on the familiar saying of, “you can’t see the forest for the trees,” whereby someone so mired in the detail of a situation, neglects the bigger picture at stake (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). By invoking that title, I may be intimating at my technical over-focus on detail while overlooking the composition as a whole. Creating an image with the stippling technique is consuming of both time and attention: it is easy to lose yourself in the meditative process of making tiny dots on a page, while being swept along in the flow. Adding to the dialect of the composition, are the collaged tree images. The tree images are cut from a larger magazine page, removing specific trees from a forest of trees. Because these fragments are printed in a magazine, the printing process creates images from small, color dots that our eyes and brains can understand once the image is printed on a page. If the tree images were magnified, however, their shape and color would reveal those small dots, much like the stippled dots created by my hand in the drawing portion of the composition. Therefore, as a composition, Figure 4 reveals the same technique used to create a visual reality—dots. Constructing my image through my material language, generates a postmodern view of a reality born from different processes of textual knowing as arts-based research.

A postmodernist identity understands knowing through seeing as part of an intertextual experience (Rolling, Jr., 2013), and one that develops, or is constructed, through interaction with and within multiple texts, from varying media sources. This gleaned knowledge and understanding expands to meet the conceptual space it is provided, without restraints on creative, imaginative curiosity, suggesting a pragmatic appreciation for knowing. Though traditional views of pragmatism often reflect the work of John Dewey and Charles Sanders Peirce, more contemporary voices like Richard Rorty’s argue that a role of pragmatism is to free knowledge from formal views that can constrain and limit philosophical imaginings (Ramberg, 2009). Such a view of pragmatism may open understanding of knowledge as a



shifting, emergent phenomena: a becoming or an understanding and appreciation for learning gathered through interaction not mediated or directed by a facilitator or teacher, but more indirectly known through experience (Sternberg & Caruso, 1985). Active engagement in constructing knowledge from experience informs personal values and ethics, creating “tacit knowledge” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 191) that can shape and awaken a shift in thinking, a paradigmatic peep hole into a new encounter. My arts-based research processes, visualized in this article, tacitly address knowledge development by the manipulation of materials stemming from contemplative engagement and decision making, that, in turn, construct meaningful encounters.

## What Does This Mean?

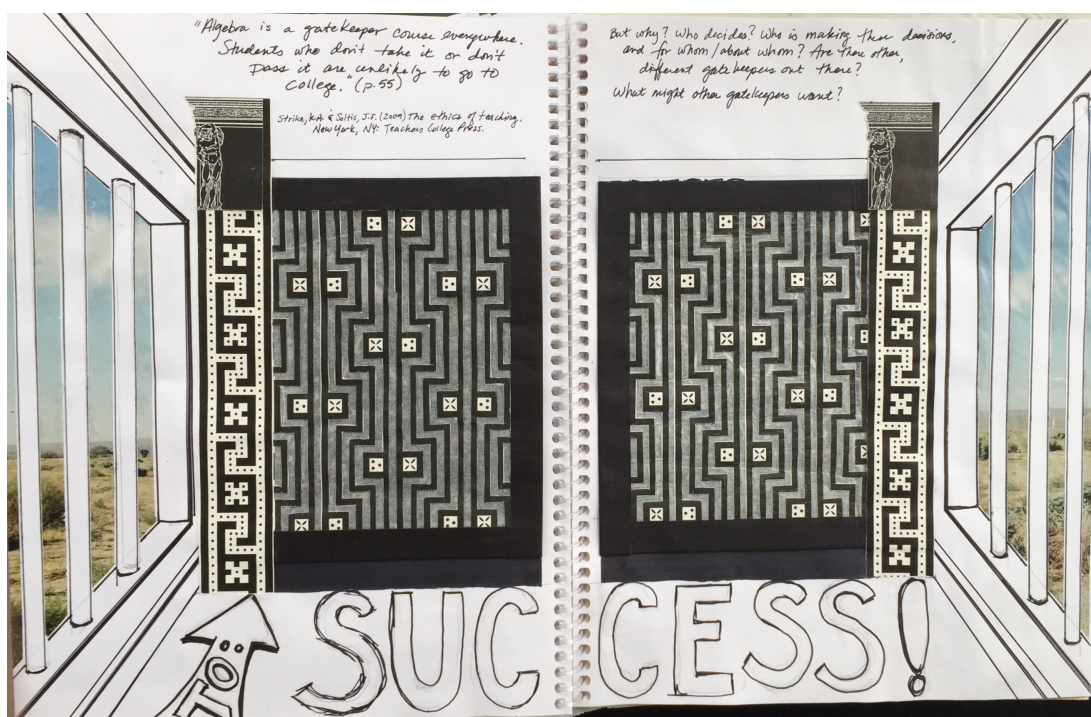


Fig. 5: *Algebra. The gatekeeper to success.* March 2018, mixed media collage on paper (gates open & close), 16 x 11 in.

How did algebra become so powerful, with a godlike presence in our schools? A policy that both allows and restricts entry depending on who approaches the gates, may negate equity. Could there be another way? Another set of gatekeepers perhaps? Of course, there could be, but who tends those gates, beholden to whom, is also worth pondering.

Each new encounter has the potential to foster meaning: new words, ideas, or theories can create opportunities toward knowing. A bank of words (see section 2/Figure 2) as a basis for contemplation in arts-based research can provide a location for intentional meaning to form tacitly. However, if new encounters have a directive that prescribes meaning, any potential to acquire knowing may be restricted or cordoned off, disabling potential learning. The process of interpreting meaning, out of words, theories, or ideas, can enable learning and eventual knowing by ascribing intent through tacit processes of knowing. The words presented for rabbit-hole investigation above, are ideas awaiting formulation and

interpretation. Embedded in those words are texts needing elucidation as reference points in a research agenda. A hermeneutic approach to interpretation that Hammersley (2012) outlines, links interpretivism with the shaping of beliefs and, from there, toward “interpreting texts” (p. 4). Past experiences will undoubtedly underpin interpreted meaning, but new research might affect and further inform previously embodied definitions, expanding the potential for interpretation. As experiences expand, so does context. Context is formed from conditions that develop out of interactions both public and private, in a mingling of symbolic interactionism: meaning is ascribed to things or concepts based on social interactions and as interpreted through individual and social encounters (Blumer, 1969). For example, if an art teacher asked a group of students to draw a chair, the resulting images could represent myriad interpretations of the word “chair,” and if this task were assigned through a global learning platform, then the outcomes may prove even more interpretive and diverse. Human interactions and social constructs give meaning to ideas, things, and places, and individuals bring understanding as developed through engagement within social groups. Within social interactionism, meaning, language, and thinking all combine to help shape how individuals come to know or to assert connotation to the objects and ideas they encounter (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbiken, 2009); social interaction acts as a building block for interpretation and meaning making. As described by Aksan and colleagues (2009) in their study and presentation on symbolic interaction theory:

meaning is created as a result of the interaction between people and meaning allows people to produce some of the facts forming the sensory world. These facts are related to how people form meaning. Thus, fact consists of the interpretation of various definitions. (p. 903)

Interpretation of facts, however, can result in a misrepresentation of reality if what one is interpreting as *facts* are opinions or beliefs meant to stoke a soapbox position, an entrenched canon, or a situation based in personal dogma, feelings, or associations. Some revisionist history, as seen in textbook publications, aimed at quieting accountability, for example, can result in the presentation of ideologies or political biases as truth or fact. If the social interaction is diverse, however, then an interpretation of sign and symbol systems stands a better chance of ascribing truthful meaning to encounters. This, in turn, can provide opportunities toward growth and appreciation for the interconnectedness of symbols, ideas, or connotations and context.

Interconnected and intertextual learning can happen across multiple sign systems or when literacy is shared through a transdisciplinary blending of symbolic interaction. Discipline-specific language learning is critical for appreciating distinct vocabularies that support and define individual contexts for learning, such as science-, art-, and mathematics-specific vocabulary. The processes for understanding and knowing the language or vocabulary of a field is vital for interaction within a discipline and between the participants engaged in that discipline. For example, language arts have traditionally focused on verbal pathways for teaching and learning in that field and tend to construct learning through a “verbocentric” (Leland & Harste, 1994, p. 337) lens, rather than building a transdisciplinary method of learning, engaging multiple sign systems as pathways for knowing. Fostering a methodology of literacy that encompasses and supports investigation within and between literacies can characterize what Leland and Harste describe as an idea of “whole literacy” (p. 344), or a process of becoming that is mediated contextually via a multisystemic approach to literacy.

Coming to know language based on signs from various textual sources, can provide multiple entry points for engagement with texts that develop out of experimentation, leading toward a process of subjective knowing.

Subjective knowing is a perceptive process of learning that Heron and Reason (1997) define as “critical subjectivity” along the following pathways: “experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical” (p. 280). Subjective knowledge originates in experiences (with others, materials, processes) and reveals itself in a form symbolizing that experience (visually, dialogically, aurally). The presentation of the experiences and the demonstration of understanding through experiences completes the critically subjective encounter. It is in the sharing or dissemination phases of gleaned knowledge where impacts toward paradigm change can grow, not only for individual growth and development but for social growth as well. This process is supported by critical research theory and, according to Hammersley (2012), this theory endeavors to examine sociocultural histories as constructs leading to “social division” (p. 7). By revealing sites of division, this theory aims to locate “causes and consequences” (p. 7) of inequity that can be addressed through action that may lead toward raised social justice consciousness. Such an awareness could occur through interconnected dialogue, supported by multi-textual interaction that reveals context as a bridge between ways of knowing through dialogic encounters. Building on the tenets of *dialogism* as defined and articulated by Bahktin (Holquist, 2002), critical theory and research aims to alter and reshape traditional dialogue from a hierarchical perspective to one emphasizing shared use, equity, and participatory input, where voices are heard and recognized equally: enhanced critical consciousness (Freire, 2011) through critical subjectivity as shared by means of utterances and interpretations.

But what happens when there is a lack of equity forged by hierarchical means? In Figure 5, I reflected on a text passage by Strike and Soltis (2009) where the authors discuss a case study involving a student struggling to pass high school algebra. In that passage, algebra is described as the gateway course to master for success (p. 55), especially for entry into college. As an arts-based researcher and educator, I wondered why this was the case and considered the potential inequities that might resonate within such a pronouncement. I deliberated on my own personal struggles with algebra and used that reflection to imagine a visual compositional response.

In *Algebra. The gatekeeper to success*, I imagined a space, a room with barred windows, created in a one-point perspective, leading to a set of gates. The interior space is drawn in black pen with cutout sections between the bars to reveal a collage of a vast landscape outside the room. On the floor leading to the gates are the words, “to success!” written in pen, and above the gates is the passage from Strike and Soltis (left side), accompanied by my research queries (right side). The gates are constructed of paper with sections cut away and a piece of tracing paper laid behind. A column adorns each side of the gates, bearing an antiquity-like figure supporting a Doric-like column top. What Figure 5 cannot reveal, however, is that the gates in this composition open on an image of the word “Algebra” written in chalk on a black surface, surrounded by various algebraic equations. The gates open, not onto the vast landscape as depicted through the barred windows, but onto algebra, in word and in problem.

As an arts-based research process, my intent in creating this image was to both reveal hierarchies in place in educational systems and the confinement that such hierarchies place on individual learners. That, in turn, led to the following questions: What policies and decisions, made over time, granted the

gatekeeper position to algebra? Who made the policies and decisions, and whom are these policies and decisions made for? Perhaps not all learners that arrive at these gates approach them from the same equitable circumstances, as argued in the theories of Paulo Freire: oppressive criteria that inherently disadvantage some groups over others. This image postulates questions related to dialogue regarding social division in educational settings. It is an attempt to illustrate a research process based on visualizing research questions for deeper reflection and symbolism: a first step toward critical subjectivity, reflexively locating myself within a process of coming to know.

This section and the accompanying image in Figure 5, pondered several theoretical frameworks for constructing meaning, including interpretation, symbolic interaction, critical subjectivity, dialogue, language, and utterances. These frameworks or ideas influence pathways toward knowing that nest within a process of being, coined by Bakhtin as “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981; Ball & Freedman, 2004), relating to the development of knowing and understanding over time, never fixed, always arriving. If a process of knowing exists along such a continuum, and becoming is a state of renewal and reemergence, what might this progression suggest for an artist/researcher/teacher seeking a path toward embodied knowing?

### Where Might These Meanderings Lead?

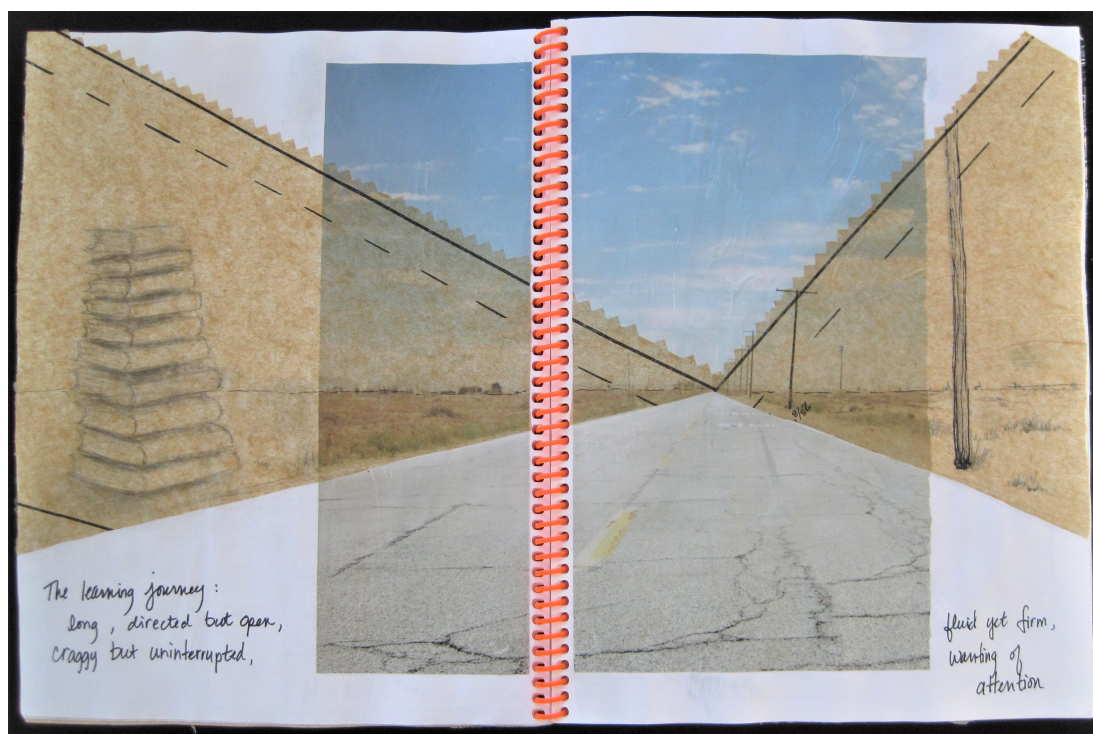


Fig. 6: *The learning journey (which way is Knowing?)*. March 2018, mixed media collage on paper, 16 x 11 in.

Setting off down a path will cause undulations, disturbances to flow no matter how predictable your intended path appears. Your response to the shifts in terrain can enlighten and illuminate your journey, revealing a reflexive practitioner of mindful research praxis.

The path to now has been long, eventful, and productive, though still becoming. In sharing this story, as an artist/researcher/teacher, my aim was to express literal and figurative connections to a way of knowing gleaned through arts-based research and reflexive praxis. Along the way, I hoped to illustrate that knowing can come from an iterative process of reflection that may alter paradigms, but through alteration, new or emergent pathways may develop, leading toward embodied knowing. My original map, once adequate, needs continual modification, revision, and reassessment: a revised plan revealing evidence of change. Invested within this change process, any adjustments become a reflexive act of acquiring knowledge while in motion (Schön, 1983), acting with and within that knowledge to uncover and reveal a self that is ready for understanding, for growth, and for awareness.

As I traverse a journey through these experiences, the route forward appears less chaotic, and there may even be the semblance of a strategy to navigate the terrain, a map sifting and realigning in real time. I am the bricoleur of my experiences (Lévi Strauss, 1962) as they develop out of a newly realized paradigm of actionable knowledge. Critical reflection and subjectivity, shared encounters, and awareness in practical action provide suitable boundaries for resistance and persistence. Reflection demands careful attention to practice, to be mindful of personal bias or potential prejudice that can stymie progress: reflection cannot only exist in the abstract, it needs to be made real and, in doing so, make it tangible, evidentiary, and committed (Freire, d'Ambrosio, & Mendonça, 1997; hooks, 1993).

As a researcher, reading academic research articles or studies is an essential practice, though, as an arts-based researcher my confidence level fluctuates from comfort and ease within qualitative research readings, to discomfort and unease within quantitative readings, especially those quantitative studies replete with ample statistical information and related equations. The image in Figure 6 began with a magazine image showing a paved road receding into a vanishing point within a vast and barren, big-sky landscape. I chose to accentuate the vanishing point with triangles cut from dress pattern paper and then completed the photographic image with my own drawn imagery, including a pile of books, representing knowledge, on the side of the road. Though the road appears paved, it is far from smooth. This notion, the cracked and jagged road, often full of potholes, is how I have always visualized reading quantitative articles: the statistical equations, numbers, tables, and the daunting number of citations interrupt, deter, and even stop me from freely reading the text. The road, then, becomes less easy to navigate, less willing to reveal its secrets or findings. However, I did conceive of the image as a pathway toward knowing, and though the process may require me to slow down, seek assistance, or take a break, the road does go on and I can choose to commit to its fluctuations in a reflexive inquiry process.

Visual and experimental inquiry processes can shape the abstract toward form, design, and consciousness. Arts-based research and exploration can continue to map future terrain as meaningful contributions to the academic canon, while supporting an iterative learning process as a location for understanding within reflexive praxis. Reflecting, again, upon Dewey (1920), I desire to work as an “experimental thinker” (Simpson, 2006, p. 45) incorporating generative ideas into a learning process and to strive toward “educational agency” as a “source of teaching and learning, whether intentional or otherwise” (p. 143). To be a source and resource, a well, for teaching and learning, is where I am headed as a researcher and arts-based practitioner: deliberate in action, word, and habitual mindfulness.



Maxine Greene (1978) considered the idea of reflexivity as an action in communication with a landscape of other learners, in dialogic praxis as teachers:

Teaching involves deliberate and purposeful action carried on by a live human being who can reflect upon what he or she is doing, who is not an automaton, but self-conscious and self-aware. Teaching involves such a person in interactions with (or dialogue with) a variety of other live human beings. These others are, by means of the dialogue, to be enabled to learn how to learn. Or, to put it somewhat differently, they are to be enabled consciously to enter into the learning process, to choose to become members of a particular learning community. (p. 247)

Choosing to participate as a reflexive artist/researcher/teacher within a community of other educators as learners, or any others willing to become through learning, is an intentional activity as a praxis of becoming and knowing. The image in Figure 6 shows a distant point, unmarked and out-of-view. This is an intentional act: revealing that the process of knowing and becoming continues onward, beckoning an arrival that is always a bit further in the distance. My arts-based reflection illustrations reveal my process for imagining what research and a researcher might look like, claiming an identity imbued with reflexivity and embodied awareness through knowing and eventual becoming.

## Note

1. All images are copyright of the author and produced in studio practice by the author.

## References

- Aksan, Ni., Kisac, B., Aydin, M., & Demirbuken, S. (2009). Proceedings from world conference on educational sciences: Symbolic interaction theory. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1, 902–904.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Translated by M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Ball, A.F., & Freedman, S.W. (2004). *Bakhtinian perspectives on language, literacy, and learning*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentis Hall, Inc.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2018). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/can-t-see-the-wood-for-the-trees>
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Delacruz, E., & Dunn, P. (1996). The evolution of discipline-based art education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 30(3), 67–82. doi:10.2307/3333322
- Dewey, J. (1920). *Reconstruction in philosophy*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, Inc.
- Eisner, E. (2012). Art and knowledge. In A.L. Coles & G. Knowles (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 3–13). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Encyclopedia of Art. (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/postmodernism.htm>
- Freire, P. (2011). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Freire, P., d'Ambrosio, U., & Mendonça, M.d.C. (1997). A conversation with Paulo Freire. *For the Learning of Mathematics*, 17(3), 7–10.
- Girl Scouts of the United States of America. (1955). *Girl scout handbook: Intermediate edition*. New York, NY: The Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.
- Glass, M.R. (2015). Teaching critical reflexivity in short-term international field courses: Practices and problems. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 39(4), 554–567, doi:10.1080/03098265.2015.1084610
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hammersley, M. (2012). Methodological paradigms in educational research. British Educational Research Association on-line resource. Retrieved from <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/methodological-paradigms-in-educational-research>
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 274–294.
- Holquist, M. (2002). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. London: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1993). bell hooks speaking about Paulo Freire: The man, his work. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard (Eds.), *Paulo Freire: A critical reader* (pp. 146–154). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Knabb, K. (Trans.). (1995). Theory of the dérive by Guy Debord. Retrieved from <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>
- Kuhn, T. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Leland, C.H., & Harste, J.C. (1994). Multiple ways of knowing: Curriculum in a new key. *Language Arts*, 71(5), 337–345.
- Lévi Strauss, C. (1962). *The savage mind*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McGarry, K. (2018). Making partnerships with STEAM. *Art Education*, 71(2), 28–34.
- Ramberg, B. (Spring 2009). Richard Rorty. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (Ed.). Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rorty/>
- Rolling, Jr., J.H. (2013). *Arts-based research*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.



Simpson, D.J. (2006). *John Dewey: Primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Sternberg, R.J., & Caruso, D.R. (1985). Practical modes of knowing. In E. Eisner (Ed.), *Learning and teaching: The ways of knowing* (pp. 133–158). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Strike, K.A., & Soltis, J.F. (2009). *The ethics of teaching* (5th edition). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

TED. (2014). Cindy Foley: Teaching art or teaching to think like an artist? [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/ZcFRfjb2ONk>.



**Karen McGarry** is a visual artist/educator presently pursuing a PhD at the University of Cincinnati (UC), OH, in Educational Studies. She holds an MFA with a minor in Women's Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago and an MAAE with licensure from UC. Prior professional experience includes K-12 visual arts and humanities classroom teaching and adjunct experience with instruction in teacher education at UC, California State University Long Beach, California Institute of the Arts, and the Art Academy of Cincinnati.

# Alleviating Anxiety Through the Abecedarian: On Supporting New Doctoral Students

Amber Moore

## Abstract

This paper seeks to offer insights and gentle suggestions for higher education leaders, particularly those teaching and supervising new doctoral students. Graduate students experience stress and anxiety, making entering the academic sphere an often emotionally taxing move. In response, a great deal of research examines how university faculty might ease this transition into a particularly intimidating, rigorous space. As such, this poetic offering invites education leaders who interact with new doctoral students to consider an abecedarian written in the spirit of capturing the potential needs and wants of early scholars navigating their PhD programs at the beginning of the journey.

## On the Anxiety and Anguish of Starting Graduate Work

I entered graduate school somewhat naively; like many fellow students, “The dreams of a magnificent future [lay] before [me], and [I could] almost touch the majesty” (Di Pierro, 2017, p. 24). However, during the first year of my PhD program studying language and literacy education, rather than basking in “majesty,” I was tormented by anxiety. It was a layered, painful experience, which I have spent considerable time reflecting on; I’ve struggled with both imposter syndrome (Moore, 2018a), and learning about the importance of humility and self-care during a PhD journey (Moore, 2018b). Unfortunately, my struggle is not unique; much recent scholarship has demonstrated that anxiety, stress, and depression are common among university students (Bazrafkan, Shokrpour, Yousefi, & Yamani, 2016). In fact, graduate students are notorious for mental health struggles (see, for example, Baptista, 2013; Bazrafkan et al., 2016; Brown, 2013; Di Pierro, 2017; Swartz & Kay, 2009). One student in Bazrafkan and colleagues’ (2016) study admitted, “I had never experienced so much stress and anxiety in all my life. All systems of my body were disturbed. I was always crying because, I felt... I’m dying” (p. 236).

Many refer to this common problem as the “campus mental health crisis” (Swartz & Kay, 2009). As such, with this paper, I aim to turn my attention to how early scholars’ experiences might inform established scholars who interact with graduate students, especially as either their course work instructors and/or supervisors and members of their doctoral committees. How new doctoral students are attended to by seasoned scholars is significant, particularly through mentoring (see, for example, Cumings Mansfield, Welton, & Young, 2010; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Holdaway, Deblois, & Winchester, 1995; Mullen, Fish, & Hutinger, 2010; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014; Yob & Crawford, 2012); as Felder (2010) asserts, “Doctoral student development... is a process where faculty members can have tremendous influence to enhance the likelihood of success” (p. 455).

Strategies such as empathetic mentorship are important, and so, I offer an invitation to education leaders in postsecondary institutions who interact with new doctoral students to consider an abecedarian written in the spirit of capturing the potential needs and wants of those navigating the early stages of their PhD programs.

## A Case for a Poetic Inquiry Into Graduate Anxiety

Many faculty members in higher education interact with and influence graduate students daily. From program directors to teaching professors, academics play significant and varied roles. While this poetic inquiry is aimed to help provide insight for individuals in all the different supporting roles, particularly for new doctoral students, perhaps the supervisory role is the most impactful, and as such, this project is especially geared towards these leaders. According to Watts (2008), “The supervisor is understood to be the academic assigned to guide the doctoral student in all aspects of the research process; the extent to which this will also involve pastoral care of the student will differ across institutions” (p. 370). However, she goes on to acknowledge that within this dynamic, “it is reasonable to expect some element of empathy work” (p. 370). Empathy is “the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person” (Kohut, 1984, as cited in Evans, 2016, p. 44), and such potential empathy is the central component being explored in this poetic inquiry with its power to begin the process of “connect[ing] empathetically and understand[ing]... complex psychosocial processes” (McCulliss, 2013, p. 84). As such, how an established academic might exercise an ethic of care and consideration when entering into either an interaction with or a relationship with a doctoral student will be explored. Poetic inquiry is used as a dynamic methodology to employ chiefly because it espouses “living poetically” (Leggo, 2005) and offers potential for fostering well-being and emphasizes the transformative power of exercising empathy while investigating lived experiences.

Poetic inquiry is understood to be a number of different things at the same time; Prendergast (2009) has chronicled its vastness, uncovering 40 different terms that describe it and three central categories of the methodology: *vox theoria*, *vox autobiographia/autoethnographia*, and *vox participare*. For the purposes of this paper, this poetic inquiry belongs to the category of *vox theoria*, “poems [that are] inquiry itself” (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxii). With this *vox theoria* inquiry, I especially follow in Leggo’s (2005) example, and am inspired by his use of poetic inquiry as a means to ruminate on “the poetic possibilities for conceiving and fostering the wellbeing of teacher [candidates]” (p. 440). Within the field of education, many researchers use poetic inquiry to explore dynamics of learning (see, for example, Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009; Gorlich, 2016; Meyer, 2008; Patrick, 2016; Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo, & Irwin, 2009; Wiebe & Margolin, 2012; Wiebe, Snowbar, & Walsh, 2017, just to name a few), demonstrating that particularly in education research, “we should always be looking for new rhetorics,” promoting “the utility and value of poetry as a dynamic rhetoric for educational research and practice” (Leggo, 2005, p. 443). In doing such work, Leggo describes the power of “living poetically,” and like his concern for Bachelor of Education students, I am similarly concerned for new doctoral students, and am curious about what seasoned academics can do for them. Poetic inquiry is especially appropriate for

investigating issues of support and mentorship because ultimately, poetry as “an intentional process can help... the audience of the poems to reach praxis or the process of being moved to action, to affect change, and to *better the next experience* [my emphasis]” (Killingsworth Roberts, Brasel, & Crawford, 2014, p. 168). Poetry “presents, and is a catalyst for, a window into the heart of the human experience” (McCulliss, 2013, p. 83). It is exactly this window of experience(s) that I attempt to tap into here; through the abecedarian poetic inquiry, I wish to tap at 26 “windows” as possible entry points for insight and understanding in the graduate school experience because like Wiebe and Margolin (2012), I also found that, in “each moment of looking back... a new moment of understanding” (p. 28) emerged. Perhaps by exploring this abecedarian, more seasoned academics might remember, or gain new knowledge about, how some students might be coping with their early time in academia.

### **“A” Is for Anxiety: The Abecedarian as a Poetic Entry Point**

The abecedarian, a poetic form using the alphabetic sequence as a formal structure, also known as an abecedarium, abecedary, or alphabet acrostic (Ardam, 2014, p. 138), was introduced to me by Carl Leggo during a course on theory and research in the teaching of written composition in my language and literacy education PhD program. He suggested this poetic form as a method for reflecting on the endless ways to think about text and recognize emerging forms. For example, he described the “movel,” a book written *after* the film, as one he had just learned of (Dr. C. Leggo, personal communication, September 21, 2016). Then, he instructed us to write collaborative abecedarians as a way to poetically and generatively engage with thinking about text. My first thought? “A” is for “anxiety.”

As mentioned, my first year as a PhD student was marked with overwhelming fear and stress. Much like one of my favourite poets, Sharon Olds (1996) chronicles in her piece, “Early abecedarian,” I also felt like “each day, I tried to read/ the world” (p. 121) of academia to find my place. Having to work with my peers, all of whom I was certain were far more intelligent and capable than myself, was certainly anxiety inducing. During the activity Dr. Leggo set out for us, I immediately offered to be the “recorder” to write the poem as we worked, in order to contribute without actually having to say too much. As the poem formed, A through Z, about all kinds of texts—epitaphs, fragments, guerrilla poetry, tweets, utterances—I realized the constraint of the abecedarian was comforting; this poem felt like a useful tool to “find words ‘that work’” (Galvin & Todres, 2009, p. 311).

Although Cooley (2014) writes in “At the window”: “what could be worse/ than to begin with “A”” (p. 5), this poetic inquiry begins with A to offer an abecedarian on how higher educators might access entry points in an effort to artfully contribute to scholarship on supporting graduate students. For this poetic inquiry, I draw from a number of personal texts I wrote in the first year of my PhD, including my journal, personal calendar, to-do lists, and text messages where I was discussing my school experiences. Like Piirto (2002), “As a writer, I have kept... personal journals, which could, in the lingo of qualitative research, be construed as field notes” (p. 436). I mined these texts to remind myself of moments where I was learning about my wants and needs as a student, and reflected on a variety of best practices that leaders around me employed to help me feel supported and welcomed. In this way, I hope that this poem

“allows the heart to lead the mind rather than the reverse” (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 3), as I put forward a heartfelt offering of poetic experiences that might help inform academics on some of what novice academics might be yearning for.

### **An Abecedarian for Alleviating Anxiety**

**A**n anecdote, please, right away. Our hearts are beating; sweat is beading behind the hairlines, slipping down our backs like children inching away from strangers, returning to safety behind their mother’s legs. At first, we might want to be seen and not heard; we stammer, laugh too loudly, and it rushes out in embarrassing bursts, smelling like our third coffee. Share an early story about your academic beginnings, or better yet- missteps. Give us time to calm down and suck a Mentos.

**B**e present, if you can. We notice when you’re distracted by emails, texts from your kid asking for a ride home later, or your growling stomach; it’s 3pm and you haven’t touched that damp egg salad sandwich that’s crouching at the bottom of the beach bag you now use as a purse. You’re clearly so accomplished and so busy, but just know that we re-wrote the email to set up this meeting four times. Our partner yelled at us when we asked (again) which closing salutation to use: “Best care”? “Warm regards”? “Warmly”? Bleary-eyed and dangerously pre-coffee, we have been stared at with an incredulous expression and asked *when did you become so damn insecure?* So please, eat that sandwich in front of us and remember that we are attuned to everything you do. You are our academic hero.

**C**urtail expectations. We do not exactly know what the hell we’re doing here. Some of us came because we were scared of living with ourselves if we had not gone for it. It got morbid, thinking about how we would feel if we were at the end of our life and filled with regret for staying a high school English teacher two decades too long because it was safe, with a nice pension. We worried that teaching *Macbeth* dozens of times might make us hate Shakespeare like the kids do, that we would become one of those bitter shells in the staff room bitching about teenagers over stale jelly doughnuts. We don’t have it all figured out yet even though we’re not that young anymore, but we did realize that we want to demand more of ourselves. We’re excited about where that fire might take us, and you’re fanning our flames. Thank you for that.

**D**o not bother reviewing the syllabus in great detail during our first class. We read it very carefully before we even signed up. Just ask if we have questions – that is where the magic is.

**E**vade requests for extensions. This might be in your practice already. We need deadlines like:

- a. A millennial needs a good job with benefits.
- b. Hillary needs a rage room.
- c. Trump needs to disable Twitter.
- d. And so on.

**Foster a community with us** – an “intellectual community of practice” (Stroude et al., 2014, p. 44).

Invite colleagues in to guest lecture our courses; we especially love seeing academic friendships on display, so haul in that brilliant feminist scholar that you play racquetball with twice a month. Brief them on our research interests and make sure they are happy to open their office doors to us too. Use us like a talking stick and gently encourage us to blossom unless, of course, we are cocky. Nip that in the bud.

**Goal-set with us.** It is a productive *and* poetic practice; Emily Dickinson writes: “in every human nature/ a goal,/ admitted scarcely to itself,” describing goals as a kind of “brittle heaven” (Dickinson as cited in Petrino, 2001, p. 138). “Brittle” is an excellent characterization of many graduate students, so engaging us in a transparent chat about your practice with teaching and supporting us is helpful:

It is... critical that faculty members look introspectively into their advising processes to ensure that they are humane, timely, efficient, productive, compassionate, and encouraging – while at the same time, safeguarding academic integrity and standards.

(Di Pierro, 2017, p. 26)

**Have a meeting with us in a coffee shop.** Our blood already has concerning caffeine content and who does not want an earl grey and lavender muffin while discussing a reach-for-the-stars research grant? As Hemer (2012) suggests:

Cafés can be seen as a ‘third place’ and in this capacity lend supervisory meetings a neutral and levelling atmosphere. Supervision over coffee is consistent with newer models or styles of supervision, which emphasise mentoring and collaboration rather than expert-disciple models. (p. 836)

Further to this point, Sameshima (2017) writes in her poem about “how to become a better learner and maker of love” – that is, a “seeking [of] relation and understanding” (p. 147) – the following:

HIGH BID 5: My Mentor

My mentor eats with me in the same place we’ve met  
For more than a decade – a place others meet with him  
He gives me a lift, lifts my work, and holds my words

Sameshima’s speaker goes on to describe how they are “in love,” and while we don’t want this with you, we could definitely go for some of this lovely lifting and holding of words business.

**If we are part-time, we are fully stressed;** we have “fractured” student identities (Watts, 2008, p. 369).

**Joke** around a little bit or get catty about a grand theorist we are intimidated by. Tell us about that time you met that scholar who largely factored into your own dissertation; shake your head and warn us, “never meet your heroes.” He was fifteen minutes late to his own keynote and was “a real ass” when you scored a few moments one-on-one. Describe how you flinch when you have no choice but to cite him now. Dark humour will go over well. Remember this question: “Are you a mentor? Or do you *do* mentoring?” (Barcus & Crowley, 2012, p. 75).

**Kindly**, tell us to put our goddamn phones away during class.

**Lie** selectively about items such as: how much sleep you get, how cruel reviewers can be, optimism and job prospects, and all lights at the ends of all tunnels.

**Manage** our expectations. Faculty who interact with us, particularly our advisors, “evaluate[] and uphold[] the academic bar of the doctoral degree” (Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016, p. 28). No, we will not get that grant. Yes, this draft needs a lot of work. Unfortunately, that journal does not value arts-based research as much as it should – they are just not there yet. When no one comes to your conference presentation, remember it’s because it was scheduled during lunch, where they are serving sliders – sliders!

**Notice:** dark/bloodshot/glassy/empty eyes. Notice the too early/too late hours we send emails. Notice the title of the first publication that we send out for review because we agonized over it. Notice our progress. Notice our chewed, picked over and bloody fingernails. Notice significant weight loss and gain. Notice pill bottles that fall out of our bags when we dig for a pen. Notice if we stop mentioning our partners. Notice if we look pregnant but avoid staring; as Squillante (2008) describes of teaching as a pregnant graduate student: “They watch my belly every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11:15 to 12:05” (p. 20). How unsettling is that.

**Offer** us opportunities to take a closer look at how you work and who you are as an academic. What are your writing habits? How do you handle rejection? Do you use iCal or do post-its bloom on the walls of your home office? Do you kick box? Do you drink green tea? Are you a foodie? How do you get yourself to the place where you do what you do as an expert in the field – all the stuff other than reading heaps of expensive books? Remember that “cross sharing elements of one’s personal life, opinions, and activities between mentees and mentors is not only condoned, it is encouraged” (Yob & Crawford, 2012, p. 44).

**Pay** close attention to international students. As Cree (2012) recalls:

When this student arrived from Bangladesh, he initially had neither a computer nor a desk to sit at (although both are routinely provided to PhD students, they were not immediately available to him). I was not one of his designated supervisors, but I was aware that he was



hanging about the office, unhappy and insecure. I had recently bought a new computer, so I offered him my old computer. I then helped him to get settled at a desk. This all seemed a tiny amount of support on my part, but was hugely important to him. He brought me a gift the next day... (p. 456).

**Q**uestion the nature of academic discourse alongside us. For example, Paré (2017) pointedly/poignantly asks: "... is the academy stuck on single-authored, print-based texts while the rest of the world has gone collaborative and digital?" (p. 408). Rebel with us.

**R**ecognize our differences and honour them. A few items to see and understand include:

- "racial and ethnic differences... exist in the presentation of mental health problems and the utilization of mental health services" (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006, p. 249);
- "ethnic minority students usually more sensitized to a lack of respect and to microaggressions and are in a very vulnerable position to be able to speak up in the moment" (Barcus & Crowley, 2012, p. 76). In fact, many describe their academic environment as a "chilly climate" (Boyer & Butner, 2011, p. 32). For instance, Felder (2010) asserts, "For many African American doctoral students, progress towards a degree completion is a journey wrought with obstacles" (p. 455). Ethnic minority students also represent understudied groups in terms of experiences in higher education; as an example, only "a few scholars have drawn attention to Latina educational needs and experiences along the academic life course" (Espino, 2016, p. 186);
- "[Indigenous graduate students] usually do not have mentorship or guidance from an Indigenous faculty member or ally" (Pidgeon et al., 2014, p. 3):
- like ethnic minority students, LGBTQ students also "typically endure microassaults" and "microinsults" (Hawley, 2015, p. 3);
- "higher education professionals are in a unique role to help open doors to opportunity for students with disabilities by providing them with accepting, supportive, and life-changing environments that help them thrive" (Cimini, 2017, p. 44); and
- "for women at the beginning of their doctoral studies, mentoring must be flexible and take into consideration aspirations, fears, experiences, and expectations of young researchers" (Stroude et al., 2015, p. 49).

And so on. Our differences are important and significantly inform our experiences at the university so being mindful of this while you support us is so appreciated. Thank you.

**S**tart writing with us, if you can. We know that we need to start publishing, like, yesterday.

Alvarez, Bonnet, and Kahn (2014) argue that the "publish or perish" dilemma "proves to be just as resonant and anxiety-provoking for graduate students who plan to [enter] academia" (p. 2) as it is for faculty members. However, if we write alongside experts like you, we will be in so much better shape.

Take us outside for a class or meeting. After all, “there are many commonalities between graduate school and packing it into the wilderness” (Barcus & Crowley, 2012, p. 78). Sit us down in the campus rose garden or under an oak older than both of our ages combined. A bench will do but cross-legged on the grass would be epic. Initial small talk about the weather goes over better here because we can *feel it*. If you’re really in a generous mood, let’s go for a walk in the woods; apparently forest bathing, or Shinrin-yoku (Tsunetsugu, Park, & Miyazaki, 2010) is good for heart health (see, for example, Ideno et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2016).

Upgrade your software. We should ensure we are digitally compatible so that we both don’t want to pull out our hair (assuming we have any at this point in our lives). How long does it take to get this PhD anyway? We age decades in a year here – our hair is thinning.

Validate our feelings when we:

- a. cry in front of you;
- b. Actually, that’s all. This will be a humiliating moment(s) for us. Throw us a bone even though we really need to pull it together – now. We are biting our lip bloody. We know that we need to act more professionally, but Foucault has trampled our spirit somewhat lately. Or Vygotsky. Or Derrida. Hell, all of them. They did a little dance and left mud everywhere, staining us. Have mercy.

Watch for an ambivalent attitude – we are not like that. We care too much not too little. Something must be up.

**X** – out some time in your schedule to attend any of our first presentations, if you can make it. Maybe we are participating on a panel discussion, giving a talk at our department graduate symposium, or we are brave enough to ‘dance our PhD,’ or train ourselves for the 3MT – the dreaded three-minute thesis competition for some extra cash to spend on Amazon Prime. Especially if you have encouraged us to apply, or wrote a reference for us, please show up early on – you will likely be one of three faces we know in the crowd. And you will not throw us a hardball question either – will you? Please do not. X that out too. Save those questions for the defence, at the end of the road.

Yes, we need to talk money. It is (likely) our constant concern; we live in expensive rentals near the university with horrendous landlords who have more money than morals. Wedding invitations are sweat-inducing. Can I wear a dress I already own? How many people that will be there have already seen me in said dress? Will it fit anymore? *Damn* those campus cinnamon buns. When we wine-shop, we check two numbers: (1) the alcohol content and (2) the price, expecting a ‘robust’ relationship between them both. Opening up space for us to have an open and honest dialogue about dollars is healthy and necessary because “literature

on financial support for graduate students is limited” (Boyer & Butner, 2011, p. 23), so we do not even have any peer-reviewed opinions to peruse.

Zone out from our progress regularly. We have to be able to stand alone sometimes and you are busy as hell. We get that. Actually, we do not; we do not have any real grasp on what it is like being a working professor. The pressures must be endless. We need to operate like we are last on your list; often, we might have to be. And that is okay too. Thank you for having us on your list at all – we are thrilled to be under your wing.

## References

- Alvarez, B., Bonnet, J. L., & Kahn, M. (2014). Publish, not perish: Supporting graduate students as aspiring authors. *Journal of Librarianship & Scholarly Communication*, 2(3), 1–12.
- Ardam, J. (2014). The ABCs of conceptual writing. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 51(1), 132–158.
- Baptista, A.V. (2013). ‘With all my heart’: Mature students’ emotions while doing a research-based PhD. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 114, 914–918.
- Barcus, C. G., & Crowley, S. L. (2012). Training ethnic minority graduate students in a white man’s program: Don’t get bucked off! *Journal of Multicultural Counselling and Development*, 40(2), 70–81.
- Bazrafkan, L., Shokrpour, N., Yousefi, A., & Yamani, N. (2016). Management of stress and anxiety among PhD students during dissertation writing: A qualitative study. *The Health Care Manager*, 35(3), 231–240.
- Boyer, P. G., & Butner, B. (2011). Advancing or hindering the next generation? A look at financial aid for minority graduate students. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 41(2), 22–35.
- Brown, P. (2013). Loneliness at the bench: Is the PhD experience as emotionally taxing as it is mentally challenging? *European Molecular Biology Organization*, 14(5), 405–409.
- Butler-Kisber, L., & Stewart, M. (2009). The use of poetry clusters in poetic inquiry. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. 3–12). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, M. (2009). The craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in educational research. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. 13–30). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Cimini, M. D. (2017). Understanding disability: The psychological and sociocultural experience. In D. S. Anderson (Ed.), *Further wellness issues for higher education: How to promote student health during and after college* (pp. 41–58). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Cooley, D. (2014). *Abecedarium*. Canada: University of Alberta Press.
- Cree, V. E. (2012). ‘I’d like to call you my mother’: Reflections on supervising international PhD students in social work. *Social Work Education*, 31(4), 451–464.

- Cummings Mansfield, K., Welton A., L, P. L., & Young, M. D. (2010). The lived experiences of female educational leadership doctoral students. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(6), 727–740.
- Di Pierro, M. (2017). Mental health and the graduate school experience. *The Journal for Quality & Participation*, 40(1), 24–27.
- Espino, M. M. (2016). “Get an education in case he leaves you”: Consejos for Mexican women PhDs. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(2), 183–205.
- Evans, K. (2016). A/R/T(therapist)-ography: Examining the weave. In K. T. Galvin & M. Prendergast (Eds.), *Poetic Inquiry II – seeing, caring, understanding: Using poetry as and for inquiry* (pp. 41–50). The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Felder, P. (2010). On doctoral student development: Exploring faculty mentoring in the shaping of African American doctoral student success. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(2), 455–474.
- Galvin, K., & Todres, L. (2009). Poetic inquiry & phenomenology research: The practice of ‘embodied interpretation.’ In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. 307–316). The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Gammel, J., & Rutstein-Riley, A. (2016). A relational approach to mentoring women doctoral students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 147, 27–35.
- Gorlich, A. (2016). Poetic inquiry: Understanding youth on the margins of education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(4), 520–535.
- Hawley, J. C. (2015). *Expanding the circle: Creating an inclusive environment in higher education for LGBTQ students and studies*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hemer, S. R. (2012). Informality, power and relationships in postgraduate supervision: Supervising PhD candidates over coffee. *Higher Education, Research, and Development*, 31(6), 827–839.
- Holdaway, E., Deblois, C., & Winchester, I. (1995). Supervision of graduate students. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 25(3), 1–29.
- Hyun, J. K., Quinn, B. C., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2006). Graduate student mental health: Needs assessment and utilization of counselling services. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(3), 247–266.
- Ideno, Y., Hayashi, K., Abe, Y., Ueda, K., Iso, H., Noda, M., et al. (2017). Blood pressure-lowering effect of *Shinrin-yoku* (Forest bathing): A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 17, 1–12.
- Killingsworth Roberts, S., Brasel, N. A., & Crawford, P. A. (2014). Poetry as praxis: An exploration of poetry discourse as qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 27(4), 167–181.
- Leggo, C. (2005). The heart of pedagogy: On poetic knowing and living. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11(5), 439–455.
- Leggo, C. (2016). Lecture(s) on theory and research in the teaching of written composition. Personal collection of author. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

- Li, Q., Kobayashi, M., Kumeda, S., Ochiai, T., Miura, T., Kagawa, T., et al. (2016). Effects of forest bathing on cardiovascular and metabolic parameters in middle-aged males. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2016, 1–8.
- Mao, G., Cao, Y., Wang, B., Chen, Z., Wang, J., Xing, W., et al. (2017). The salutary influence of forest bathing on elderly patients with chronic health failure. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14, 368–383.
- McCulliss, D. (2013). Poetic inquiry and multidisciplinary qualitative research. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 26(2), 83–114.
- Meyer, E. J. (2008). “Who we are matters”: Exploring teacher identities through found poetry. *LEARNING Landscapes*, 2(1), 195–210.
- Moore, A. (2018a). “Blackboxing it”: A poetic min/d/ing the gap of an imposter experience in academia. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 3(1), 30–52.
- Moore, A. (2018b). Eight events for entering a PhD: A poetic inquiry into happiness, humility, and self-care. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(8), 592–596.
- Mullen, C. A., Fish, V. L., & Hutinger, J. L. (2010). Mentoring doctoral student through scholastic engagement: Adult learning principles in action. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34(2), 179–197.
- Olds, S. (1996). Early abecedarian. *Salmagundi*, 112(fall), 121.
- Paré, A. (2017). Rethinking the dissertation and doctoral supervision / Reflexiones sobre la tesis doctoral y su supervisión. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 40(3), 407–428.
- Patrick, L. D. (2016). Found poetry: Creating space for imaginative arts-based literacy research writing. *Literacy Research: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 65, 384–403.
- Petrino, E. (2001). Nineteenth-century American women’s poetry. In D. M. Bauer & P. Gould (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to nineteenth-century American women’s writing* (pp. 122–140). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pidgeon, M., Archibald, J., & Hawkey, C. (2014). Relationships matter: Supporting Aboriginal graduate students in British Columbia, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 44(1), 1–21.
- Piirto, J. (2002). The question of quality and qualifications: Writing inferior poems as qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), 431–445.
- Prendergast, M. (2009). Introduction: The phenomenon of poetry in research: “Poem is what?” Poetic inquiry in qualitative social science research. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. xix–2). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Prendergast, M., Gouzouasis, P., Leggo, C., & Irwin, R. (2009). A haiku suite: The importance of music making in the lives of secondary students. *Music Education Research*, 11(3), 303–317.
- Sameshima, P. (2017). Enchanting “love-making.” In P. Sameshima, A. Fidyk, K. James, & C. Leggo (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Enchantment of place* (pp. 147–150). Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.

- Squillante, S. (2008). Student/body. In E. Evans, C. Grant, & M. Peskowitz (Eds.). *Mama, PhD* (pp. 20–24). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Stroude, A., Bellier-Teichmann, T., Cantero, O., Dasoki, N., Kaeser, L., Ronca, M., et al. (2015). Mentoring for women starting a PhD: A “free zone” into academic identity. *International Journal for Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4(1), 37–52.
- Swartz, V., & Kay, J. (2009). The crisis in college and university mental health. *Psychiatric Times*, 26(10), 32.
- Tsunetsugu, Y., Park, B.-J., & Miyazaki, Y. (2010). Trends in research related to “Shinrin-yoku” (taking the forest atmosphere or forest bathing) in Japan. *Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine*, 15(1), 27–37.
- Watts, J. H. (2008). Challenges of supervising part-time PhD students: Towards student-centred practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(3), 369–373.
- Wiebe, S. & Margolin, I. (2012). Poetic consciousness in pedagogy: An inquiry of contemplation and conversation. *In Education*, 18(1), 23–36.
- Wiebe, S., Snowbar, C., & Walsh, S. (2017). Curriculum triage: A poetic play upon crisis in schools. In P. Sameshima, A. Fidyk, K. James, & C. Leggo (Eds), *Poetic inquiry: Enchantment of place* (pp. 337–346). Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.
- Yang, B. B., Mao, Z. X., Lyu, G. X., Wen, Y. D., Xu, X. L., Lyu Xiao, W. H., et al. (2016). Health effect of forest bathing trip on elderly patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. *Biomedical and Environmental Sciences*, 29(3), 212–218.
- Yob, I. M., & Crawford, L. (2012). Conceptual framework for mentoring doctoral students. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 2(2), 34–47.



**Amber Moore** is a SSHRC-funded PhD candidate and Killam Laureate at the University of British Columbia studying language and literacy education with the Faculty of Education. Her research interests include adolescent literacy, feminist pedagogies, teacher education, and trauma literature, particularly YA sexual assault narratives. She also enjoys writing poetry and creative nonfiction.

# Working With Avatars and High Schoolers to Teach Qualitative Methods to Undergraduates

Kristin M. Murphy

## Abstract

Learning to conduct qualitative research is a complex endeavor. In this article, I introduce mixed reality simulations as a scaffolded learning tool to support student mastery of learning and knowing how to conduct qualitative research. Like flight simulators used to train airline pilots prior to flying an actual airplane, mixed reality simulations provide active practice opportunities to interact with avatars in order to practice newly learned skills. I discuss this in the context of my experiences using mixed reality in an undergraduate youth participatory action research methods course as a scaffold before joining research teams with high-school-aged coresearchers.

## Background

Immersive community-based learning is a transformative experience for teachers and students alike. Immersive learning takes students on a journey beyond textbooks and lectures, and brings course concepts to life through community-based active learning and problem solving centered around collaboration and critical thinking (Latz, Phelps-Ward, Royer, & Peters, 2015). During the spring and fall 2016 semesters, I received funding to support the design, implementation, and evaluation of a course at my university that featured community-based immersive learning. I designed and taught a qualitative research seminar about youth participatory action research (YPAR) methods to junior and senior undergraduate students. In addition to learning about the foundations of qualitative research, students were responsible for working alongside high school students from a local urban school district on research teams and carrying out a full YPAR project. The immersive benefits were in play for the high school students as well. They participated in carrying out a full research project over the course of seven weeks with college students. For many of the students, it was their first time on a college campus, and my intention was to cultivate a positive experience in which the high school students experienced success and enjoyment conducting research at the college level, and for the students to receive mentorship from their college research partners.

In the course, students learned the foundations of, and went through the process of, conducting a credible and trustworthy qualitative youth participatory action research study alongside high school students from a local urban public school district serving as their coresearchers. Research teams utilized photovoice as their research method to explore the notion of how teenagers reported understanding their experiences at school and in their communities. Based on their findings, the research teams were tasked with making recommendations for the future. The ultimate goal was to empower the high school student coresearchers



to communicate experiences and recommendations to peers, teachers, and school- and district-level leadership about what was working well and what needed to be improved upon. The course objectives for my college students were to (a) learn the ethics of qualitative research; (b) carry out a full photovoice research project in the context of a youth participatory action research methods project; (c) conceptualize, conduct, and report on a credible and trustworthy qualitative research photovoice study; (d) work alongside high school students as coresearchers on research teams; (e) coauthor a full research paper based on their project; and (f) construct and present a gallery-based exhibit of their photovoice work.

When I initially designed the course, I focused a lot of energy on the actual meetings my college students would have with their high school coresearchers, and the culminating gallery event at the end of the semester. I did not give as much thought to the actual experience of being a college student learning about qualitative research methods, and learning to lead an interview or focus group with high school students. Faced with teaching my first qualitative research methods course, I simply envisioned that my students would learn the same way I did.

Through discussion board responses and conversations that occurred in the early weeks of the semester, I was quickly reminded of a humble truth. Interviewing is a hard and oftentimes unpredictable endeavor. There are many approaches to interviewing as a research method, and the actual event itself can go in directions we did not imagine, despite our best intended plans (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). This was foreign territory for my class, consisting primarily of students from the hard sciences and coming to me with years of quantitative experience. Prior to beginning work with the high school students, it became clear that my undergraduates needed extensive preparation and varied practice opportunities to engage in qualitative research.

In this article, I hone in on my college students' journey of learning and knowing how to carry out qualitative research studies using photovoice methodology with high-school-aged coresearchers, and how my understanding of the context that would best support their learning and knowing shifted during the semester to include active practice opportunities with avatars in a mixed reality simulation environment. First, I will briefly discuss the literature on interviewing, YPAR, and photovoice. Then, I will introduce mixed reality simulations as a scaffolded tool for active learning and discuss in detail how I used it in my qualitative methods course. Next, I will present narrative findings of my college students' journey of learning and knowing about qualitative research from the start of the semester until after they completed mixed reality simulation exercises. Finally, I will conclude with lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

## Literature Review

**Interviews as research.** Interviewing is a complex and oftentimes unpredictable endeavor. There is no single approach to interviewing as a research method (Roulston et al., 2003). Depending on the theoretical perspective you and your study follow and the focus of your study, the format of an interview can range from what Gubrium and Holstein (2002) refer to as a basic model or an active model. In the basic model, an interviewer's goal is to pull information from the interviewee while not infusing

his or her own subjectivity or conversing about information considered extraneous to the study. In the newer active model, there is not one single truth as the interviewee and interviewer approach the interview as a collaborative partnership in reaching a new understanding about the research question (Gubrium & Holstein).

**Youth participatory action research.** Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is a framework that seeks to empower youth as the resident expert and researcher of their own experiences, with the guidance and mentorship of adults who can support them as they engage in critical inquiry (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016). The voices of children, particularly children of color and from low-income communities, are markedly absent from the literature. Their perspectives are often dismissed, driven by the belief that they are too immature or unable to communicate their ideas appropriately (Brunson & Miller, 2007). The consequence of this mindset is that youth are left feeling even more marginalized and believing that their opinions do not matter. When children and teenagers are invited to the table and asked to share their thoughts about the issues they face in their lives, the results can be transformative and empowering (Ginwright, 2007).

**Photovoice as a YPAR method.** One form of research that aligns well with the principles of YPAR is photovoice. Photovoice is an approach that integrates photography and critical discussion to examine issues from the perspective of “resident experts.” Insights and findings are then used to inform social action. The goal is to promote change at the personal and community level, and to empower (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 2006). In today’s day and age, we all take photographs. With the advent of smartphones, most of us have access to a high-quality camera for taking photographs and video in our pocket. We may carry thousands of our personal photographs and videos on our phone, and have access to even more via our social media accounts, also on our phones.

Photovoice is not bound specifically to YPAR, but certainly aligns well with its goals. Photovoice was first developed in the 1990s (Wang & Burris, 1994) and is a common research tool used to engage in participatory research across health sciences, education, and beyond. Children and teenagers who may be traditionally viewed as participants and those who are to be researched, are instead our coresearchers, and are tasked with taking pictures that illuminate their experience with regards to the research question. The photographs then serve as an artifact to facilitate conversation and understanding about the topic at hand during interviews or focus groups. The addition of photographs adds a level of depth to the findings, and also lends itself to a different level of dissemination, access, and interaction with the findings than findings that may ultimately only end up in a research journal. Most photovoice studies culminate in a gallery event where community members and leaders can interact together with the goal of promoting change (Latz, 2017).

One of the most common ways to structure the interview or focus group in a photovoice study is the SHOWeD method (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 2006). The SHOWeD method consists of several structured discussion questions. After coresearchers take pictures in the field, they come together for a research team meeting. While looking at a picture, the group transitions through the following series of questions: (a) What do you see here?; (b) What’s really happening here?; (c) How does this relate to our

lives?; (d) Why does this situation exist?, or How can we become empowered through this?; and (e) What can we do about it?

The first question allows the participants to absorb and discuss all the dimensions of the photograph, from the obvious parts of the image to the small details in the background. In the second question, the participants begin to think critically and convey their thoughts regarding the situation present in the photograph. The third question leads the participants to reflect on how the photograph relates both to oneself and to their peers. In the fourth prompt, the participants hypothesize both the origins of this situation and the events that took place for this photograph to be relevant today. Finally, the last question prompts the group to envision community solutions related to the theme raised by the photograph (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 2006).

Conducting photovoice-driven YPAR work focuses on personal issues and experiences with the goal of promoting empowerment and change for the better in a community. Conducting an interview or focus group that may include conversation-sensitive topics, involves special care taken to ensure a positive, safe, and productive research experience for both the researcher and participant (Watts & Liamputtong, 2013). Becoming an interviewer with this level of skill takes practice. Many qualitative researchers can remember back to their days as a student in qualitative methods courses and learning to interview by engaging in role-plays and practicing interviewing with their classmates.

**Mixed reality simulations as a scaffolded learning tool.** There is a long and varied collection of multidisciplinary research supporting role-play as an active learning opportunity as it can change behavior, attitudes, and knowledge as learners practice complex situations in a safe environment with their peers that presents little to no consequences (Storey & Cox, 2015). However, in traditional role-plays where all of the roles are played by fellow students, interpersonal issues can make the experience more difficult. A student can simplify things for another student in order to achieve social desirability, or conversely, can make a role-play too difficult. Furthermore, a student playing the interviewee may be disinterested altogether. Harnessing new technology like mixed reality simulations unleashes the potential to remove some of the interpersonal issues that may affect role-play or mock interview objectives (Murphy, Cash, & Kellinger, 2018).

Mixed reality simulations (MRS) provide an opportunity for learners to practice what they are learning before applying concepts in the real world. It creates a risk-free environment for learners to safely take risks without harming real participants (Hughes, Nagendran, Dieker, Hynes, & Welch, 2015). Like flight simulators used to train airline pilots prior to flying an actual airplane, MRS provides active practice opportunities to interact with avatars (i.e., computer-animated characters controlled by humans) in order to practice newly learned skills. MRS is an ideal tool to address the critical need for providing high-impact, low-risk preservice training. The body of research on MRS as a professional training tool is in its infancy, but there is a growing body of research exploring its use in preservice teacher coursework. Early MRS research in teacher preparation has shown that four 10-minute sessions yielded changes in teacher behavior that were translated into classroom practice (Straub, Dieker, Hynes, & Hughes, 2014).

MRS is a tool that require relatively little time, but may yield large benefits as a precursor and complement to fieldwork.

MRS offers a safe space to practice newly learned skills without the risk of harming students, clients, or patients (Murphy et al., 2018). MRS employs technology where avatars, displayed on a large monitor, spontaneously engage with participants by following a scenario protocol lasting approximately seven to 10 minutes. MRS can take place in environments spanning school, office, and health-based environments featuring children and adults for different scenarios and objectives. During the simulation, participants focus on a discrete skill and objective to accomplish. MRS follows what is known as the human-in-the-loop paradigm, where a human known as an Interactor actively controls the voices and movement of avatars, allowing for more authentic, spontaneous responses that reflect the nature of unpredictable human interactions (Hughes et al., 2015). The Interactor is a highly trained specialist that can see and hear the participants through a web camera and microphone, while the participants only see and hear the avatars displayed on the large monitor. One Interactor plays the role of all avatars involved in the MRS scenario, and controls all of their movements and voices. In addition to being versed in the objective of the scenario, Interactors are trained on how the avatars should respond based on the actions of the student participating in the simulation. There are “hits” and “misses” associated with achieving the objective. When a student engages in activities that lead up to, or achieve, the objective, he/she is engaging in hits, and the avatars act accordingly. Conversely, when the student engages in misses, or activities that deters him/her from achieving the objective, the avatars will respond accordingly and further derail from the desired objective.

The Interactor represents the defining characteristic that marks MRS as different from virtual reality environments. Since an Interactor actively controls the voices and movements of the avatars during a simulation, participating in an MRS can better replicate the unpredictable nature of human interactions (Hughes et al., 2015). This affords unique opportunities that would not be able to occur in a traditional college classroom lesson, and better mirrors fieldwork.

What does it look like to practice in a mixed reality environment? In the class I focus on in this paper, students engaged with avatars in an 8th grade classroom environment. There are five 8th grade student avatars seated in horseshoe style seating: Savannah, Dev, Ava, Jasmine, and Ethan (see Figure 1). The five student avatar profiles were developed in such a way that they are diverse enough in personality to represent the population across an entire classroom, even though the majority of classrooms comprise far more than five students. Their personalities stem from two major pairs of evidence-based personality factors: aggressiveness and passiveness, and independence and dependency. Their interactions with each other and the teacher provide for a multitude of challenges, opportunities, and teachable moments (Hughes et al., 2015).



Fig. 1: Mixed reality simulation middle school classroom. Reprinted with permission by Mursion.

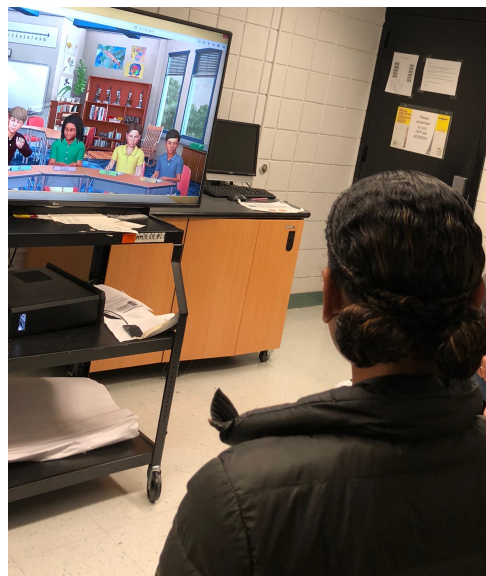


Fig. 2: A college student works with a 5th grade class of student avatars. Her peers and the professor are seated in a horseshoe around her to observe and provide coaching and feedback.

Students interact with the avatars by standing in front of a large screen monitor where they are displayed (see Figure 2). During simulations, the student is never alone with the avatars. Depending on the design of the course session, either an individual student or a team of students participate in a simulation, all while their peers and professor observe and take notes, seated in a horseshoe behind them so they may engage in observation. Before the simulation begins, the students are given a brief vignette that provides a jumping-off point for the simulation to begin. The Interactor can see the student through a web camera positioned on top of the monitor and hear them through a microphone set on the table, but the students can only see the avatars. Our students are instructed to stand in front of the monitor, and when they are ready, they say the magic words: “Start simulation.” The classroom pops up on the screen, and students may begin to speak with the avatar(s) as if they are real students seated in front of them. As the interaction begins, our students engage in something known as a suspension of disbelief (Hayes, Straub, Dieker, Hughes, & Hynes, 2013). This is a crucial component of the MRS experience.

The students know that the simulation is not an actual middle school classroom. However, as they begin the simulation, they temporarily suspend the belief that it is not real, and instead accept it as reality. Time and time again, we witness our students, and ourselves, temporarily engage in this suspension of disbelief as we participate in simulations.

One of the most unique aspects of this type of practice is utilizing a feature I describe as “remote control teaching” (Murphy et al., 2018). At any given time during a simulation, the student or professor can “pause” the classroom if they need assistance from their peers or professor. They can then debrief with their peers and professor about what happened and receive on-the-spot coaching and feedback. Then, the classroom can be unpaused and a student can rehearse the exact same scenario again, either from where they left off, or start at the beginning again. This is also a way to scaffold the learning. In earlier coursework or early instances of practicing a new skill, students can be given the option of using the remote control. In later coursework or after practicing a skill multiple times, they may lose access to the remote control. Even without use of the remote control, time is set aside for a debrief after each simulation, one of the most crucial aspects of any MRS session. Students and the professor have the opportunity to give and receive coaching and feedback. While working with the avatars is a powerful experience in itself, I believe that the nature of the discourse that emerges during debrief sessions is truly one of the most unique, fruitful, and transformative aspects of incorporating MRS into coursework. Based on the debrief, students can then reflect on the experience and think about how they will improve upon it next time in a simulation and/or in fieldwork.

The application of MRS as a preservice teacher learning tool is becoming more widespread. Recent research indicates that four ten-minute mixed reality sessions resulted in improved teaching performance that transferred to live classroom teaching above and beyond traditional methods of teacher preparation (Straub et al., 2014). In the military, aviation, and medical fields, mixed reality simulations have utilized technology in training for decades (Barsom, Graafland, & Schijven, 2016). Little did I know that soon I would be bringing this tool into my qualitative research methods coursework as well.

## Methods

### Participants and Setting

The participants were 15 junior- and senior-level college students enrolled in a qualitative research seminar focusing on youth participatory action research (YPAR). As part of the course, the college students joined research teams with high school students to conduct YPAR-driven photovoice studies exploring experiences of trauma in urban schools and communities. This was the college students’ first experience with qualitative research, and also working with high school students.

## Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective underlying this study was constructivism. A critical aspect of constructivism is the participants' perceptions and meaning-making (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). My college students were viewed as the experts of their experiences, and their constructions of knowledge about their experiences were of particular interest to me (Crotty, 1998).

## Intervention

For the first four course sessions, college students learned the foundations of qualitative research, and specifically, YPAR, photovoice, and the SHOWeD method. We also spoke about research ethics, and engaged in in-depth reading and discussion about racial, economic, educational, and health equities and inequities pertaining to growing up in an urban community and attending public school. Sessions five and six provided different levels of scaffolded active learning opportunities for students to practice the SHOWeD method prior to working with the high school students as seen in Figure 3.

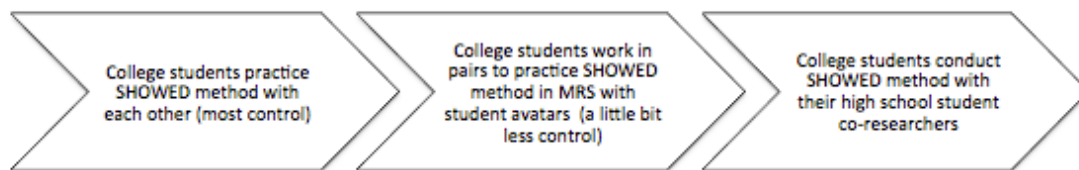


Fig. 3: Scaffolded levels of active learning opportunities to practice the SHOWeD method.

During session five, students participated in one practice photovoice session using the SHOWeD protocol with their college peers, and in the sixth session, students participated in a mixed reality simulation session in the Mursion classroom using the SHOWeD protocol with the student avatars.

For the MRS session, students worked in two-person teams with the student avatars for 10 minutes per team. During their 10-minute simulation, the teams were tasked with leading the five-student avatar class through a SHOWeD photovoice discussion based on a photo one of the student avatars took based on the topic of representing the idea of “balance” for a photovoice project. The students are hoping to inform the Principal about the various responsibilities in their lives, and to think about how to revise homework policies and support programs. My objectives for the college student teams were (1) to ensure that all students' voices were heard during the discussion; and (2) engage students in conversation about school improvement actions based on their conversation around each photo. I wanted to make sure that the students moved beyond simply describing the literal photos and discussed the deeper meaning behind the photo for the student avatars, and prompted the student avatars to envision community solutions based on the themes that emerged. The Interactor was prepared with reactions based on hits and misses for each objective (e.g., for the first objective, one student avatar would be silent unless directly prompted; and for the second objective, unless guided to thinking more deeply about the photo meaning and community solutions, the student avatars would simply derail and ask when class would be over or that they were getting bored). For full activity details and materials for the MRS activity, please refer to



Appendix A. In sessions 7 through 15, college students convened with their high school coresearchers to actually carry out the photovoice project. During session 15, the culminating activity was a photo gallery exhibit. School district leaders were invited to attend and engage in critical discussion with the students about their findings and recommendations.

### **Data Collection**

Each week, students were required to post reflections in a discussion board in Blackboard, and respond to at least two of their peers. I analyzed the responses in discussion boards after four key sessions. In the first key course session, students reflected on general impressions after completing the first course meeting and learning the full details of the class. In the second key course session, college students reflected on impressions and asked questions based on class readings focused broadly on the qualitative research-driven interview processes. For the third and fourth sessions, students reflected on their experiences practicing the SHOWeD method with each other, and with the student avatars. Finally, I analyzed reflections about their learning processes included as part of their final papers for the course. As their professor, I kept a reflective journal across the course, and I include that in the data collection as well.

### **Data Analysis**

Data sources were analyzed using Labov's (1972) fully formed narrative structure. It includes six components: (1) the abstract which summarizes the whole story; (2) the orientation which identifies the people, places, and activities of the story; (3) the complicating action which highlights a key event to the story and what happens next; (4) the evaluation which explains why this narrative is told and the "so what" message of the story; (5) the result or resolution which tells the reader what finally happened; and (6) the coda or end to the story. I read and re-read discussion boards, in addition to my own reflective journal, to identify the components of the narrative.

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

Because of the nature of qualitative research, a researcher's subjectivity, or expression of their lived experience, is integral to the findings of a research study, and should therefore be explicitly identified (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). The process of examining one's subjectivity allows the researcher to identify the potential benefits and disadvantages that their experiences and beliefs potentially bring to a study.

I have worked in the field of Special Education for almost 20 years, in positions spanning intern, teaching assistant, teacher, policy advisor, graduate research assistant, and teacher educator. I have been using mixed reality simulations in my preservice teacher coursework for nearly four years. I have been a qualitative researcher working in the Special Education field, particularly in urban environments, for nearly 10 years. I believe that I know and understand how hard this work can be. However, prior to teaching this course, I had not worked with undergraduates learning about urban education and

qualitative research methods for the first time before. I have not worked with novice qualitative researchers, learning for the first time, since I was one myself. This experience represented my first time teaching first-time qualitative researchers, and my first time preparing novice researchers to engage in youth participatory action research in an urban high school. I believed I was fully prepared, and could lean on my own memories as a novice learner in urban classrooms and qualitative research courses. I soon realized I had much to learn.

## Findings

### Abstract

Fifteen junior- and senior-level undergraduate students with no background in qualitative research enrolled in my Research Colloquium course about youth participatory action-driven qualitative research. The college students learned the foundations of conceptualizing, implementing, and analyzing a full qualitative study. Specifically, students learned how to carry out a youth participatory action research (YPAR) driven photovoice research project with the goal of creating research teams with students from a local high school to conduct YPAR studies on experiences of trauma in urban public schools and neighborhoods. The high school students were given disposable cameras and sent out into the school and community to take pictures that illuminated the topic at hand from their perspective. Pictures were developed by me, the professor, and then research teams comprising high school and college students came together to discuss the photos in groups of four to five. Using transcripts from audio-recorded conversations, and the photos themselves, the students worked together to create a photo gallery exhibit for school district leaders.

Everything started off smoothly until the college students began to immerse themselves in reading about qualitative research, and also about racial, educational, and economic inequities existing in urban school communities. The college students felt the weight, complexity, and importance of the work at hand. They became very worried.

### Orientation: How Hard Could This Be?

In the early weeks of the semester, students were excited at the prospect of working with local high school students and learning about their lives. Many of them felt as though this would come naturally, since they love talking to their peers. How hard can qualitative research actually be? One student commented, "I spend a lot of time with my younger siblings and am very good at talking to them about their lives. This is great preparation for the work at hand in this class." As the professor, I felt cautiously optimistic, but knew there was much to learn in the coming weeks.

## **Complicating Action Clauses: It Is Mad Complicated!**

Within a few weeks of class, students had begun to learn the foundations of qualitative research, and many were stunned at the differences from the quantitative training they had been immersed in for the duration of their college careers thus far. When I checked the Blackboard discussion forum for their first week reading about how to conduct interviews as part of a qualitative process, I witnessed a stark change in tone from previous weeks. Students were becoming anxious. One student wrote:

When I first found out that a major component of this class was going to be effectively interviewing high school students for our research project I really thought I wouldn't have any problem. However, as I learn more I'm getting worried...

Another commented on his concern upon realizing just how far out of his quantitative comfort zone he had traveled: "It seems that the whole interview process is going to be difficult for most of us because many of us have never really engaged in such qualitative research where we can't use words like hypothesis!"

Finally, one student simply commented that simply working with the students might not be as easy as they had initially discussed with each other. She wrote, "Even with the preparation we do, it can seem daunting to be able to actually approach the students." The students were learning quickly about the complexity of qualitative interviewing, and also about the lives of the students we were about to meet. One student simply posted, "I am really concerned."

I reminded and reassured them in class that in the following week, they would have a practice opportunity with each other. The college students' homework that week beyond required readings was to take pictures that illuminated their experiences of being a college student. During the following week, they would have the opportunity to practice facilitating and participating in the SHOWeD discussion, and subsequently analyzing it, with each other. It was meant to be the safest environment for practice, and was strongly grounded in my own experiences from grad school. I learned how to interview by practicing interviewing my classmates. Naturally, this is how they would learn best too, right?

## **Evaluation: My A-Ha! Moment**

After wrapping up class with my qualitative seminar students one afternoon, I was quickly shifting gears to teach a graduate-level special education course about reading and writing instruction and assessment. My graduate students would be practicing delivery of evidence-based instructional strategies for children with disabilities with the student avatars in MRS. I had an "A-Ha!" moment. I quickly scribbled a note to myself in my reflective journal:

My graduate students work with the student avatars as a scaffolded learning tool to practice with student avatars prior to working with living, breathing students out in the field. Why am I not bringing this technology into my qualitative research methods course where they also need practice prior to working with living breathing students? I speak freely about bringing in new technology to foster new and meaningful practice opportunities for my preservice teachers...

why am I living in the past in my undergraduate course and clinging only to the ways that I learned in my own qualitative research methods courses?

### **Result/Resolution: They Are the Experts of Their Lives**

I got to work developing a simulation that I could use with my qualitative research seminar students. For the simulation, each of the five student avatars “took a picture” illuminating their experience with stress at school in preparation to participate in a photovoice study with my college students. My college students would each have a 10-minute turn in the mixed reality classroom, and they would do so with a partner. I chose to do this because they would be working with at least one peer on their actual research teams with high school students. They would randomly be given one student avatar’s photograph, and it was their task to practice the SHOWeD method with the mixed reality class. The other students sat with me in a horseshoe behind the student pair participating in the simulation, and took observational notes. In their 10 minutes, they were allowed to use an optional “remote control” feature to “pause” the simulation if they wanted, so they could seek advice and coaching from their peers and myself. After the simulation, we dedicated five to seven minutes for feedback and reflection. After class, students participated once again in discussion boards. Overall, students were receptive to the activity, and found that it helped ease some of their nerves, and also provided a sense of clarity about how the process might feel with their students, and some of the strategies that may work well, and others that might not. One student commented:

I thought it was a really cool experience to be able to interact with the Avatars, and especially to interact with them about pictures that they "took". It really helped me get a better feel about how to act and what to say with the high school students.

Many of the students reported feeling focused inward and only worrying about themselves prior to the simulation, but realized that some of the most powerful learning occurred from observing their peers:

I think the most helpful part wasn't even practicing myself, but seeing everyone else practice to get ideas on questions to ask, or the most effective way to develop rapport. We obviously all started the conversation a little differently and in turn, the conversations all went differently.

Furthermore, because each of the student pairs had a different picture, and it inevitably led down different rabbit holes of conversations with the student avatars, the college students were able to get a close examination of various pathways of interviewing high school students, and it helped them to begin to think about the importance and power of the wording they choose:

It was also helpful to see how the students reacted in an array of different situations. I kind of learned how to frame my questions like for example instead of saying, "Do you agree?" I should say, "What do you think about that?" so they have to say more than just yes or no and a real conversation can be facilitated.

I noticed that many students tried to develop scripts to support what they would say during interviews before coming to class that day. I notice that this happens a lot with my preservice teachers at first too. Perhaps the most important discovery and learning that took place was this:

I learned I can't expect a certain response or level from the kids! I think that's what I took away – that we should not put limits and expectations on the students. We have to remain open, a reoccurring theme, in our interactions with them. At the end of the day they are the experts of their lives...

For students coming from strict quantitative and hard science backgrounds, the biggest learning curve was stepping away from hypotheses and highly controlled study designs and instead opening themselves to the places that their high school student coresearchers wanted to take them. Additionally, this exercise opened students up to each other, paving the way for collaborative relationships with each other. Many students reflected upon how it helped them to “come out of their shells” and bond:

This exercise also made me feel like I was more connected to my classmates. It's a class that's filled with bio majors. This exercise made me feel like we all bonded a little more as a class. Even just the way the room was set up was more welcoming to be “open” to one another and all inclusive. While watching everyone do their simulation, I felt like we were all connected more. There were a lot of moments where the simulated students would say funny things and we'd all laugh and I felt like that was the most I'd ever felt connected to the whole class, and not just a few classmates, it was nice.

### **Coda: Remember to Not Forget How Hard This Is and Think Outside the Box**

In the month that followed the MRS experience, my students met and worked together with their high school coresearchers on photovoice research projects, analyzed the data together with them, and held a photo gallery exhibit attended by district school leaders, including the superintendent. One student reflected it quite well:

This course resulted in an outcome I did not expect in September. Until this course, I hadn't heard of qualitative research, and upon hearing about it, I didn't understand its significance. After intense readings on youth participatory action research, photovoice, and after learning many theories, I quickly learned about qualitative research. Slowly I began to understand its importance and great implications. It wasn't until I met the [high school] students, that I realized how big of an impact we could actually make in our local communities. What we learned in the readings and the simulations was now finally reality. During our first meeting with the students, we talked about important social issues like race, incarceration, poverty, education, etc. We provided an environment for our participants to openly voice their concerns, and at the end of the discussion, we handed them all cameras and told them to take pictures of what social issues they thought were represented in a picture. A week later, we received the photos from the students, and what we saw was very unexpected but it was reality for our participants. This was when we, as researchers, began to understand the lives of our participants.

Refer to Figures 4, 5, and 6 for examples of final photovoice exhibit examples. Each of the photos includes a caption represented by high school coresearcher voices to illuminate the experiences and perspectives behind the photos. While it is beyond the parameters of this paper to fully discuss the photo gallery exhibit experience, you may visit <https://tinyurl.com/y9oab5fn> for more information.



Fig. 4. You can look but you better not touch: "Like stick your hand through and take it out. They did that because of all the gunshots and stuff that was happening. They got scared so they guarded it up, yeah. So you walk in the back and they pat you and everything through here."



Fig. 5: Black hole: "Nobody has any money to fix it. The only thing that they fix is the gym. They haven't fixed anything else but the gym."





Fig. 6: The local dump: "Nobody bothers to pick them up. Um, this is in front of people's houses. Yeah, just a regular day."

Beyond the photo gallery exhibit and final papers, it was clear that much more happened in this immersive community-based learning class about qualitative research methods comprising reluctant quantitative research enthusiasts:

Overall, this experience really opened my mind and I feel that as a student pursuing a career in medicine, this research project was a crucial milestone in my development. I can relate this all back to the barriers presented in the healthcare field for people that are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, especially those who face street trauma growing up. Towards the end of this course, we presented our findings to the superintendent. For once, I felt as though my research team and I have actually made an impact with the work we've done in college. I'm personally so moved by this project.

Another student reflected:

This research experience exposed me to an entirely new method of research, one that values human experience over statistics. As a science major, I have worked for years to develop skills that would make me successful in quantitative research: removing bias from experiments, planning and controlling all parts of data collection, and never developing a relationship with the subjects. These guidelines make sense in a scientific environment when you are trying to find



underlying biological or chemical mechanisms of processes; however, I realize now that they don't make sense when the research is aimed at improving human experience and institutional policy. Qualitative research has the unique power of being engaging because the stories of participants are often so moving and relatable. I learned that listening to these stories is the best way to truly understand one's experience, and by understanding it, you can provide better solutions to some of society's greater problems.

At the end of this experience, I had so much to reflect on as the professor. I learned several important lessons. I *think* that I know how hard this is—by this, I mean working with high school students in urban school communities, and I also mean conceptualizing and carrying out a qualitative research study. And this is true. I do know how hard it is, but, the notion of *what* is hard has changed and evolved in my mind the longer that I am in this field, and as my own roles and responsibilities shift. It was important for me to spend the semester working with college students who had no prior experience to remember just how complex those first steps are in working with high school students, and dipping your toes into qualitative research.

Furthermore, I realized that I was operating in compartmentalized ways in my own teaching. I was energized and excited about taking advantage of new technology offered by mixed reality simulations to support my preservice teaching students in ways I could not have imagined when I was training to become a teacher. But, when I had the opportunity to teach students their very first qualitative methods course, I immediately resorted to the methods I was exposed to as a student myself. The jump from role-playing with fellow college students to mentoring high school coresearchers in the field was a large leap. Providing a scaffolded risk-free opportunity for practice with the avatars in the mixed reality environment was an ideal middle ground on their pathway to learning.

My “Ah Ha!” moment was a powerful one for me, to take a tool that was working well for me in one area of my teaching, and reconceptualize it to enhance and foster improved active learning opportunities in another area. I need to continue to think outside the box of what I know. I need to continue to actively take the time to listen to my students, and myself. I need to continue to explore the power that lies in immersive community-based learning and challenge my own notions of how to teach and learn.

## Concluding Thoughts

Conducting qualitative research is not easy. Learning to understand qualitative research, and how to carry it out, takes time. The act of carrying out YPAR adds a highly complex layer due to the sensitive nature of the topics explored, and the mentorship of child and adolescent coresearchers. However, the rewards for pursuing this research are abundant. In teaching this course, I learned that teaching YPAR and learning how to conduct YPAR benefits from thorough planning and varied modalities for acquiring confidence and mastery, in addition to keeping an open mind and willingness to be flexible along the way. Novice qualitative researchers can only benefit from varied and multiple opportunities for practice, and as their mentors and teachers, we must continually reflect, practice, and listen in order to foster meaningful active learning opportunities for our students and ourselves. MRS offered a powerful

scaffolded step in my students' journey to learning and knowing how to be thoughtful qualitative researchers. The body of literature exploring the application of MRS as a tool for active learning is still young. I encourage you to think about how learning with avatars may serve as a valuable scaffold for you and your students on their pathway to experiences in the real world. I look forward to learning from you.

## Acknowledgment

The project and research reported in this publication were supported by the UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science UL1TR001453, the UMass Boston Joseph P. Healey Research Grant Program, and the UMass Boston Civic Engagement Scholars Initiative. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and does not necessarily represent the official views of UMass Boston or the UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science.

## References

- Barsom, E. Z., Graafland, M., & Schijven, M. P. (2016). Systematic review on the effectiveness of augmented reality applications in medical training. *Surgical Endoscopy*, *30*(10), 4174–4183.
- Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., & Richardson, V. (2005). Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children*, *71*, 195–207.
- Brunson, R. K., & Miller, J. (2007). Young black men and urban policing in the United States. *British Journal of Criminology*, *46*, 613–640.
- Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Ginwright, S. A. (2007). Black youth activism and the role of critical social capital in Black community organizations. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *51*, 403–418.
- Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Handbook of interviewing: Context and method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hayes, A. T., Straub, C. L., Dieker, L. A., Hughes, C. E., & Hynes, M. C. (2013). Ludic learning: Exploration of TLE TeachLivE™ and effective teacher training. *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations (IJGCMS)*, *5*(2), 20–33.
- Hughes, C. E., Nagendran, A., Dieker, L. A., Hynes, M. C., & Welch, G. C. (2015). Applications of avatar mediated interaction to teaching, training, job skills, and wellness. In G. Brunnett et al. (Eds.), *Virtual realities* (pp. 133–146). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Latz, A. O. (2017). *Photovoice research in education and beyond: A practical guide from theory to exhibition*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

- Latz, A. O., Phelps-Ward, R., Royer, D., & Peters, T. (2016). Photovoice as methodology, pedagogy, and partnership-building tool: A graduate and community college student collaboration. *Journal of Public Scholarship in Higher Education*, 6, 124–142.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mirra, N., Garcia, A., & Morrell, E. (2015). *Doing youth participatory action research: Transforming inquiry with researchers, educators, and students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Murphy, K. M., Cash, J., & Kellinger, J. J. (2018). Learning with avatars: Exploring mixed reality simulations for next-generation teaching and learning. In *Handbook of research on pedagogical models for next-generation teaching and learning* (pp. 1–20). IGI Global.
- Roulston, K., deMarrais, K., & Lewis, J. B. (2003). Learning to interview in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 643–668.
- Storey, V. J., & Cox, T. D. (2015). Utilizing mixed reality to building educational leadership capacity: The development and application of virtual simulations. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 4, 41–49.
- Straub, C., Dieker, L., Hynes, M., & Hughes, C. (2014). Using virtual rehearsal in TLE TeachLivE™ mixed reality classroom simulator to determine the effects on the performance of mathematics teachers. 2014 TeachLive National Research Project: Year 1 Findings.
- Wang, C. C. (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14(1–2), 147–161.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1994). Empowerment through photo novella: Portraits of participation. *Health Education Quarterly*, 21(2), 171–186.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369–387.
- Watts, M. N. C., & Liamputtong, P. (2013). Sensitive research and vulnerable participants: Accessing and conducting research with Australian teenage mothers in Greater Melbourne, Australia. *GSTF International Journal of Nursing and Health Care*, 1, 192–198.

## Appendix A

### Mixed Reality Simulation Materials

#### Challenge for college students:

Your middle school coresearchers have each brought in one picture representing the idea of “balance” for the photovoice project they’re working on with you in class! The students are hoping to inform the Principal about the various responsibilities in their lives, and to use this YPAR project to think about how to revise homework policies and support programs. In this 10-minute simulation, you will be randomly assigned one of the photos below taken by the student avatars, and lead the class through the SHOWeD discussion protocol with this photo.

#### College student objectives for the simulation (10 minutes):

- 1) Establish rapport with students.
- 2) Lead discussion of “what do you see” in this picture using the SHOWeD discussion protocol.
- 3) Make sure to hear from all students and engage in asking open-ended questions!

#### Tools

You will work with one teammate. You may employ “remote-control teaching” in the mixed reality classroom. If you are stuck or have a question, simply say, “Pause classroom,” for the opportunity to engage in a coaching and feedback session with your peers. After your session, we will engage in a coaching and feedback debrief. After the debrief, you will complete a brief reflection independently.

#### Student avatar photos



Savannah #1: Can of red bull in media center.



Savannah #2: Chewed up pen cap.

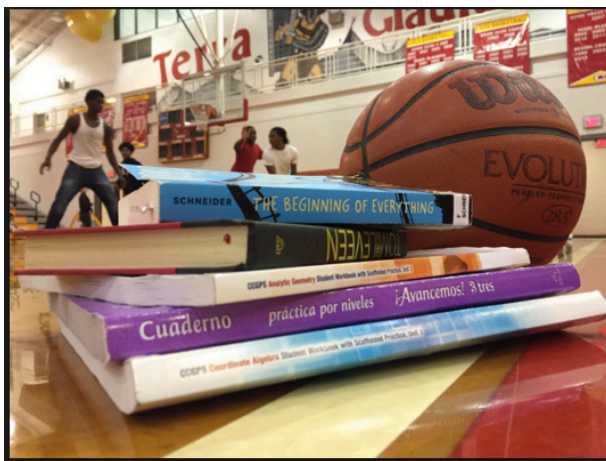




Dev #1: Blank screen on computer.



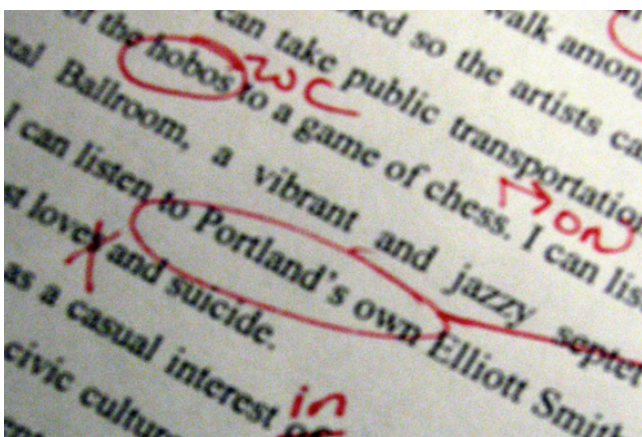
Jasmine #1: Crowded table with everyone's homework (siblings, cousins).



Ethan #1: Balancing academics and basketball practice.



Ethan #2: Pasta dinner with teammates.



Ava #1: Close-up of red mark-ups from teacher on an assignment.



Ava #2: Photo of friend doing yoga.



**Kristin Murphy**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in Boston. Dr. Murphy has served in various special education teaching, research, and policy positions for 15 years. Her research primarily focuses on the design of pre- and in-service professional learning opportunities to support teachers and school leaders in urban school settings, including exploring mixed reality simulations as an active learning tool for teachers and K-12 students.

She holds a master's degree from Harvard University and a PhD from the University of Florida.





# Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy Through Arts-Based Learning: Preservice Teachers Engage Emergent Bilinguals

Nancy Pauly, Karla V. Kingsley, and Asha Baker

## Abstract

Rooted in arts-based learning, funds of knowledge, and culturally sustaining pedagogies, this paper describes the experiences of a cohort of preservice teachers who co-created arts integration units with emergent bilingual students, engaging them in the creation of plays based on culturally relevant children's literature. This cohort was designed by eight professors to prepare professionals to serve the needs of culturally diverse and economically vulnerable communities through arts-based teaching and assessment modalities. We share three telling cases about these preservice teachers' reflections on their pedagogy and their students' engagement illustrating how the arts can foster inclusive ways of knowing and communicating.

## Background

Studies have demonstrated that participation in the arts contributes to academic and social success for diverse learners, especially those living in poverty (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012), English learners (Craig & Paraiso, 2008), and students with disabilities (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008). In this paper we share the experiences of 13 preservice teachers who used arts-based learning approaches (Stewart & Walker, 2005) throughout their three-semester student teaching courses and fieldwork while drawing from their students' *funds of knowledge* (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2009) to develop *culturally sustaining pedagogies* (Paris & Alim, 2017). The preservice teachers (PSTs) were undergraduate students in a cohort named the Teacher Education Collaborative in Language Diversity and Arts Integration (TECLA).

The TECLA model was developed in 2014 by an interdisciplinary group of eight university faculty with the goal of addressing the educational needs of diverse learners, particularly emergent bilingual youth and those living in economically vulnerable communities. TECLA was created to improve preservice and in-service teacher quality by preparing teachers for careers in culturally diverse and economically vulnerable communities, and explore arts-based teaching, learning, and assessment to support diverse ways of knowing and communicating.

This study was conducted in a dual language elementary school in the international district of a large city in the southwestern United States. Students at the school are from diverse backgrounds with varying levels of ability and readiness for school. Many are English learners from immigrant or refugee families, and all students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

The research question guiding this investigation was: how are preservice teachers' understandings of their elementary students' literacies, learning, and funds of knowledge mediated through arts-based learning when transforming a book into a play? Using qualitative methods, the authors examined coursework and interview data from preservice teachers including reflections, observations, and interpretations of elementary students' learning during an interdisciplinary arts-based unit. The instructional objectives were to build a culturally sustaining curriculum based on multicultural children's literature by selecting a book, planning an interdisciplinary unit based on students' *funds of knowledge*, teaching that unit during their final semester of clinical practice, and guiding elementary students through the creation of theatrical performances that were attended by the school community.

## Theoretical Framework

### Sociocultural Frameworks

Theories of *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 1992; González et al., 2009), *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005), *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014), *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris & Alim, 2017), and *multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996) informed the TECLA model. According to Paris and Alim (2017), culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) "seeks to perpetuate and foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change" (p. 6). PSTs used these frameworks to incorporate the languages, cultures, bodies of knowledge, and social relationships that their elementary students brought to school.

Arts integration facilitated the use of *multiliteracies*, which refers to a "focus on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural and social effects" (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). *Multimodal* learning includes pedagogy, learning, and assessment methods that use textual, linguistic, aural, gestural, visual, spatial, and multiple multimedia modalities (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

### Arts Integration

According to Parsons (2004), arts integration helps connect academic learning to students' personal experiences and real-life issues. TECLA links the arts and other subjects through *big ideas* and *enduring understandings* (Stewart & Walker, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), where learning has broad applications and significance throughout life. The TECLA model utilizes Marshall's (2016) approach to making meaning, wherein students keep a creative research journal to record sources of inspiration and evolving ideas. We also draw from Efland's (2002) concept of *metaphor* as the principal object of study in the arts. We center the work of Chappell & Faltis (2013), who found that diverse learners, particularly emergent bilinguals, were able to demonstrate deeper understandings, aesthetic preferences, personal expression, cultural values, and metaphoric translation relevant to their lives while creating artistic works. The current study used the Kennedy Center ArtsEdge definition of arts integration:

Arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understandings through an art form. Students engage in a creative process, which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both. (Silverstein & Layne, 2010)

The TECLA model expands upon The Kennedy Center's creative process by including the study of artworks by diverse artists and the application of sociocultural theory. In TECLA's enhanced creative process, students: 1) perceive, analyze, and interpret works of art to empathize with diverse artists' content and develop ideas for their own art; 2) explore and develop technical skills within a media; 3) develop ideas derived from their own experiences, school content, or their imagination through activities such as creative research, sketching, journaling, or improvisation; 4) begin to create original artworks; 5) reflect and revise their artworks as they progress; 6) share their products with an audience through a performance or exhibition; and 7) reflect on what they learned, expressed, and experienced through the event and how those experiences might inform their future art work or life.

We concur with Silverstein and Layne's (2010) recommendation that teachers use a constructivist instructional approach for building interdisciplinary curricula to integrate students' prior knowledge and experiences. TECLA offers learners opportunities to demonstrate their understanding after engaging in a creative process using one or more of the arts and other academic areas. Finally, the Performance Cycle (Landay & Wootton, 2012) framed the project. In this model, students enter a text to comprehend, create, revise, and perform the content. In so doing they build community as they collaboratively construct knowledge about a subject, then share that knowledge with others in an expressive performance, and receive feedback from the community, which builds empathy and strengthens social relationships.

Silverstein and Layne (2010) also describe three arts curriculum models. The *art-enhanced curriculum* includes arts-based teaching strategies used by nonarts teachers to engage students in learning, but teachers do not usually include artistic objectives. In contrast, art, music, dance, and drama specialists commonly teach the *arts as curriculum*, wherein students learn about the history of the arts, skills, concepts, and creative processes to create or perform within that art form. In this model, arts teachers do not try to meet objectives in other curricular areas, although some do. *Arts-integration* stresses a balance between meeting objectives in the arts and other subject areas.

## Context of the Study

In the spring of 2015, a cohort of 13 preservice teachers from a public university began their student teaching experiences at La Montañita Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms) as part of the TECLA cohort. TECLA faculty members met regularly to discuss the project and to plan the methods and seminar courses intended to provide support to emergent bilingual students and English learners in literacy, mathematics, social studies, and science using the arts. During their first semester the preservice teachers created and taught interdisciplinary inquiry-based teaching units based on global spring celebrations. Elementary students shared their knowledge in a student-guided classroom museum and a festive parade.

During their final semester of student teaching in 2016, the PSTs collaborated with their cooperating teachers and TECLA faculty to plan an arts-integration unit to transform culturally relevant children's storybooks into colorful, expressive theatrical performances. Throughout the project, which was called *Bring a Book to Life*, the PSTs utilized multicultural literature to design meaningful curricula that incorporated their students' *funds of knowledge*. To plan, teach, and assess their units, the PSTs read books aloud to each other, dialogued and brainstormed about potential instructional units, and taught their emergent bilingual children the elements of story, plot, characters, and point of view. The PSTs and their students mapped the content of their selected story, experimented with creative dramatics, assembled cardboard figures, created papier-mâché heads, masks and props, and incorporated sound, movement, scenery, and costumes into a theatrical production. During Literacy Week the students performed their plays and parade for the school community.

## Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of their final semester of teaching, the PSTs participated in exit interviews where they reflected on their pedagogy and on their students' learning. Interview data, coursework, and fieldnotes were analyzed through constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2007) to distill themes and patterns from the PSTs' narratives, pedagogy, and their students' learning. Five PSTs were invited to participate in more in-depth interviews (see Appendix A). We used multimodal learning theories (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014) to frame the analysis and interpretation of the data. In what follows we share three telling narratives to illustrate what the teacher candidates learned about utilizing arts integration in culturally sustaining ways.

## Exemplary Preservice Teacher Narratives

### Amaya

Most of the study participants described their thinking as teaching "through the arts," that is, using artistic modalities to teach curricular content. For example, prior to beginning this cohort, a PST named "Amaya" explained that she didn't realize she would be "using art to teach, teaching through art." Rather, she had imagined arts integration would mean that her students would do art projects that were added to the central learning, which could be characterized as *arts-enhanced curriculum* (Silverstein & Layne). To illustrate the difference between "adding the arts" and "teaching *through* the arts," Amaya explained how she approached the assignment to transform a book into a play with her third-grade students. Earlier in the year, her cooperating teacher (CT) had taught the following parts of a story: characters, setting, and plot. In this project, Amaya intended to refresh their memories of story content and research skills in preparation for their annual national tests.

Before reading the Australian Aboriginal story entitled *Sun Mother Wakes the World* (Wolkstein, 2004) to her third graders, Amaya asked her students to compile a list of characters, piquing their interest by telling them to "pay attention because they were going to *become* the characters." In this case,

a character was “anybody who does something in the story, so even the plants were characters.” After reading the story, she recalled how much she “was surprised to see how engaged they were during that. Most of the kids had a list of about 20 characters.”

Amaya asked her students to choose a character they would like to portray and research. She explained,

Then we needed to go more [in-depth] into character. In addition to who is it, we needed to discover what are they like. They had to make their costume and they had to pay attention to how they would behave in the play. They had to think about the characters’ emotions. What were the characters doing? . . . It helped them to focus because they had to make their character and later be their character. So they were more attuned to listening for the characteristics of the characters.

The interactive process of planning the play illustrated what Landay and Wootton (2012) have described as “entering the text” (p. 11), where learners connect with content and “incorporate the full range of multiliteracies” (p. 5) with “a balance between rich academic content and the tools for working with that content” (p. 6). Amaya and her students had conversations about how they might represent themes in the Aboriginal story in the form of a play. With the help of an art teacher, Amaya and her students researched and interpreted Indigenous Australian arts such as symbolic “dreamtime” dot paintings and rainsticks. Traditionally, rainsticks were created by pushing cactus thorns inward and adding pebbles, which sound like rain when inverted. The art teacher showed them how to create rainsticks using cardboard tubes and nails, which they decided could represent a gentle alarm clock signaling how Sun Mother awoke the world (see Figure 1). Amaya carried the idea of symbolism into other subject areas, too. During a lesson on the solar system, for example, creative conversations led to comparisons between the sun symbols in children’s literature and cultural narratives about the sun.

For the first of three panels on the rainstick, Amaya asked her students to create a symbol for the sun. In addition to the Aboriginal sun symbols, she showed them the Zia Pueblo sun symbol featured on our state flag. For the second panel, students portrayed either an Australian animal from the book or a New Mexican animal. She explained,

The third panel related to the theme of the book; caring for the community or caring for your home; preserving it. It’s not just yours, it belongs to everybody around – the animals, the plants, and the other people – people before you, people after you. The third panel referred to somebody or something that is honored in the community or something that is especially important that you want to preserve in the community.



Fig. 1: Amaya and her students' rainsticks.

The students' funds of knowledge were evident in the rainsticks (Figure 1) as well as in the masks and costumes they created after researching their animal. Amaya shared part of her students' creative problem-solving processes: "I had a snake, so he had to cut out his scales on the back and lines for the belly. We had feathers for the birds and we figured out how to make wings." Moving back and forth between the research they were conducting about their animal characters and constructing meaning with the symbols on the rainsticks, costumes, and masks, Amaya and her students engaged in Landay and Wootton's notion of *entering the text to comprehend the text*.

Amaya's students engaged the text by practicing the script and actions, exemplifying Landay and Wootton's concepts of *rehearsing*, *revising*, and *performing the text*. The students used group problem-solving strategies to decide how to embody and enact the characters of the play. Amaya described the process this way:

I asked, 'What are the animals doing first?' They said, 'sleeping,' so we got them to lie down. At first when the animals wake up they are really excited to be following the sun. She is so beautiful. The Sun is walking around and the animals are awake. Then when the sun goes up to the sky, the animals get angry and fights start. Then I asked, 'How are our animals feeling? How can we show our feelings through the play?' The students were showing their feelings on their faces. Then we added our masks for the final rehearsal and you couldn't see their faces so we asked, 'How can you look angry with your body?' We worked through that and it turned out well during the play.

Landay and Wootton (2012) described the importance of this process as a literacy practice:

In *rehearsing and revising the texts*, students modify, improve, and practice their performance. Throughout revision, students give and receive feedback on their own and one another's work... Attention to revision provides a key element for furthering students' literacy skills. (p. 12)



The Performance Cycle emphasizes the process of reflection, where student performers discuss what they learned or experienced. The PSTs reflected on the advantages of arts integration for their students through the play enactment and the other arts experiences in their classrooms. Amaya recounted how one girl's engagement changed dramatically as a result of her participation in the play. Amaya described a quiet student who showed "good" passive school behavior but didn't complete her schoolwork or homework: "she'll sit there quietly and then you realize she hasn't done anything." As an incentive, Amaya told the students she would award the four big roles in the play to students who had earned the most points for good behavior. The girl achieved the top score, and she chose the role of Sun Mother (Figure 2).



Fig. 2: Sun Mother leading the parade.

She took [her part] very seriously. She was very excited. She knew she had the big mask. She highlighted her lines right away. She lost her script, got another one, and highlighted it again. She took it home and brought it back. She practiced, and she got it, she was very excited, and it went really well.

Amaya described how the girl's behavior changed after the play.

She always talked to me but now she gets more excited and she'll run up and tell me things. Today she did her homework. She was very proud. She pulled it out and showed it to me. She had finished her multiplication practice and she had started the timeline they were supposed to finish. She did at least three pieces of homework so she got praise for that.



## Joshua

When Joshua entered the TECLA cohort, he could not remember any personal art experiences in school except for creating a Mother’s Day gift in kindergarten. In his exit interview, Joshua reflected on the way that producing a classroom play contributed to his ability to communicate, create a classroom community, and teach meaningful history. For example, his first grade students studied Cinco de Mayo and converted the historical narrative into a play. He described his experiences as a first semester student-teacher:

I was in a bilingual classroom, and I’m not bilingual, so it was hard for me at first to deal with the kids and communicate, but when we did this [play], all the borders were down. They wanted to do it. The kids who would shut down on me because we couldn’t communicate, would then light up, because it was something that they wanted to do, that they understood, that they could participate in.

Joshua was “really sold” on teaching through the arts because of the sense of joy students showed daily. “They would ask, ‘Are we going to do Cinco de Mayo today?’ They would look forward to it every day.” His cooperating teacher found a video of an enactment of the events of Cinco de Mayo. Using that video Joshua wrote a script and assigned roles based on the children’s reading ability. Students were narrators, villagers, or French soldiers. It ended with a performance of *baile folklórico* taught by his cooperating teacher (Figure 3). He elaborated,

The majority of the class had ties to Mexico but when we started not one of them knew anything about Cinco de Mayo. Through the lesson, the art, and the play that we did, they learned the real history of Cinco de Mayo and not just our Americanized beer-drinking holiday. I think they understood the history and it will stick with them.



Fig. 3: Cinco de Mayo performance.

Joshua recognized the potential of arts-based learning to deepen his students' understanding of academic content, to build community in the classroom, and to mitigate communication challenges with his students. Joshua's fifth-grade students were proud to perform and parade characters based on the Oaxacan tale, *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun* (Martinez, 1991).



Fig. 4 and Fig. 5: Joshua and his colleague, Allison, displaying props created for their play and parade.

Joshua commented on the props created for his students' play. "We had the giant lizard and hummingbird and they were proud to be carrying it around and showing it off" (Figure 4 and Figure 5). Reflecting on both the Cinco de Mayo and the Oaxacan plays, he observed,

Now the arts are a "go-to tool" in the bag. . . You're doing art, not math. You're doing a play, [but] they just happen to be learning about social studies. I think art is a sneaky little way [to] trick them into learning. That's how I use it. . . If it is something that is more interesting to them, then they take more away from it. . . By doing art you are helping them to become critical thinkers, you are helping them to problem solve. All those qualities translate to taking tests, especially with all the word problems on the tests lately. They have to think for themselves and it's not just teaching them to pass a test. . . If you can speak, write, and read, then you will vote and be active in your community. If you can't do all that then you're going to be more reserved because you don't have the skills to build upon.

For Joshua, the arts were a bridge to learning for emergent bilinguals who were reluctant to participate in classroom activities. He explained how art making boosted the confidence and motivation of a young immigrant girl with hearing challenges who spoke only French.

When we are doing other things she shuts down because it is hard for her to communicate: it's hard for her to understand [me] and it's hard for me to understand her. When we do something that she wants to do, like art, . . . then she wants to participate. She tries harder to communicate; it gives her that incentive. When she's doing something she wants to do, she tries harder to get her point across.

Joshua's narrative is an example of an "arts-enhanced curriculum," where the arts are used as a "hook" to engage students in academic learning, without teaching specific arts skills or art history.

## Victoria

In contrast to Joshua, Victoria was comfortable with dancing, painting, performing plays, and practicing photography prior to entering the cohort. She explained her perspective this way:

I kept in the back of my head that this program is supposed to be about arts. It's not just an add-on to the lesson. I want it to be part of the lesson. I want it to flow through the lesson.

Like Amaya and Joshua, Victoria understood that the arts positively affect students' attitudes toward learning.

It's fun for the kids. The minute the kids know that art is going to be involved, it . . . changes their attitude. They're excited and they're willing to learn because they know they are going to get dirty or they're going to paint. Self-expression is so important to those kids. . . Some of them will not talk otherwise, and through arts they are able to express some feeling.

Victoria incorporated the book *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale* (Tonatiah, 2013) into multimodal learning experiences for her first-grade students (Figure 6). Like Amaya, Victoria offered her students opportunities to "enter the text," "explore possible worlds," "comprehend the text" by making it their own (Landay & Wootton, 2012, p. 11). She drew from students' funds of knowledge in that, like the rabbit in the story, many of the children's families had migrated to the north to find work.



Fig. 6: Victoria and her students performing *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*.

We used it for math, for science, for history, for writing, [and] reading. We didn't just bring it to life through a play, . . . we brought it to life as part of our everyday class. We used that book for everything. It became part of the kids' discussions when they had time to talk. It became part of their journal writing. . . If you could imagine pages becoming part of these kids, that's how I feel this book became part of them.

She explained how the book teaches important life lessons:

The story tells about how the fathers of the families are heading from the south to the north to find work. It talks about trusting somebody and what you would do for your family. So Pancho Rabbit was willing to give all his food and starve himself on this long journey to the north just to get to his dad. So it taught the kids about selflessness. They really understood the story.

Victoria's students used collage to illustrate themes in the story. They also created masks and costumes, rehearsed their parts, and performed their play with confidence and enthusiasm. Throughout the lesson, Victoria incorporated aspects of the story to teach several school subject areas.

In math, we did a trail. We marked, "where did Pancho leave from, where did he get to in the desert, [and] how long of journey was it? And then how long of journey was it back home? . . . All we did was to show them on a map of where Pancho started (somewhere in Mexico) and then he trailed up North to get to the United States ...[w]e also talked about journeys other people have taken. We used the book, *How Chile Came to New Mexico* and talked about a mestizo Native who came through with chile seeds and planted them throughout his journey. . . That was a way we connected desert and journey to Pancho. . . We were able to talk about migration, we talked about farmer workers, we talked about how this was what the dad was going to do, he was going to the carrot fields or the lettuce fields. We talked about Cesar Chavez and the real migrant farm workers and how they're treated. . . They made picket signs.

## Interdisciplinary Arts Integration

Victoria related stories about how arts-based learning experiences shaped her students' behavior. Victoria recalled a first-grade boy who regularly disrupted her class when she read books aloud because he was "so bored." Initially, she told him to "sit down [and] pay attention," following her cooperating teacher's example.

But then I let him draw while I read. He has created some of the most awesome scenes from the books that we've read. Because I allow him to draw, he's absorbing what we're reading. He draws his interpretation of what I've read and it keeps him quiet. He doesn't bother other kids. In fact, it's become a trend in the classroom. There are other kids who get wiggly and can't sit still. They will also draw while I read.

She also noticed his journal writing changed after drawing.

His drawings also prompt his journal writing. . . If I let him draw what he's thinking first, then he can spill out a dozen words on the page. But if he has to just write, then he's just stumped. He won't perform.

The same was true for two other girls in her class who received special education services. Victoria reported, "I can assess them by what they draw." She described how watching her students perform gave her insights into her students' personalities: "You see a different side of your kids. . . They are not just pupils sitting there, writing, and reading, and raising their hand. You see their personality."

Victoria shared this example of how one student was affected:

We read a book one day about a giraffe that couldn't dance. It talked about different types of dancing – the cha-cha, swing, oldies, the tango – then we brought in those bits of music and we let them dance in the classroom for a little while and they loved it and we got to know them. That helps you establish a relationship with them. It helps you tailor the instruction to them...so here you have Penny who seems so quiet and doesn't say a peep at all and then, that day, she was dancing all over the place that day like a crazy little monkey. And it seemed like she broke out of her shell and now she's the one who tells the group, 'Please be quiet. We need to listen. I can help you with that.' It's like her personality just popped out after we did the dancing that day. Ever since then she's changed. That's what I mean. It allows you to see your kids for who they are.

As an avid salsa dancer, Victoria noted how dancing enhanced her relationship with students by allowing them to see her as a person as well as a teacher.

I mean, I got to dance with them and I was acting silly and maybe that's another thing. A teacher can show she's human. She's not just the lady up there that just talks *at* the kids. She's showing them she has a personality and she's fun. . . They will learn that when it's time to be serious, we will be serious. If you give them those opportunities to break and be themselves, I think you can get so much more out of them.

Victoria's work aligned with the ideals of arts-integration curriculum outlined by The Kennedy Center, the goals of culturally based learning drawing from students' funds of knowledge, and deeper learning that promote "more rigorous habits of learning and deeper understanding of content" (Hewlett Foundation, 2012, p. 6). When asked if her cooperating teacher (CT) felt that these experiences were important for the students, Victoria responded,

That's something you guys can explain to the CTs next year because I feel that [they think] the arts are an add-on. 'Now I have to make room for this. Now I have to cut into my usual teaching time to make sure this art gets done for you.'

She added, "No, you don't, why don't we just make it part of it. Why can't [the arts] just be included?"

## Discussion

### Engaged Students, Energized Teachers

The Kennedy Center website articulates two big reasons why arts integration is a powerful approach to learning. First, arts integration aligns with best practices for how students make meaning. Arts integration also "energizes teachers by providing increased professional satisfaction" (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, para 2). Students actively engage in the arts as a way to reflect on and develop ideas, and to solve problems individually or collaboratively. Nontraditional learners often excel because the arts tap into their otherwise hidden strengths.

The TECLA teachers offered insights into their knowledge of their students' literacies, learning, and funds of knowledge as mediated through interdisciplinary arts-based learning. Amaya stressed that her students were more "focused," and "ready to pay attention" because they looked forward to embodying the character from the literature. Joshua found that arts integration improved his communication with emerging bilingual students by connecting their academic learning to their cultures. Both Joshua and Victoria mentioned that the arts afforded their students with disabilities opportunities to demonstrate their understandings through artistic modalities that could be assessed. All noted that their relationships with students improved through arts involvement by offering insights into each other's personalities.

The PSTs found that their students were more focused on learning because they had a purpose and a desire to create art. The vignettes illustrated how the students were excited about learning and motivated to work hard to construct their own knowledge in meaningful ways. At the same time, the PSTs experienced the joy and satisfaction that led them into teaching in the first place.

In their interviews, all PSTs indicated that they needed faculty support to effectively teach multiple subject areas through the arts, and they expressed the need for more scaffolding as they developed their unit plans within the constraints of rigid, prescribed curriculum. In addition, they wanted more in-depth instruction about how to create within the arts. All TECLA cohort members expressed that they would use the arts to teach in the future.

### Arts-Based Learning Engagement

During data analysis, three levels of arts engagement by the PSTs emerged. We created a three-tiered arts-based learning engagement model (Figure 7) as a tool to guide preservice teachers into deeper engagement with the arts for instruction, learning, and assessment.

<p><b>Level I: Opaque Practice:</b> The teacher considers art as a tool used to distract learners or uses the arts to refocus students either as a reward for good behavior or as a break from regular academic learning. At this level, students are empowered to use art as a tool for learning subject matter.</p>
<p><b>Level II: Translucent Practice:</b> The teacher values art making as a way to engage students' cultural funds of knowledge, using best practices to facilitate creative risk-taking in a safe, controlled environment. Art making is a way to engage and accommodate English language learners, students with exceptionalities, and other diverse student populations in culturally relevant ways. The arts offer inclusive opportunities for all students to shine through many modalities. Art making becomes a way to build classroom community and student confidence. At this level, students are empowered to use art as a tool for learning subject matter within a culturally relevant and sustaining context.</p>
<p><b>Level III: Transparent Practice:</b> The teacher understands the potentiality of art making as a force in personal and collaborative meaning-making, self-discovery, and identity formation. Art making facilitates the creation of individual and community-based narratives. Students co-create and take ownership of their learning in creative and imaginative ways. Rather than passive consumption of content, students are active producers of knowledge. In this context, students are empowered to learn about diverse and culturally relevant artists and artworks as they engage in personally meaningful art making. Art making empowers learners to imagine themselves as part of the larger trajectory of human creative endeavors.</p>

Fig. 7: Levels of arts-engaged learning practices.



We considered how Amaya, Joshua, and Victoria's practices might fit these levels of engagement. Joshua began the program with little to no conception of how to incorporate the arts into teaching, but then progressed to an opaque level when he observed that his students' artistic engagement offered him a way to "trick" students into learning. His teaching moved into translucent practice when he recognized the arts provided ways that his students could perform and remember history, and other content, and increase diverse students' access to learning.

Victoria had a strong personal commitment to social justice and honoring students' funds of knowledge. She demonstrated a translucent level of practice, engaging in multiple arts projects with her students that were culturally relevant and which drew connections across the curriculum. Amaya engaged her students in multimodal learning that paid homage to both indigenous and western worldviews. She integrated culturally relevant content into learning experiences that allowed each student to truly shine in personal ways. She showed her students diverse artworks to help them empathize with other artists, and encouraged them to create personally and culturally meaningful art. In all cases, TECLA teacher candidates harnessed the power of the arts to engage their students in multimodal, culturally sustaining ways, and they came to understand the possibilities of reaching and teaching diverse students through the arts.

## Implications

TECLA is a transdisciplinary framework for infusing artistic thinking and processes into different disciplines to deepen learning and to enable students to see how subject areas overlap or fit together. The project may offer insights for teacher educators, educational leaders, classroom teachers, and teacher candidates striving to provide students with rigorous interdisciplinary content while energizing the school with culturally relevant arts-based multimodal learning experiences. The TECLA model "reach[es] beyond interpretation of academic topics to explore and interpret life-centered issues or 'big ideas' that transcend disciplinary boundaries" (Marshall, 2014, p. 105). It also provides a lens through which to conduct scholarly inquiry that is more collaborative, inclusive, and integrated than traditional conceptions. TECLA created space for students to work across several modes of representation and communication as they investigated topics that were relevant to them. We believe that when the arts and students' funds of knowledge are part of the meaning-making process, their range of *effere[n]t* and *aesthetic* responses to texts is deeper and broader. Rosenblatt (1995) refers to *effere[n]t* information as that which is remembered, whereas *aesthetic* focuses on the experiential or emotional response to texts. The TECLA curriculum model provides all learners, including emergent bilingual students and those with disabilities, with choice, time to work collaboratively, and the freedom to perform their learning and develop multiliteracies. The aesthetic, collaborative nature of the project yielded benefits for the student teachers, the cooperating teachers, and university faculty members as well. All of us came away with a better understanding of how the arts can foster inclusive ways of knowing and sense making for diverse learners.



## Acknowledgments

We thank our TECLA colleagues for their work on this project: Leila Flores-Dueñas, Carlos LópezLeiva, Irene Welch, Rebecca Sánchez, Sylvia Celedón-Pattichis, Amy Sweet, Eileen Waldschmidt, Katherine Crawford-Garrett, Virginia Necochea, and the principal at the elementary school, Bernadette Hall-Cuaron. The TECLA project was supported by funding from the ECMC Foundation and from Dave and Mary Colton, and an anonymous donor.

## References

- Alexander, J., & Rhodes, J. (2014). *On multimodality: Media in composition studies*. New York, NY: Conference on College Composition and Communication of NCTE.
- Catterall, J.S., Dumais, S.A., & Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012). *The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings from four longitudinal studies* (Research Report #55). Washington, DC: The National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved from <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf>
- Chappell, S. V., & Faltis, C. (2013). *The arts and emergent bilingual youth: Building culturally responsive, critical, and creative education in school and community contexts*. London: Routledge.
- Craig, D., & Paraiso, J. (2008). Dual diaspora and barrio art: Art as an avenue for learning English. *Journal for Learning Through the Arts*, 4(1).
- Cresswell, J.W. (2007). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Efland, A.E. (2002). *Art and cognition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2009). *Funds of knowledge theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hewlett Foundation. (2012). Deeper learning strategic plan summary educational program. Retrieved from [http://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Education\\_Deeper\\_Learning\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Education_Deeper_Learning_Strategy.pdf). San Francisco, CA: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 74–84.
- Landay, E., & Wootton, K. (2012). *A reason to read: Linking literacy and the arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Press.
- Marshall, J. (2014). Transdisciplinarity and art integration: Toward a new understanding of art-based learning across the curriculum. *Studies in Art Education*, 55(2), 104–127.

- Marshall, J. (2016). A systems view: The role of art in education. *Art Education*, 69(3), 12–19.
- Martinez, A.C. (1991). *The woman who outshone the sun: The legend of Lucia Zenteno*. New York, NY: Scholastic Books, Inc.
- Mason, C.Y., Steedly, K.M., & Thormann, M.S. (2008). Impact of arts integration on voice, choice, and access. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 31(1), 36–46.
- Moll, L. C. (1992). Literacy research in community and classrooms: A sociocultural approach. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil, & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives in literacy research* (pp. 211–244). Urbana, IL: National Conference on Research in English.
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1) 60–92.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H.S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Parsons, M. (2004). Art and integrated curriculum. In E. Eisner & M. Day (Eds.), *Handbook of research and policy in art education* (pp. 775–794). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Silverstein, L.B., & Layne, S. (2010) *What is arts integration?: Explore the definition*. Retrieved from <https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/arts-integration/what-is-arts-integration#explore-the-definition>. Washington, DC: The Kennedy Center ArtsEdge.
- Stewart, M., & Walker, S. (2005). *Rethinking curriculum in art*. Worcester, MA: Davis.
- Tonatiuh, D. (2013). *Pancho rabbit and the coyote: A migrant's tale*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Wolkstein, D. (2004). *Sun mother wakes the world: An Australian creation story*. Bronwyn Bancroft (Illustrator). New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. When you came to this project, what did you think about arts integration or arts-based learning or teaching through the arts?
2. What happened regarding arts learning during the first semester that made an impression on you? Can you tell me more about that? What did you learn by doing that?
3. Do you think the students learned by doing the arts integration Bring a Book to Life?
4. Was there anything that happened for particular students during that time that seemed to result from this experience? What other value might there have been for the kids learning about (your subject)?
5. Did you get some ideas from your method classes to help you do art integration yourself?
6. How do feel about using the arts in your teaching now?
7. How have you seen your students react to the arts?
8. What value do you think the arts have had in your teaching?
9. Have the arts helped you reach students with special needs?
10. What are your thoughts about the value of bringing a story to life?
11. What might you have done differently?
12. Are there any offshoots from the play?
13. Do you have any suggestions how teaching about arts integration could be improved in this cohort program?
14. Did you feel support from the GA or embedded faculty member?
15. Is there any way you might use their expertise in the future?
16. Do you have any other comments about how you will use the arts in your future teaching?
17. Is there any way you could explain why you are teaching this way to a future administrator?



**Nancy Pauly**, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Art Education in the Department of Art Studio, History, and Education at the University of New Mexico. Her research interests include visual culture, arts-based learning, teacher preparation, and teaching about contemporary Native art.



**Karla V. Kingsley** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education, Educational Leadership & Policy at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on instructional technology, multiliteracies, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and transdisciplinary learning.



**Asha Baker**, M.A., is a bilingual teaching artist and doctoral student at the University of New Mexico based in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Oaxaca, Mexico. Her work focuses on the power of the arts in fostering awareness of consciousness in empathetic contexts.



# Creating a Context for Girl of Color Ways of Knowing Through Feminist of Color Playwriting

Grace D. Player

## Abstract

This article investigates how playwriting served three middle school Black girls within a larger practitioner research study seeking to better understand the literate practices of girls of color. It delves into the ways that playwriting provided the girls in an afterschool writing club opportunities to explore both their knowledge and ways of knowing, rooted in their cultural, gendered, and racialized experiences, and, in turn, share these with others, within an academic setting. It points to the necessity for creating writing pedagogies that celebrate experiential, cultural, emotional, and relational knowledge, using playwriting as an example.

## Background

After school hours, in the library of an ethnically and linguistically diverse Catholic school in a large Northeastern city, eight girls of color gathered weekly after school to write, to read, to talk, to dance, to create. This writing club was designed specifically for them—to invite them to explore the writing and art of women of color writers, activists, artists, and intellectuals, and to provide an academic context in which they could tap into their own writerly, activist, artistic, intellectual girl of color selves with and alongside one another. They named this club “The Unnormal Sisterhood” and they shaped it into a place that centered and celebrated their knowledge and their ways of knowing.

On one spring day, the Unnormal Sisters sat in every part of the library, some by themselves, some in clusters. Throughout this writing period, they ebbed and flowed through various acts of writing—sometimes typing, sometimes scribbling in their notebooks, sometimes conversing with their partners, sometimes listening to music as they sat thoughtfully in silence, sometimes reading aloud what they had already written, sometimes chatting about nothing related to their plays, as they allowed their minds to wander. I rotated through the room, checking in with them, reading what they’d written, conferring with them. Over the course of the year, the girls collectively dug into the topics that concerned them the most and were now working to write plays to bring to life their emotional, imaginative, and theoretical understandings of those issues. Diamond<sup>1</sup> and Seraphina were huddled over the computer keyboard—taking turns typing and carefully choosing the words to best convey their ideas about the relationships to their teachers.

I settled into a chair next to them and watched them write for a while. Eventually, I asked why they were writing this particular story. Seraphina replied, “I want teachers to know what it would feel like if the students talked to them the way *they* talk to students.” She elaborated, “They need to learn new ways to

teach a child. It's not the 1990s anymore and you can't just scream at them." In this statement, she showed her understanding of her rights to dignity. These were understandings rooted in her own experiences with teachers and in the emotions associated with those experiences. Playwriting was a vehicle through which she and Diamond processed, expressed, and shared their knowledge and theories of oppression and change. This article investigates how playwriting operated for Black girls. It delves into the ways that playwriting provided the Unnormal Sisterhood with a pedagogy that opened space to explore their knowledge and ways of knowing, rooted in their cultural, gendered, and racialized experiences, and, in turn, share these with one another.

### Story of the Question

Black girls find themselves located at the intersections of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1993). In schools, Black girls, in particular, are often subject to myriad physical and symbolic violences. They are disproportionately and harshly surveilled, disciplined, expelled, and criminalized in schools that too often prioritize discipline and control over education (African American Policy Forum & Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015). What's more, as a result of combined racist and monolithic narratives about Black girls and limited perceptions of what femininity should be, Black girls are often disciplined and commanded to be more "ladylike." They are punished for behaviors and attitudes that could, in fact, lead to educational success, for example, outspokenness, assertiveness, commitment, and a feeling of deservedness (Morris, 2016).

The impetus behind the creation of the Unnormal Sisterhood was an effort to reimagine what educational spaces could look like for girls of color in the face of these and other intersecting structural oppressions facing not only Black girls, but also Asian and Latina girls. This project took place at a K-8 Catholic school that served almost exclusively low-income and working-class Black, Asian, and Latinx students, but employed almost exclusively white teachers. The school too often abided by curriculum and disciplinary measures that were at best marginalizing, and, at worst, violent to the students. The project grew out of knowledge and curiosities born out of my own identity as an Asian-American woman of color educator and writer, my immersion in the community surrounding the girls' school, and my understandings of the intersecting oppressions that affect girls of color in this country (African American Policy Forum & Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015; Morris, 2016; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). Using a feminist of color framework, the Unnormal Sisterhood was an attempt at building a writing and literacy curriculum for girls of color that attended to and celebrated their knowledge and ways of knowing, which are too often ignored, misunderstood, and fragmented through the white heteropatriarchal epistemologies that shape mainstream schooling.

## Theoretical Framework: Feminist of Color Ways of Knowing and Writing

This paper is an invitation to attune to the brilliances of Black girls—their sensemaking, critiques, theories, and proposals for change that arise from their experiences in this world, their cultural legacies, their emotional understandings, and their relationships to one another. Taking on a feminist of color framework that centers girl of color knowledge rejects a white heteropatriarchal lens and allows us to more accurately understand both the oppressions that girls of color face as well as the ways that they are brilliant, agentive, and passionate (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016).

Black girls are able to most accurately theorize the intersections of racism and sexism and suggest change because they, themselves, have lived life at these intersections (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). It stands to reason that Black girls, who have experienced racism and sexism—and possibly, if not likely, other categories such as homophobia, classism, and ableism—are those most knowledgeable about how to challenge the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000) that upholds intersecting oppressions.

Importantly, there are not only types of knowledge, but also ways of knowing that contribute to the ability of women and girls of color to theorize and propose change to oppressive structures. As Anzladúa (1983) has philosophized, it is often in our bodies that we make sense of the world, that we feel and therefore understand both pleasure and oppression, freedom and constriction. Black feminists have attended to this idea as well. For instance, Fannie Barrier Williams names Black women's anxiety "as an emotion integral to race women's politics... rooted in an intrinsic bodily awareness about Black women's corporeal vulnerability" (as quoted by Cooper, 2017 p. 41). Emotions, and in particular, rage, can be put to important anti-racist and feminist causes when utilized with precision, a skill that women of color across time have had to develop (Cooper, 2017).

Girls of color are also privy to specific ways of knowing born of cultural and gendered knowledge. They are inheritors of legacies of struggle, conquest, and resistance, stories of which are passed down by and amongst women and girls of color (Delgado-Bernal, 2006). This knowledge transmission often occurs through caring relationships, as women of color enact care as a form of resistance to white heteropatriarchal structures (Collins, 2000). The knowledge transmitted and shared between and among girls and women of color is rooted in cultural practices of mutuality that leverage literacies that are relational, emotional, and embodied (Ghiso, 2016).

Too often, though, the understandings of girls of color are relegated out of academic spaces through narrow and hegemonic definitions of knowledge and theory. Their intellect, innovation, and creativity are obscured by controlling images that frame them as less capable, less brilliant, and less adept for schooling than their white and male peers (Collins, 2000). Emotional and experiential knowledge is placed at odds, rather than in cohesion, with conceptions of rationality (hooks, 1994; Jaggar, 1989). Further, because of the ways that women of color are simultaneously raced and gendered, their knowledge is often labeled as irrational, as outrage, as incomprehensible from a white masculine standpoint (Ahmed, 2012). Thus, in dominant academic spaces, theories of change rooted in woman of



color knowledge are marginalized, perhaps at times purposefully, as white supremacist and masculinist ideologies persist.

I suggest a reimagining of academic spaces in order to center and celebrate the woman of color knowledge and ways of knowing. Playwriting and performance served as a platform for this work, as it provided space for girls to investigate their experiences, enact emotions, and build on knowledge born of woman of color cultures of resistance and caring.

## Playwriting and Performance to Access Feminist of Color Ways of Knowing

Writing, as so many women of color feminists have discussed, can be a pathway toward processing emotional knowledge, claiming one's experience, and speaking back to negative stereotypes. Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) explained the impact of writing for her as a woman of color when, in response to the question of why she is compelled to write, she claimed:

Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. (pp. 168–169)

With these words, Anzaldúa explicates the importance of writing as both a rebellion and a means of survival in the face of oppression. She explains that writing is a route toward exploring experiences and tapping into emotions. What's more, she notes that writing is relational, that it facilitates the building of intimacy between women of color. This reflects what Mónica González Ybarra (forthcoming) names as qualities of girl of color literacies: "(1) em[bodied] and intergenerational, (2) disruptive, and (3) reflective and shifting."

In the Unnormal Sisterhood, playwriting became one genre through which the girls could employ their literacies. As Brazilian revolutionary theater director and writer, Augusto Boal (1979), has asserted, "theatre is a weapon of the oppressed" (as quoted by Fine, 2011, p. 145) and, further, it is rehearsal for the revolution. Jeanne-Marie Miller (1982) demonstrates this utility of playwriting by citing a history of Black women's playwriting as an expression of Black humanity, exploring Black experience from a Black point of view. Citing playwrights like Sonia Sanchez, Lorraine Hansberry, Ntozake Shange, and others, Miller demonstrates the way that Black women have used theater as affirmative, revolutionary, idea-laden, and fantasy driven.

Black women playwrights have told the Black woman's story—from slavery to freedom—from her point of view. The plays have focused on her tragedies; her struggles; her dreams for herself, her family, and her race. Their images of Black women are usually positive, and their female characters, for the most part, have great moral strength. (p. 289)

She adds that Black women playwrights were not writing solely for themselves, but also for each other and for other oppressed people. Playwriting, then, is not only an act of self-preservation, but an act of coalition and care. Indeed, it holds potential to reflect the qualities of girl of color literacies.

## Literature Review

Maisha Winn's (2011) ethnographic inquiry into the ways incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls wrote and performed texts in a playwriting group demonstrates the power of playwriting girls of color. She found that playwriting allowed girls to explore and express their experiences, identities, and desires. It gave space for girls to inquire into the numerous structural inequities they faced and put words to their desires for their futures. Girls were able to fictionalize and perform some of their own experiences and therefore analyze their lives, their sense of deservingness, and hopes. Moreover, playwriting invited what Winn describes as an "ensemble" where teachers and students worked together to establish shared goals and connect over efforts to achieve those goals. Playwriting served as a mechanism for girls of color to utilize their power and resist oppressive narratives with and alongside one another.

In addition to writing, performance of places can give girls of color the opportunity to further explore their understandings by acting them out. Performances of their writing allows them to engage their embodied literacies, enacting emotions and drawing understanding from those enactments. Embodied literacies can open girls to criticality as they attune not only their mind, but their bodies to the world (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012). Further, acting out plays allows girls to enter one another's texts, thus becoming critically attuned to the experiences and calls for resistance of their sisters (Gallagher & Ntelioglou, 2011). Playwriting can also illuminate youth perspectives on issues of inequity, challenging "common sense" understandings developed by adults of phenomenon that most directly affect youth, and in particular, youth of color (Conrad, 2005). Finally, as Lee and De Finney (2008) have investigated, performance of plays written by girls of color can help them to overcome a feeling of aloneness that results from their racialized experiences and to engage in conversations about those experiences with others. In all, playwriting and performance is a way for girls of color to engage in coalitional literacies that tap into their stories, emotions, and imaginings of change.

## Methodology

The Unnormal Sisterhood developed during a yearlong practitioner inquiry project (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in partnership with eight Black and Asian middle school girls. The methodologies to study the Unnormal Sisterhood was rooted in humanizing (Paris & Winn, 2014) and ethical community-based (Campano, Ghiso, & Welch, 2016) methodologies. Building from ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017), the curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood sought to center the knowledge and theories of the girls and women of color involved as critically important to understanding the ways the intersections of gender and race were implicated in literacy pedagogy and the envisioning of literacy pedagogy (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016; Muhammad, 2018).

My practitioner inquiry stance allowed me to not only understand patterns, but to also create conditions for growth and change. It allowed me to reflexively engage in data I collected across the course of the club, adjusting my own pedagogies to best serve the needs and desires of the girls in the club over time.

Influenced by Campano and colleagues (2016), I worked with the girls as collaborative knowledge producers, rejecting the colonial notion that, as a researcher, I was the sole holder of knowledge. It was through the establishment of sincere and sustained relationships with the girls that we were able to build trust from which coproduced girl of color knowledge emerged. The trusting relationships gave way to honest and open dialogic learning that would likely be unavailable through more traditional and distanced research methods (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014).

The data off of which my analysis grew came in the form of fieldnotes, transcribed semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and artifacts including girls' writing and art. I iteratively analyzed this data, filtered through the woman of color lens I employ, finding emerging thematic and in vivo codes to mark patterns and anomalies across the multiple sources of data. I also looked across my data sources, understanding that the multiple dimensions of context, texts, individuals, and relationships needed to be viewed as related and affecting one another. To grapple with this sense I was making, I wrote ongoing reflexive memos to crystalize meaning (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008) and help me to shape the course of the pedagogy to suit the needs and desires of the girls. To help ensure the centering of the girls' knowledge, I performed member checks, bringing back my initial analysis to the girls to confirm if my interpretations seemed accurate to them. These methods allowed me to understand their plays, their critiques, and their experiences with more depth and more attunement to their brilliances. Further, by using a feminist of color framework, I was able to filter understandings of their work through a lens that rejected potentially racist and sexist interpretations girls of color are too often subject to by dominant audiences. The following sections synthesize data gathered from the work of three Black girls in the group, tracing the ways they wrote, worked together and independently, performed, and reflected through the process.

## Emerging Themes

The focus of this article is on two of the plays produced in the Unnormal Sisterhood, one written by a duo of girls, Seraphina and Diamond, and one written independently by Ciara. The plays were inspired by the work of Dr. Gerald Campano's (2007) students, who wrote critiques of their own schooling in the form of plays. After reading and discussing Dr. Campano's students' work, the girls discussed the ways that playwriting could be a method to take on their own critiques of schooling, taking a specifically girl of color perspective to elucidate how they experienced school.

Amongst the girls in the club, the issues of student-teacher relationships and sexual harassment emerged as most prevalent. In the following plays, these issues were explored collaboratively through writing and performance as girls shared their experiences with these issues, their empathy for others experiencing connected hardships, and their imagining of alternative possibilities for how these issues would unfold.

I offer, here, their scripts, conversations about their scripts, documentation of their performances, and a feminist of color reading of these scripts. I am purposeful in reading these through the feminist of color lens in order to disrupt white hegemonic interpretations of Black girlhood that may fail to see the theories and understandings Black girls bring to literacy curriculum.

### Seraphina & Diamond: “Teachers Getting Taught a Lesson”

At the time of writing their play, Seraphina was a seventh grader and Diamond was a sixth grader. Both were Black girls. Both attended the same Catholic K-8 school. Seraphina was a cheerleader, a straight-A student, and later became 8th grade class president. She claimed a strong commitment to race and gender equity. Diamond was a talented poet and dancer who came to identify as a lesbian. She was an outspoken critic of police violence and racism. She was also a student who was in trouble often, got sent to the office frequently, and was eventually expelled from their school when she was in the 7th grade. They decided to partner in writing this play (see Figure 1) because they both were passionate about challenging the ways students were treated by teachers in schools. Though Seraphina was rarely a direct recipient of disciplinary measures, she frequently witnessed her classmates as targets of racist and sexist language. Diamond, on the other hand, was frequently a target of mistreatment at the hands of her teachers.

Teachers getting taught a lesson	Scene 3
<p>*Mrs. Graceia *Xhocitli mom                      *Diamond *Mr. Langston                      *Xhocitli</p>	<p>Both Xhocitli and Diamond's parents are furious at the teacher's comments about Xhocitli's homeland {Peru}</p>
<p><b>Scene 1</b></p> <p>*Students enter the classroom</p> <p><b>Diamond:</b> Were do I sit Mrs. Graceia</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Right next to Xhocitli</p> <p><b>Xhocitli:</b> Hi what is your name mine is Xhocitli I just come here from Peru sorry if my English isn't the best.</p> <p><b>Diamond:</b> Its fine  <b>Diamond:</b> Why did you come here?</p> <p><b>Xhocitli :</b> Well their was gangs rivalries in our hometown of Lima so we left and when to American for a better life. We also heard that the United States was one of the most diverse places on the planet</p>	<p><b>Xhocitli mother:</b> How dear you allow such mockery to go on in your school. Isn't America supposed to be diverse and cherish one another's cultures? Should you allow this?</p> <p><b>Xhocitli:</b> {Que horrible, sin valor cerdo racist} you horrible worthless racist pig</p> <p><b>Xhocitli mom:</b> le encenderán {you will be fired}</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Vaya por delante que así perunan ningún trabajo que tiene que de cruzar la frontera con el sida que tenga azada *screaming and taking the two girls with her</p>
<p><b>Scene 2</b></p> <p>*A few months of school are in</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Kids we are learning about South America I am giving 3 weeks to come up with a presentation and A dish from the country</p> <p><b>Xhocitli:</b> Yes (excited) can we do Peru?  <b>Mrs. Graceia :</b> OK (face looks confuse)</p> <p><b>Diamond :</b> What's wrong Teacher?</p> <p><b>Xhocitli:</b> Yeah what's so bad about Peru (about to cry)</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Ugh, Out of all the places why Peru? Because if you have a problem you can address me with Mr. Langston</p> <p><b>Xhocitli and Diamond:</b> We will *angry * walking out of the class</p>	<p><b>Scene 4</b>                      *Later that week</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Because I was in a meeting with two of my students*eye balling Diamond and Xhocitli* I am now not allow to talk about racial things because are students our llorones (crybabies)...</p> <p><b>Xhocitli:</b> Stop it right there you no right to talk about me or my home land I try my best to keep up even though I just came here heritage or put me down for being me or disrespect my virtues you should be ashamed.</p> <p><b>Diamond:</b> Right! You shouldn't just judge because where their from its crazy. Also, if you want to talk about someone and where their from you have to talk about everyone in the world and you because we all are from specific country's or states and you need to realize how everyone is unique</p> <p><b>Mrs. Graceia:</b> Ir a morir a los estudiantes yo (go die you dumb students I quit)</p> <p><b>Seraphina </b> Yellow, My name is Seraphina I'm a 13 year old from Philadelphia I wrote this to show that how you treat students. And isn't the best because say if I called you a inmate how would you like it. I believe by doing that degrades you as a person. I also don't like that when you get mad or have a bad day you take it out on us and that's not cool.</p>

Fig. 1: Seraphina and Diamond's Script<sup>2,3,4</sup>

## **Employing Experiences to Critique the Mistreatment of Students**

To better understand their motivations and process in creating the play, I asked Seraphina what inspired them to write this play. She responded:

Me and Diamond didn't like how the teachers were treating us students. Like she would say how Ms. X would flick papers at her, call her names, scream at her, lie on her, so I just, influenced it, like how Ms. X would treat us in the beginning and put it in here, the play.

Here, Seraphina is showing the direct ways that their lived experiences shaped their motivation to address teacher treatment of students in their school. Seraphina and Diamond claimed that they wanted their teachers to better understand the ways that their language affected students.

Throughout their play, Seraphina and Diamond reflect their experiences through the violent language the teacher enacts. Seraphina and Diamond put on display racist and vitriolic behavior that reflects their own experiences. In the play, the girls write the teacher as someone who derides one of the students' home country of Peru, calls the students "crybabies," and who tells them to "go die." The teacher derides students' cultures, mocks their emotions, and incites violence. These are fictionalizations of very real experiences and pain, for as Seraphina frequently brought up across the course of the club, teachers' language made her feel "less than human."

In the closing soliloquy, Seraphina wrote:

I wrote this to show that how you treat students. And isn't the best because say if I called you a inmate how would you like it. I believe by doing that degrades you as a person. I also don't like that when you get mad or have a bad day you take it out on us and that's not cool.

Here, she specifically cites the use of the word "inmates," language she often reported as being used by her classroom teachers. According to Seraphina and Diamond's testimonies across the course of the club, teachers had called them inmates, animals, and things (as opposed to humans) and yelled at and ostracized them frequently.

Their play, then, is a reflection and analysis of their real-life experience. They engage storytelling and a subsequent soliloquy to employ an experience-based critique and narration that reflects the increasing criminalization of Black girls in schools across the nation (Morris, 2016). This critique of teacher behavior builds off of their emotional knowledge that results from their experiences with racism and sexism in the classroom. They offer a feminist of color critique that points to the dehumanizing pedagogies their teachers employ, and imagine and call for change.

## **Enacting Coalitional Resistance Through Playwriting**

Playwriting allowed Diamond and Seraphina to inquire into and enact coalition amongst girls of color. One way in which they reflected their coalitional ideologies was by choosing to write one of their main characters as Latina, although neither of them claimed any Latina roots. When I asked the girls about this choice, they claimed it was because they had read about another Latina student in the plays we read by

Dr. Campano's students and because Seraphina had read about a student who shared her character's name in her mother's teacher education materials. The girls synthesized a variety of experiences and texts to create a fictionalized account of teacher treatment of students that simultaneously replicated their own experiences while expressing empathy for girls with different ethnic identities, but who they understood likely also experienced racism. This follows in the tradition of women of color activists enacting care for all marginalized people with the understanding that "nobody's free until everybody's free" (Hamer, 2011, p. 136).

Diamond and Seraphina not only enact care themselves, but they also chose to story caring relationships amongst their characters. From the start of the play, the two girls portrayed, Diamond and Xhocitli, engage in conversations about their subjective realities—Diamond inquires into why Xhocitli has immigrated to the United States from Peru, showing a level of concern and curiosity that reflects care (Valenzuela, 1999). This relational care is not shown in Diamond and Seraphina's characterization of the teacher. The primary way that the fictionalized teacher attempts to engage with culture is through a research report and the preparation of an ethnic dish, objectives that seem rather removed from the relational work of understanding minoritized students' experiences and cultural knowledge. Diamond and Seraphina script the teacher's approach to multicultural education in a way that is at best, misguided, and, at worst, racist (Nieto, 1999; Paris & Alim, 2017). They seem to intuit the carelessness of this kind of multicultural education, a topic taken up by many scholars engaging the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). What's more, Diamond and Seraphina demonstrate an alternative by storying their girl of color characters as engaging care and curiosity for one another. The girl characters show support for one another, understanding that Xhochitli's cultural roots are part of her and worthy of celebration and potentially important content for the students' critical learning. In this way, they not only engage critique of Eurocentric notions of multicultural education, but they, further, suggest an alternative.

### **Performance as a Route Toward Engaging Embodied Critique**

Performance also played an important role in creating pathways for Seraphina and Diamond to tap into their emotional knowledge. The emotions they named were not just expressed in words, but also in their physical enactments. This gave them the opportunity to play out their anger, stomping and throwing items on the floor as they acted out the scenes. Performance allowed them to tap into their embodied knowledge and physically project their emotional knowledge in ways that were too often punished in their classrooms, a phenomenon addressed by Diamond over time as she reported the multiple ways she was disciplined for moving, speaking, and interacting with others during class.

Through performance, though, not only were they connecting with their emotional knowledge, but they were using it to transmit knowledge to other girls as they shared their plays with the other Unnormal Sisters. As Cooper (2017) has discussed, there is power in women (and in this case, girls) of color taking their rage and directing it with precision and purpose. For Seraphina and Diamond, playwriting offered a productive outlet for the intellectual work of using emotion as a foundation for critiques of injustice. They demonstrate, as Fahima Ife (2017) has explored, the critical value of attuning to Black girls'



embodied critique. Through a woman of color theoretical viewpoint, we can reject the misreadings of Black girls' bodies, and instead understand that their bodily reactions are wisely pointing out acts of violence directed at them.



Fig. 2: Stills from a video of Diamond and Seraphina acting out their play.

This play gave the girls an opportunity to rewrite the world, imagining it as a place where they had more power to express their anger and their care for one another. Diamond and Seraphina reimagined school to be a place where they had agency to speak back to their teachers without major consequence, besides some escalating language from the teacher. In fact, in the end of the play, the teacher even quits her job, potentially freeing the girls from her wrath. The teacher's exit from the profession was, further, inspired by the coalitional work that the girls did. This revision of reality offered insight into and critique of the ways they, as girls of color, felt so often hurt and dismissed by teachers as well as the hope they see in their own caring relationships. By engaging the multiple girl of color literacies afforded by playwriting and performance, the girls enacted resistance, critique, and suggestions for change.

### **Ciara: "Does She Know That Is Sexual Harassment?"**

Ciara, a sixth grader, identified as Black and female. She was a devoted music fan who saw Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj amongst her idols. When Beyoncé's 2016 album *Lemonade* came out, she was beyond ecstatic and spent many hours poring over the lyrics and visuals, making deep and concerted efforts to make sense of what she was hearing, reading, and seeing in Beyoncé's masterpiece. She, like Beyoncé, used her art, and in this case, her playwriting, both to analyze her relationship to her peers as well as to understand how structures of inequity shape those relationships. Her writing served as a vehicle to explore her experiences and relationships and, in turn, begin to make sense of structural sexism and analyze her own sometimes complicity in those structures.



Daquan: Ayo Brianca. Bring that butt over here boi.	(Daquan walks into the room and talk to Ali.)
Stephanie: NO!	Daquan: Go slap Brianca's butt.
Daquan: Can you please come over here.	Ali: Why don't you go do it.
(Stephanie walks to Daquan)	Daquan: I can't.
Stephanie: Yes Daquan.	Ali: Ok
(Daquan slaps Steph butt)	(Ali smacks Brianca's butt.)
Stephanie: Stop touching me!	Brianca: Stop! (and giggles away)
Brianca: Stop touching people butts.	Steph: Tell Ms. Sherry.
Daquan: Nobody asked you, Stephanie. You know u like it.	Brianca: No.
Ali: Brianca you know you want ur butt slaped	Ali: She not going to tell because she like it.
Steph: I don't like it.	Brianca: I'm not telling because Im not a rat.
Daquan: Stop lying.	(Steph talks to the crowd)
Steph: Ms. Sherry. Daquan touched my butt!	Does she know that is sexual harassment? Does she like it?
Ms Sherry: Daquan let me talk to you in the hallway.	Maybe she is a little slut. Wait. That's my friend I should
(Daquan goes into the hallway to talk to Ms. Sherry)	have never said that. But wait do boys know that its not
Ms Sherry: Why would you touch her butt?	right. I shouldn't be blaming this on my friend. I should be
Daquan: I was just playing	blaming it on the boys. Just because you like someone
Ms. Sherry: Don't touch her again.	doesn't mean you do something disrespectful.
Daquan: Ok.	

Fig. 3: Ciara's script.

Ciara's play explored the ways that girls are labeled sexually promiscuous while the perpetrators of sexual harassment generally go unscathed. Further, she notes that those who are in positions of power—in this case, teachers—fail to protect girls of color in the face of harassment (see Figure 3). The content of the play reflected conversations the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood had over time about the ways sexism affected the girls' lives. In the play, two girls interact with boys at their school who end up grabbing the girls' behinds. While the narrator protests, her friend simply lets it happen.

### **Girl of Color Language at the Core of Critique**

During the scene, Ciara uses the language of her everyday life, not attempting to mold what is happening into school-sanctioned language. Thus, she captures something that feels very real, very of her life, that could not be illustrated within the constraints of what is too often seen in schools as the prized academic genre for middle schoolers: the five-paragraph essay. She is not constrained, either, but sentences and structures would fail to reflect her everyday experience. Playwriting allowed her to break convention, and instead, use the exact words she needed to story her experiences. As poet June Jordan (1988) points out, Black English has specific utility in communicating points, and often points about injustice. Jordan claims Black English is useful in insisting on one's existence, centralizing voice, and delivering messages with clarity. Indeed, these seem to be qualities of Ciara's play, as an oral reading conveys the very realness of Ciara's experiences, the very clear voices of her interlocutors.

**Daquan:** Ayo Brianca. Bring that butt over here boi.

**Stephanie:** NO!

**Daquan:** Can you please come over here.

(Stephanie walks to Daquan)

**Stephanie:** Yes Daquan.

(Daquan slaps Steph butt)

**Stephanie:** Stop touching me!

**Brianca:** Stop touching people butts.

**Daquan:** Nobody asked you, Stephanie. You know u like it.

**Ali:** Brianca you know you want ur butt slaped

The use of her language, the repeated cries for it to stop, her capitalized “NO!” put us in a position to hear the pain of feeling underprotected in the face of sexual harassment in school. She draws from her multiple vocabularies and grammars, including “Black English,” but also, taking on a more formalized tone when she addresses the audience in soliloquy. She picks up, skillfully, the ways that the boy characters employ sexist discourse; she shows the ineffectuality and curtness of her teachers’ discourse; she employs a contemplative and explanatory tone to engage with the audience. Playwriting allowed her to take on multiple voices and skillfully utilize them to story and critique her experiences with sexual harassment.

### **Playwriting to Move Toward Liberatory Ideologies**

Ciara also used playwriting to demonstrate the ways that she has transformed, painting an image of how ideologies shift as one pursues a justice orientation. In her soliloquy she writes:

Does she know that is sexual harassment? Does she like it? Maybe she is a little slut. That’s my friend, I should have never said that. But wait, do boys know that it’s not right? I shouldn’t be blaming this on my friend. I should be blaming it on the boys.

Initially, she labels her friend being sexually promiscuous, and further denigrates her by using the sexist term “slut.” But she pauses and shifts, realizing that this is her friend—her sister—another girl who has lived through the same sort of incidents as she has herself. In part, her theorization of sexual harassment is born out of her relationships to her sister. Motivated by care, she changes the course of her questioning.

At this point, she shifts to the question, “Do boys know that it’s not right?” With this question she understands that her friend should not be punished for choosing not to speak up, as silence in these situations can often be a protective measure. She narrates her realization that she should be blaming the boys who are doing the criminal act, who are perpetuating sexist behavior, not being victimized by it, as her friend is. She elucidates the core of rape culture—that it is insidious and often unrecognized, and that, as a society, we are not teaching our boys to treat women and girls with love and dignity. Ciara shows the ways that enacting sisterly care can help girls shift away from blaming each other and shaming each other and toward holding boys accountable for their behavior and perceptions of women.

Playwriting served as a pathway toward taking control over a situation by providing Ciara with an opportunity to analyze sexism through the process of writing and the subsequent performance of her narrative. In this case, Ciara used it as a way to understand how she might redirect her negative perceptions away from other girls, girls who perhaps act in the world differently than herself, reserving and even reevaluating her judgments in order to be a better ally to them against various manifestations of sexist ideologies, some of which she experiences herself, and some of which she does not.

In all, playwriting offered an opportunity for her to analyze her own experiences with sexual harassment and to begin to theorize an antisexist view rooted in her life and relationships.

## Conclusion

Playwriting provided a space for girls of color in the Unnormal Sisterhood to explore and share experience-based knowledge, hopes and visions of change, theoretical understandings of sexism and racism, coalitional practices, and empathy. The girls' work offers images into what writing curriculum could look like if their knowledge and ways of knowing were centered in classrooms and literacy pedagogies. Specifically, playwriting served as culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), which gave room for the girls to not only build off of their experiential and cultural knowledge, but to also critique various aspects of their worlds. Through their plays, they drew from linguistic, experiential, embodied, and relational knowledge to create sophisticated and nuanced critiques and understandings of their worlds. This openness to creating contexts that center and celebrate girls of color represents an important shift in what literacy pedagogy could be.

Girls and women of color will always make spaces for themselves. They will always engage in pedagogies that refuse the racist and sexist structures that can warp school-sponsored pedagogies into violent and destructive tools of oppression (Ohito, 2016). They have proven this over and over throughout history as they've developed formal and informal advocacy groups, art and writing collectives, and spaces of healing. It's time, though, that all educators learn from them to co-create spaces that interrupt white hegemonic structures of schools that allow them to thrive, not just because they've fought tooth and nail to do so, but because educators have attuned themselves to the fact that girls deserve these spaces as much as any other student, and because they understand girls of color are the bringers of change who they need to partner with, listen to, and learn from as we fight intersecting oppressions.

## Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms chosen by the girls themselves to simultaneously conceal their identities while also giving them choice in the way they were represented.
2. When asked why she chose to name the teacher [my first name plus the letters ia], Seraphina responded that "cuz I was thinking about you, but I was like, no you are too nice for all of that, and I just put an ia." I want to point this out, not completely out of vanity's sake, but because I think it is genuinely important. This idea of her contrast between my pedagogy and the pedagogies she critiques came up for her often and she frequently compared her relationships and learning between her classroom spaces and the space of the unnormal sisterhood.
3. Girls used Google Translate to write Spanish-language text.
4. Xhocitli was pronounced as and seems to be an approximation of the name Xochitl, a Nahuatl name meaning flower.

## References

- African American Policy Forum & Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies. (2015). *Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced and underprotected*. New York, NY: Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1983). Speaking in tongues: A letter to 3rd world women writers. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings of radical women of color* (pp. 165–174). New York, NY: Kitchen Table: Woman of Color Press.
- Campano, G. (2007). *Immigrant students and literacies: Reading, writing, and remembering*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Campano, G., Ghiso, M. P., & Welch, B. J. (2016). *Partnering with immigrant communities: Action through literacy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S.L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Conrad, D. (2005). Rethinking 'at-risk' in drama education: beyond prescribed roles. *Research in Drama Education*, 10(1), 27–41.
- Cooper, B. C. (2017). *Beyond respectability: The intellectual thought of race women*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1993). Demarginalize the intersections of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In D.K. Weisberg (Ed.), *Feminist legal theory: Foundations* (pp. 383–395). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Delgado-Bernal, D. (2006). Learning and living pedagogies of the home: The Meztiza consciousness of Chicana students. In D. Delgado Bernal, C. A. Elenes, F.E. Godinez, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: Feminista perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology* (pp. 113–132). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Evans-Winters, V., & Esposito, J. (2010). Other people's daughters: Critical race feminism and Black girls' education. *Educational Foundations*, 24(1), 11–24.
- Fine, M. (2011). Talk-back/talk-with: How does one applaud in text? In M. Winn (Au.), *Girl time*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gallagher, K., & Ntelioglou, B. Y. (2011). Which new literacies? Dialogue and performance in youth writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 54(5).
- Ghiso, M.P. (2016). *The laundromat as the transnational local: Young children's literacies of interdependence*. *Teachers College Record*, 118, 1–46.
- Goldberg, N. (1986). *Writing down the bones*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

González Ybarra, M. (forthcoming). "We have a strong way of thinking... and it shows through our words": Exploring the Mujerista literacies of Chicana/Latina youth.

Hamer, F. L. (2011). Nobody's free until everybody's free. In M. P. Woods & D. W. Houck (Eds.), *The speeches of Fanny Lou Hamer* (pp.134–139). Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2015). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Ife, F., (2017). Perhaps a Black girl rolls her eyes to shift calcified pain throughout her body. *Bank Street Occasional Paper Series 38*.

Jaggar, A. M. (1989). Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology. *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 32(2), 151–176.

Johnson, E., & Vasudevan, L. (2012). Seeing and hearing students' lived and embodied critical literacy practices. *Theory Into Practice*, 51(1), 34–41.

Jordan, J. (1988). Nobody mean more to me than you and the future life of Willie Jordan. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 363–374.

Kinloch, V., & San Pedro, T. (2014). The space between listening and storying: Foundations for projects in humanization. In D. Paris & M.T. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Knowles, B. (2016). *Lemonade* [Visual album]. New York, NY: Parkwood Entertainment.

Lee, J., & De Finney, S. (2008). Using popular theatre for engaging racialized minority girls in exploring questions of identity and belonging. *Child & Youth Services*, 26(2), 95–118.

Miller, J.M.A. (1982). Black women playwright from Grimké to Shange: Selected synopses of their works. In G.T. Hull, P. B. Scott, & B. Smith (Eds.), *All the women are white, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies*. New York, NY: The Feminist Press.

Mohanty, S.P. (2000). The epistemic status of cultural identity: On beloved and the postcolonial condition. In M. Moya & M. R. Hames-García (Eds.), *Reclaiming identity: Realist theory and the predicament of postmodernism* (pp. 29–66). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Moya, P. (2000). Introduction: Reclaiming identity. In P. Moya & M. R. Hames-García (Eds.), *Reclaiming identity: Realist theory and the predicament of postmodernism* (pp.1–23). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Muhammad, G. E. (2018). A plea for identity and criticality: Reframing literacy learning standards through a four-layered equity model. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(2), 137–142.

Nieto, S. (1999). *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ohito, E. O. (2016). Refusing curriculum as a space of death for Black female subjects: A Black feminist reparative reading of Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl." *Curriculum Inquiry*, 46(5), 436–454.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Paris, D., & Winn, M. (2014). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E.A. (2008). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 473–500). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2016). Why Black girls' literacies matter: New literacies for a new era. *English Education*, 48(4), 290–298.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Winn, M. (2011). *Girl time: Literacy, justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.



**Grace D. Player** is a Professor in the Curriculum and Instruction Program at the University of Connecticut Neag School of Education. She received her PhD from Penn GSE and is a former Cultivating New Voices Fellowship Recipient. Her research interests center girl of color literacies, coalitional literacies, and community literacies. Through her career, she has taken up feminist of color epistemologies in order to work with and alongside youth and communities of color to co-investigate the ways that they utilize a complex web of literacies to understand the world and advocate for themselves in the face of white supremacist heteropatriarchal structures. Her goals are to work towards the transformation of academic spaces to center and celebrate marginalized knowledge and ways of knowing.

# Communities of Knowing: Curriculum Making in/of Community

Christie Schultz

## Abstract

This paper explores experiences of becoming a “curriculum maker of community” as part of the University of Alberta’s Building Peaceful Communities Summer Institute, held annually over a two-week period each July. Prompted by the experience in 2018, the author explores the ways in which curriculum can be co-composed as a community of learners, moving beyond prescribed curriculum. Throughout the account, the author narrates autobiographical life experiences that serve to illustrate ways of knowing and ways of coming to communities of knowing.

## Coming to Community

In July 2018, I was introduced to the idea of becoming a “curriculum maker of community,” learning and experiencing learning alongside Dr. Florence Glanfield and 13 other graduate students at the University of Alberta’s Building Peaceful Communities Summer Institute. We inquired together and individually into what it means to shift our thinking about curriculum towards “a curriculum of community” and to see ourselves, through autobiographical narrative inquiries, as curriculum makers in and of community. These writings are both personal and scholarly, bridging the liminal spaces inside and outside the classroom. While these writings are my own and tell my story of a particular time, I recognize that they owe their existence to the people with whom and the places in which they were written. In these reflections, and in this writing, my intention is to show the ways in which communities of knowing can come to be written and known.

## First Words—July 3, 2018

There are many stories to tell. Too many stories to tell in these lines. Today’s story includes a line from a classmate, one that he shares with teachers who are struggling in the springtime, a translation of Cree teaching shared with him by Elder Bob Cardinal of the Enoch Cree Nation of Treaty 6 Territory. The question he asks: “What are you trying to lift?” I brought this line home with me, unexpectedly. I shared it as my spouse and I were finishing dinner, as I was wondering if I should get to the work of this writing. But, I stayed. We talked a while longer.

My mother-in-law is living her last days. (My own mother has reminded me that my mother-in-law is not merely dying, she is living these days, and so I am becoming attentive to this difference.) This may go on for a week or two, or a month or two, but probably not more. And my spouse is struggling. With life and living. With death and dying. And alongside all of this, she is struggling most especially with her work



world, a world that is not lifting her right now—and in which she finds she is unable to try to lift the things that matter most to her. And I am struggling to lift her up, but I am trying to do so because that feels at least as (or more) important than my professional life or my scholarly life.

But I am also trying to remember why I am here, writing these words, taking on this inquiry, taking on these doctoral studies. With this work, what am I trying to *lift*? In this remembering, I am attentive to the ways in which “a person, young or old, gets out of his present experience all that there is in it for him at the time in which he has it” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 49). I will be experiencing this present learning as a white, middle-class, queer, able-bodied, married, cis-gendered woman, who has spent most of her life in the Canadian city where I now reside. And so, I am looking for all that there is in this for me at this very specific moment in time.

### **Learning, Still**

My present experiences beyond this classroom feed the classroom. I am attentive to others’ experiences, knowing they, too, are not here as *tabula rasa*. In the same way, I attend to my own previous experiences, recognizing that “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 35). I am still learning, changing, experiencing—becoming. Already, today, I am (still) becoming. I am bringing new lines to the dinner table, lines I hadn’t heard before. In this way, I recognize my home as part of my experience of this particular curriculum.

And I am reflecting further upon what (previous) experience provides to the ways in which we learn. My present and past experiences are shaping this experience of becoming, of learning, of being and living alongside others. As Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest in *Teachers as Curriculum Planners*, “When the word ‘curriculum’ is used, the picture that flashes before your mind is one in which the persons are storytellers living out their past and remaking that past to deal with their current situation” (p. 8). That is what I am doing. I am sense-making and making sense—experiencing the ways in which “every situation leads to another situation” (p. 8). This is my own “experiential continuum” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 33). I hope I can use it, in some small way, as Elder Bob Cardinal reminds us, *to lift up*.

As I went upstairs to write, my spouse called out, “I meant to ask, what did you learn today?”

### **The Space Between—July 4, 2018**

Today was unexpected. My computer’s space bar has stopped working reliably, shedding my normal experience of writing, becoming especially attentive to the experience of space and spaces, spaces within which we write and within which we live.

I’m probably a little bit broken today as well.

My mother-in-law no longer has an oncologist. She has moved today, away from a system that has been part of our lives for a few years. She is now within the system of palliative end-of-life care. We are researching hospices tonight. Soon, we're told. Soon. Her cancer doctor is no longer her doctor. That means something. We know what it means. There have been hugs we didn't understand until now.

### **Permeable Classrooms—July 5, 2018**

I am reminded that we so often see ourselves and our experiences in what we read. As I travelled today, continuing to reflect upon curriculum and community, I am drawn into Joseph J. Schwab's (1973) world of the milieus within the context of curriculum-making. An idea later developed by Clandinin and Connelly (1992) as they worked to envision and create narrative inquiry as a methodology, Schwab is attentive to milieus that include the school and the classroom, but also include the family, the community, and other groupings particular to an individual. Put another way, as I come to understand a "vision of curriculum as a course of life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392), how I make sense of the idea of curriculum is "intimately connected with the life stories of each person and the intermingling of storied lives in the lifespace of the classroom" (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003, pp. 347–348).

I am thinking in this way because I know intimately in this moment that my home and my life are intermingling within this classroom space. Perhaps more than intermingling, today, the spaces of home and the classroom feel deeply permeable to one another; they pass through one another, crossing a barrier that is not a barrier, like "a bridging of two worlds by a bridge, which is not a bridge" (Aoki, 1981/2005, p. 228). And in this permeability, the classroom expands, and the curriculum encompasses one's full community and life.

I recognize, too, that in this I am not alone. While end-of-life experiences cause us all to attend to the permeability of our life spaces in ways that can be significant, each one of us in this classroom is experiencing life outside the classroom. We are living our milieus at all times.

### **Curriculum as Lived—July 8, 2018**

I am certain that the curriculum-as-planned did not include this: I shared the news of my mother-in-law in class on Thursday. On Friday, a classmate, Shaun,<sup>1</sup> presented me with bound sage, a medicine bundle his wife had prepared for my spouse and me. He had mentioned before class began on Thursday that, over the course of his degree, both his mother and his mother-in-law had passed, leaving this earthly existence; I recognized and acknowledged that he knew something of my present experience when I shared my morning reflections with the class. He heard this and, as he has shared with me later, he wrote "sage bundle" in his notes. This gesture of kindness (Michell, 2005), grounded in the Cree culture, was unexpected—and welcome.

When I shared the story and the sage bundle with my spouse, we delighted in its scent, its earthiness, together. What I didn't know is that my spouse carried the bundle with her that evening, feeling connection. I wrote to Shaun the next day with a story:

The sage medicine is helping. I didn't know it, but Shell<sup>2</sup> tucked the bundle under her pillow last night. (She hasn't been sleeping well, perhaps unsurprisingly.) We woke up at six this morning, rested. She showed the bundle to me and I asked: "Did you sleep?" She said, grinning: "No ... I dreamed." We both slept all through the night—and Shell slept so well that her dreams returned. (C. Schultz, personal communication, July 7, 2018)

This is a curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1993), not at all what I had expected from what is really (only, at least for now) a "found community" (Nelson, 1995), not (yet) a community of choice, but one in which I am sensing relatedness and relationality. Perhaps I am even sensing an experience of *care*, ideas connected to my doctoral research and something we so often—or too often—erase in the landscape of higher education as we genuinely

expect to become experts, to engage in knowledge production, to debate others, to separate criticism of the person and the criticism of the ideas, to participate in social criticism, to critique school practices, to ferret out school ideologies, and to make expert prescriptions for improving practice. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 249)

I had a plan about what I thought I might write as part of this experience, and this writing is not at all that plan. But I have been settling in to the rhythm of learning about peaceful communities and the lived experiences that shape a curriculum. I have been spending my time with my wonders about how a curriculum extends beyond the classroom, into one's life, into one's community, into one's home. I have been wondering about how far a curriculum reaches, whether the formal learning space is a graduate school classroom or the classrooms of our earliest learners.

We find ourselves, brought together, sharing our personhoods deeply, with or without intention or expectation, affecting one another, changing one another—in this experience, this narrative, this story of learning.

We are living our shared curriculum. We are creating a curriculum of community.

### **Some Tensions—July 9, 2018**

*"It's so interesting that you and your husband talk about the course at home."*

It is not an accident that I speak of "my spouse" in class. Of course, this is my chosen language, language I am comfortable using in public and private, in class and elsewhere, appreciating the politics of more gender-neutral language. But, since 2006, my mother has been more likely to refer to my spouse as her "daughter's wife," language I appreciate, too, and that I know is one way my mother expresses her love. I am thinking about this language today.

Before I formally applied to begin doctoral work, I was advised by a genuinely caring colleague to be cautious with disclosure about anything that would suggest, albeit accurately, that I was married to a woman. I understood from the brief conversation that there are those in our midst, as yet unnamed and unknown to me, who wouldn't be accepting and who may make my experience as a doctoral student more difficult. Students, even those returning to that role in mid-career, are vulnerable. Precarious. And, so, my *wife* is almost always my *spouse* in these spaces.

As I write this, I hesitate to disclose this tension. First, I feel a kind of guilt in this uttering, recognizing that I do not know who I need to (supposedly) be afraid of, so perhaps I shouldn't mention this ever, at all, lest I harm the reputation of a place I am coming to love. Second, I experience a sincere sense of wonder at my own willingness to regulate my language, to hide (again), knowing that in most of my professional circles, those circles external to my student life, I am known to love and to be married to a woman.

And, yet, I know from my own lived experiences that “a truly inclusive society and a curriculum for human beings” (Greene, 1993, p. 214) remains aspirational, complex, complicated, and delicate. Maxine Greene offers us the following observation, connecting her sense of this curriculum for human beings, to the ways in which we have the capacity to so easily gloss over, instead of dwelling with and within, difference:

Thinking of curriculum, realizing that it always emerges out of an interplay among conceptions of knowledge, conceptions of the human being, and conceptions of the social order, I want to lay stress once more on the way in which universals are structured (like the managerial or the military or the technological norm of what it is to be human), categories are invented, and discourse is manipulated. Just think of the taken-for-granted assumption that heterosexuality is universal, or that public space is (by definition) a patriarchal space available only to those who live by patriarchal norms. (pp. 216–217)

In other words, my experiences of shielding my whole self from the spaces of the classroom may not be particularly unusual, especially because using the language of “my spouse” allows others to inscribe their own assumptions and expectations on me, in whatever way they are most comfortable. I know this happens, and so I was not surprised to be asked about my husband today. Still, I replied with *hers* and *shes*, instead of *hims* and *hes*, as if it was the most natural thing. In doing so, I disclosed and we moved on together, in peace.

I do not know how to make this scenario better right now. But, I do hope that, in moments when people “begin disclosing who they are to one another ... that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another” (Greene, 1993, p. 218). In these moments of *hers* and *shes*, I sense the possibility of moving from merely *glossing over* to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia*, that Greene describes as “the existence of many voices, some contesting, some cohering, all demanding and deserving attention” (p. 212).

I also know that some dissonance might be okay. It might even be “a necessary dissonance between what is taken for granted at the center and what might, what ought to be” (Greene, 1993, p. 220).

While this specific experience of curriculum-as-lived—of acknowledging that my spouse is not a husband—continues to work on me, I find myself wondering how my place in our curriculum of community may (or may not) be working on the other voices in this class, each life as it is lived and told, always and forever unfolding. If I have created any dissonance in my role as a curriculum maker of community, I hope it's the good kind.

## **A Retelling and a Reliving Addressed to *This* Community of Knowing— July 11, 2018**

I have told stories. We have told stories. We have not told all the stories. We have not told all our stories.

I know this to be certain, that stories remain unspoken and unwritten, because I have not told all my stories. This cannot be surprising. There is a story in everything—in every moment of the past, the present, and the future we imagine and into which we are becoming; in every space and place we've lived; in every story of love and loss and longing; in everything said and unsaid. As Thomas King (2003) reminds us, “the truth about stories is that that's all we are” (p. 32). And we are infinite.

The stories I have told have been ones that put me at ease in this world, in Lugones' (1987) sense of being at ease in a world. The stories I have told were stories I was scared to tell. And, the stories I have told burst forth because of the life I am living right now, because of circumstances beyond these walls, beyond my control, and between these lines.

The stories I have told are because of you, because you listened and read and responded to me. For me. Even in the moments of writing, alone at my desk, I imagined you might be reading. You have been with me all along.

In these 10 days, I also became a listener, a reader, a part of a response community. Your response community. Our response community. And, in doing so, as I listened and read and responded to your stories, too, we each became people experiencing “*relational living alongside*” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23, emphasis in original) one another.

I am thinking today of Adriana Cavarero's (2000) *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, in which her central claim is that we always turn to a *you* in order to become a narratable subject. For Cavarero, there is no possibility of an *I* without a *you*. Over these 10 days, I have been grateful for the subject I've been able to narrate, the one who has been inquiring into her own life, her own present and past and maybe even into her future, and into what it means to be or become a curriculum maker of community.

### **Towards a Curriculum of Community**

Ten days ago, I wondered aloud, confused. I asked: What is the difference between a “curriculum of community” and a “curriculum maker of community”? At the time, I had no rational or reasonable response to this wonder. I merely wondered. I let this wonder work on me, like a story.

As I reflect on this wonder now, I find myself needing to begin with the first part, sensing that I'm making sense of what it might be to experience a curriculum of community. I connect the sense I'm making about this curriculum of community to Ted Aoki's (1993) idea of "curriculum-as-lived," a curriculum that steps outside the curriculum-as-planned and towards a curriculum that is a little bit messy and composed (or co-composed) because of the chorus of individuals that make up the community that arrives, even if it's a "found community" as Hilde Lindemann Nelson (1995) might suggest. Here, in these spaces, the curriculum of community emerges from what might be described as, in Aoki's (1993) words, an "understanding of 'self/other,' one that intertwines the self as subject and the other as subject—an intersubjectivity, which, in the hermeneutic language of Hans Georg Gadamer understands it as a fusion of horizons, an intersubjectivity fused into a 'we'" (p. 265).

In other words, this—this we—is our curriculum of community. What we have learned together would not be without one another, in this time and in this place. It is specific to us.

### **Becoming a Curriculum Maker of/in Community**

Understanding the idea of a "curriculum of community" in this way has been helpful, at least for me, as I've worked to (begin to) understand the ways in which I might consider myself a "curriculum maker of community" or the ways in which I might wish to practice the work of being a "curriculum maker of community" beyond this classroom and these days, out there in the worlds in which each of us lives. Imagining the "curriculum of community" as a community-composed, lived curriculum returns me to another earlier wonder: How do we create spaces for "curriculum as lived" to happen? Put another way, who am I and what is my role in creating and acknowledging a curriculum of community as worthwhile and valued? And, then, how do I contribute to being a curriculum maker of community—as a student, a teacher, a professional, or even a spouse, an aunt, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a neighbour? I want to gesture towards a few possibilities—possibilities I will not call answers, but possibilities that may hold some meaning, some potential, and perhaps even some playfulness.

First, while I may embody any or a number of possible roles in a given space, I must always be willing and able to acknowledge that, through my lived experiences, I am learning and becoming. (I'm not done yet.) What this entails, in being a curriculum maker of community, is to embrace myself as part of the community of learners. This is easy as a student. I know this role well. I am a learner and I am supposed to be learning. But in other spaces, where I may be perceived as an *expert* of some kind, or someone who might have an answer, I must be willing to remind myself that I am one of the community, one of the ones doing the learning. In doing so, I imagine I can create space for, help to make, a curriculum of community.

Second, coming together as a community—creating space for and becoming a curriculum maker of community—necessitates, rather than erases, the need to honour each individual as an individual, filled with stories of experience, who is also still becoming. As Maxine Greene (1993) offers, "[t]his means responding to one another as a sister or a brother being in the process of choosing, of becoming what that person (in the midst of others) is not yet" (pp. 218–219). What this does not mean, of course,

is that there is an expectation of universal agreement, a silent symphony of expected nodding heads. Rather, in working to become a curriculum maker of community, diversity of lived experiences must be given space to emerge. The expectation, of course, is not that this is easy, but that dissonance can be “a necessary dissonance between what is taken for granted at the center and what might, what ought to be” (p. 220).

And then, as the final possibility I’ll offer for now, once I remember that I too am always learning, becoming, and once I begin to listen to and for individuals’ stories, as a curriculum maker of community, I must challenge myself to, as Lugones (1987) would have us, engage in “world-travelling.” That is, for me, becoming a curriculum maker of community isn’t a call merely to listen to stories. Rather, it seems to me that the work is to, “learn to love each other by learning to travel to each other’s ‘worlds’” (p. 4), worlds that are not our own, that may even bump up against worlds that are our own. As I move into my future work and world, I want to create spaces to experience these bumpings within a curriculum of community, because “[w]ithout knowing the other’s ‘world,’ one does not know the other, and without knowing the other, one is really alone in the other’s presence because the other is only dimly present to one” (p. 18). And I do not want to live in this world alone.

### **Communities of Knowing: A Closing, for Now**

As Jean Clandinin (2013) reminds us, “[r]esponse is a concept frequently used in narrative inquiry. Taken from the same root as responsibility, it signals the importance of making spaces for telling and listening to stories as well as responsibilities for sustaining each other” (p. 28). It is my sense that this is where communities of knowing, communities of knowledge, begin. As we engage in living and telling, reliving and retelling (Clandinin, 2013), we “begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another” (Greene, 1993, p. 218).

After these weeks of inquiring together, as a class and as a community, I can say that your stories are still working on me—and my own stories of living and learning alongside you are still working on me, too. I’m reminded that our stories, our autobiographical narrative inquiries, “refuse closure” (Miller, 1998, p. 153).

I am changed. I am changing. And I continue to wonder.



## Notes

1. Name used with permission.
2. Name used with permission.

## Acknowledgments

The University of Alberta's Building Peaceful Communities Summer Institute is cosponsored by the Departments of Secondary and Elementary Education and the Mahatma Gandhi Canadian Foundation for World Peace. The Institute is coordinated by the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. This paper has benefitted from conversations with and thoughtful comments provided by Dr. Florence Glanfield. I wish to respectfully acknowledge that I live and work on Treaty 6 territory. I dedicate this paper to Diane Stepney, who passed from this world on July 31, 2018.

## References

- Aoki, T. (1993). Legitimizing lived curriculum: Towards a curricular landscape of multiplicity. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 8(3), 255–268.
- Aoki, T. T. (1981/2005). Toward understanding curriculum: Talk through reciprocity of perspectives. In W. F. Pinar & R. L. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki* (pp. 219–228). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (Original work published 1981)
- Cavarero, A. (2000). *Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*. London: Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as curriculum maker. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum*. Toronto: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1998). Asking questions about telling stories. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Writing educational biography: Explorations in qualitative research* (pp. 245–253). New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938/2015). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. (Original work published 1938)
- Greene, M. (1993). Diversity and inclusion: Toward a curriculum for human beings. *Teachers College Record*, 95(2), 211–221.
- Huber, J., Murphy, M. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (2003). Creating communities of cultural imagination: Negotiating a curriculum of diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 33(4), 343–362.
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A native narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc.

Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, “world”-travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3–19.

Michell, H. (2005). Nēhîthâwâk of Reindeer Lake, Canada: Worldview, epistemology and relationships with the natural world. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 34, 33–43.

Miller, J. (1998). Autobiography and the necessary incompleteness of teachers’ stories. In W. Ayers & J. Miller (Eds.), *A light in dark times: Maxine Greene and the unfinished conversation* (pp. 145–154). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Nelson, H. L. (1995). Resistance and insubordination, *Hypatia*, 10(2), 23–43.

Schwab, J. J. (1973). The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review*, 81(4), 501–522.



**Christie Schultz** is the Assistant Dean (Academic) of the Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. She leads the Faculty’s teaching and learning activities within its continuing and professional education portfolio. In addition, she is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. The focus of her research is care-centered leadership in higher education. She has published and presented work in the areas of organizational change, continuing and higher education, settler-allyship, and feminist leadership.

# Relief: Observations on Creative Nonfiction as Pedagogy

Mark Silverberg

## Abstract

“Relief: Observations on Creative Nonfiction as Pedagogy” offers a case study in the possibilities of using creative writing as a pedagogical tool with ESL students. Analyzing the experience, comments, and creative work of a Chinese nursing student named Wei Wan at Ryerson University, the essay explores the benefits of personal writing and peer workshops as tools for self-exploration, aesthetic appreciation, and confidence building. While urging teachers to see the advantages of this methodology, the paper also reflects on the literary values of creative work in hybrid, non-standard English forms.

As a teacher of literature and occasionally creative writing at Cape Breton University (a small institution with a traditionally homogenous, English-speaking, population), I hadn’t given much thought to the possibilities of creative writing and second-language learning. That changed this past summer when I had the opportunity to teach a class at Ryerson University, a large, urban institution in downtown Toronto with an ethnically diverse student body including many new immigrants. Since this creative writing course was classified as a “liberal arts elective,” one that could be counted for credit by students in almost any program, the class attracted a diverse group from a wide range of majors. While I didn’t design the class for “second-language learning” as such, it turned out that some of the students who benefitted most from the class had chosen it with exactly this goal in mind.

This essay explores the experience, comments, and creative work of one such student, a Chinese nursing student named Wei Wan, whose writing I’d like to consider as a case study in the possibilities of using creative writing, particularly creative nonfiction, as a pedagogical tool. Wei Wan produced two remarkable personal essays, one of which is reproduced below. After the course was completed, I asked her to share some of her thoughts and recollections about the class.

I think Wei Wan’s writing is illustrative in two ways: first, her experience and comments attest to the potentially transformative powers of writing and creative workshops as tools for self-exploration, aesthetic appreciation, and confidence building. Second, her final pieces (particularly *before* they were subjected to rigorous “correction” for syntax and grammar) reveal the stylistic nuance possible in a hybrid English that educators may be too quick to correct out of existence. Here Wei Wan reflects on choosing the course and her experience of the first few classes:

This past spring, I needed to choose an elective. Since English is my second language, writing is really painful. I enjoy writing in my native language but transferring that to English is very difficult. Therefore, I wanted a course that would improve my English skills and be interesting at the same

time. Because of English being my second language, I hesitated and really struggled with making the decision to sign up. In the end, I really wanted the chance to improve so I joined the class.

What I learned in the first class and second class astonished me. The professor outlined some guidelines for writing. The methods, such as keeping your hand moving, losing control without thinking about punctuation, spelling, grammar, and on and on, were contrary to everything I thought I already knew. This amazed me because I had always focused on punctuation, spelling and grammar while writing. It caused me stress and it made writing a really laborious task. Thinking of the basic rules of writing disturbed my thought flow when I was trying to write.

The method I use with students develops out of what the Surrealists called *automatism*. Its goal is to short-circuit the barriers of reason and decorum by writing continuously for a set period of time, without letting the hand stop. “Automatic writing” is all about flow.<sup>1</sup> It is a method of writing without rules, whether those of the “internal editor” (who tells us our writing is not good enough for one reason or another) or those of Standard English (whose requirements can be equally paralyzing for a second-language learner). As Wei Wan puts it, succinctly and non-standardly, “During the course I followed these suggestions and really helped me to feel more freedom while writing.” That fundamental freedom, about which little can be said, but from which much can be learned, is at the heart of what I wanted to happen for my students.

Another important method for this class, long known to English teachers and students, but frequently unrecognized by students in other disciplines, is writing from and about personal experience. My exercises and writing prompts invite students to explore intimate material, an emotional space that is often foreign in their academic experience.

In class, the professor suggested some topics for non-fiction writing practice. I had never thought about writing about such topics as describing a person, an action, best gift, or some memory. From my school year recollections back in China, we were never asked to write anything creatively, not even in Chinese class. So at the beginning, the topics to choose for writing didn't seem significant or deep enough. How wrong I was.

I remember, in the second class, the instructor requested us to write a description of a person we knew and to do it within 5 minutes. I chose to write about my mother. I thought I would have lots to write but my brain went blank when I started. I simply described my mother's health condition and the two days prior to her passing. I continued to write several sentences and felt my brain empty again.

As revealed in the following narrative from Wei Wan, “Relief,” that blankness evolved into many pages of deeply felt, meditative prose. Using the language that came naturally to her, ignoring the imperatives (cultural, moral, grammatical) that would restrict flow, she allowed the piece to grow. I think there were several things that helped Wei Wan break through the initial barrier of silence. The first is the practice itself: writing automatically, “unthinkingly,” on a regular basis. Wei Wan explains,

Another writing technique I learned was to foster good writing habits. This meant I had to practice regularly and be faithful to the schedule. . . . After the first class, I set aside three to four hours every Monday and Tuesday to write or polish a piece. If I did not finish, I would continue on the following Monday and Tuesday. . . . The overall outcome surprised me. Every time I wrote, I could

sense that my thoughts were flowing easier and I was less concerned about the quality of English and more focused on the story. It was more fluid than before when I wrote.

The Surrealists believed this fluidity marked the opening of the unconscious. They saw automatism as akin to a form of dreaming, rather than a form of logical, rule-bound thought. The method of “feeling more freedom while writing” can only be learned by repeated experience: by regularly, unceremoniously opening a space for the unsaid, or the not-yet-said, or the repressed.

Wei Wan describes her return to writing about her mother from this vantage point:

I re-started my first commemorating piece to recall my mom’s life. Some feelings I have never revealed to my family. I wanted to hide them inside me as my Chinese culture teaches us to do. Some thought and images of my mom have existed in my mind and have never changed. But over time I was afraid that these would fade away, and be forgotten. However, I was surprised that the more I wrote these thoughts, the more other thoughts and images popped into my head.

This process of reliving and rewriting, as Wei Wan tells us and shows us in the following piece, is both risky and enlivening, a “relief” in many senses of the word:

Relief (by Wei Wan)

Shane, my mom, was an active and energetic woman with black eyes and hair. She was beautiful, gorgeous and curvy with slim figure. She liked all the fresh and fashionable things and always tried to learn and use them. She always hid her smile under a serious facial expression. It scared my classmates during my childhood. When they saw her, it was as if a rat met a cat. She had a strongly compelling laugh, which spread to people around her. She spoke briskly and persuasively.

I am very proud of her. Whenever I hear someone talking about my mom, my chin tilts up and up with a smile. I guess people could not see my face but only my nostrils at that time. In my memory, she had always spent time with me until I fell asleep at night on average days. Sometime I woke up and did not see her, I had never hesitated shouted “mom~”, then mom seemed to appear immediately and jumped onto my bed out of nowhere and then stayed with me. I had never thought she would ever no longer respond to me when I called her. I had never thought she would leave me.

When I was a child, I followed my mom all the time. People liked to call me “mom’s tail” as a nickname. She liked to call me around when she arrived home from work. Because I am her third child, she always called me from her eldest child’s name and ended with mine. So my name was “How-Hey-Anne.”

One day I hid in a wardrobe when she arrived home. I did not show up after her call. She detected that my schoolbag was at home, therefore assumed I was home as well. She looked for me around the house while called my name. When she found me, we stared each other and laughter filled our home. I liked to play this game because I like to hear her voice ringing like a song. The game did not continue right until the wardrobe could not fit my body, but I still waited for her calling and suddenly appeared in front of her; watched sparks emitting from her eyes, and heard laughter flying out of her mouth.

She is like a magician when I want to eat snacks. She can grab anything if I want them.

When I said, “Mom, I am hungry.” A candy, an apple or a piece of cake immediately came out from her hands. I laughed.

When I asked her, “Where did you get me?” or “Where was I born?”

She laughed and said, “Oh. I got you from a garbage bin.” But something she said, “When I gave your birth, you cried like a boy. I was disappointed. But nurse said, ‘she is a girl.’ I was really happy. I have a girl!”

I always laughed because I could feel her happiness. She always laughed when she talked with me.

My elder brother said, “Our mom is an excellent lady, I have never seen another like her in my life.”

In 1984, I was 13 years old; my mom had some weird signs, such as urgent bowel movement, and lightly abdominal pain. She did not see a doctor until she could not stand her pain. To figure out what happened to her took 3 months to get a diagnosis. It was cancer. She stayed in the hospital and had a basic treatment for pain.

When I went to the hospital after school, I still could see her smile with dark circles around her eyes. I did not know how she spent every long night, she had never mentioned how. She promised me that she would buy beautiful clothes for me and cook delicious foods for me after she’s discharged. I had never doubted how she would break a promise. Three months later, my mom and family decided to have a surgery to remove the tumor. This surgery was unsuccessful, because cancer cell already spread all over the body. No hope was to be anticipated.

She lived at a unit where people diagnosed with terminal illness would stay. There was a three-single-bed room. Her room had two other people while she moved here.

At her first day of moving into the room, we accompanied, and pushed the door to enter in. We saw two residents were lying in their own single beds. They opened their eyes, turned their heads to face to the opening door, indifferently looked at us for a very short time and then closed their eyes. Their families were sitting beside their beds and smiled when they saw us. No words of welcoming or expression came out from them.

The room was very quiet. Shane spoke about her job and life in the future if she recovered when we stayed there. The unit did not allow family to stay overnight. We took turns to stay with her during daytime. She always talked about her future. She said she would buy beautiful clothes for me, and she would see her sons’ lucky future.

She was very independent. She went to washroom and dealt with her personal hygiene by herself. She had never asked for help even though she was very weak. She had never said how she was tormented with her pain. She only asked, “please, give me a shot,” and then lied in the bed very quickly for two to three hours without any words.

The unit was in shortage of staff. One nurse would have managed 60 patients. The doctor and hospital gave the permission allowing family to give painkillers because Shane asked for a shot in every 1-2 hours period. My father and my elder brother (Hey) even learned how to give a painkiller shot.

Later, Hey told me with tears filling his eyes, “her skin is like a hard board because the tiny needle holes are all over her arms, thighs and her buttocks, her bone protrude over her body because no more fat can be felt. I don’t know where I can put needles in. I don’t even know if the shots work.” No treatment was provided aside from the painkillers.

After 9 o’clock at night, we left her to stay lonely. She had never said how her night was. She always looked at door with smile when I opened the door to see her.

One day, one of the beds was empty when I went there. My mom became a little bit quiet. She started to ask me to assist her with personal hygiene. She could stand by herself for a short time. She needed our arms when she walked between her bed and washroom. She could not walk without assistance. She lied in the bed all the time.

I asked my father and brothers, “How does mom do when I was not here.”

They gave the same answers quietly, “No changes. She can do everything by herself.”

It was February 19, 1985. At 9 o’clock, we left away from the hospital and stayed home together to celebrate the Chinese New Year’s coming. Around 10 o’clock, we heard someone knocked our door. I was downstairs and opened the door.

“Mom?! Why are you here?!” I surprised.

“Mom is coming. Mom is back to home.” I turned my head, looked up the stairs and raised my voice.

She was excited and laughing when she saw the door opening. She gave me a big hug and whispered, “Yes, I am back home.”

She seemed like a very healthy and beautiful lady. My mom was back. Yes! She was back.

My father and brothers were downstairs and looked at her. They were surprised. She was upstairs with a left hand against the wall. I doubt if my mom recovered.

She was sitting in a chair beside my father and faced to her children in the living room. My brothers and I were on our knees facing to them. The candles were lit. The red lanterns were lit.

We said, “Xin Nian Kuai Le (Happy New Year)! Gong Xi Fa Cai (Hope to have a rich and flourish year)!”

My mom and my father said, “Wish you have a flourish year. How and Hey have a good achievement from work. Anne has good grades from school.”

And then my mom gave lucky bags to each of us like every other previous year. We were very happy. My mom did not stop her smile during the dinner. She did not stop looking at us even though she was eating.

After the dinner finished, my father said seriously to my mom, “you have to back to the hospital. We do not have any medicines, syringes or needles at home.”

The smile gradually disappeared from her face. She stayed at home that night and my father brought her to the hospital next day.



When I went to school in the morning, one of my neighbours asked, "Is your mother at home? I saw her walking toward your home last night. She pressed her two hands against wall to walk. I asked if she needs help. She shook her head. Why did nobody accompany her?"

One month later, another bed was emptied. She lost her laughter and became quieter. I could sometimes see her weak smile. She still asked for my assistance, but had never asked my father or my brothers for.

She still liked to look at door when the door opened. The smile faded little by little, bit by bit. Occasionally, she said, "I will buy beautiful clothes for you. I will cook delicious food for you," she had a short pause, and said, "If I am getting better." I had never second guessed her words.

Three months passed after Chinese New Year, she was lying in her bed. A yellowish face, eyes deeply sunken, cheekbone highly raised, lips without any clear border and pale. Because there was not any fat underlying the face, her eyes appeared very large and dark. She seemed not take interest in anything and quietly waited for the death approaching. She did not try to talk because cancer cells ate most of the nutrition from her body and continuous pain tortured her all the time. She lost her energy. She was not able to sit, stand, or walk. She was not able to clean by herself. Most days, she spoke one or two words during the day. She gradually stopped asking to have pain medications. Pain seemed to be gone away from her. Her face became peaceful.

It was May 16, 1985. The room was still quiet and empty. Only my mom and I were at room. I read a book and sat beside her. She opened her eyes widely; it looked like they were occupying half of her face. There was a light igniting in her eyes.

She looked at the door, asked me to open it, and mumbled, "someone's coming to bring me to heaven."

She took a deep breath and tried to raise her voice hastening me to open the door, but the voice still mumbled, "open the door... someone's coming ...and they will pick me up to go anywhere."

I opened the door, but there was no one there. She tried hooking over her neck to look outside the door, but failed to do so. Then she closed her eyes and sighed. The second day, she stopped her breathing and quietly left me without a word. Perhaps there was not only tiredness, but also relief.

A nurse told us, "Your mom was always moaning over the night since her first day at the hospital."

"She refused to have pain medication. I assumed she wanted her family to stay with her and give medication to her," another nurse said.

Yes, pain had never left her side. Yes, I forgive her to break her promise. Yes, she is free now.

How happy I was at the time,

How painful I become now...

You are free because I permitted

You are relieved because I let you go

Good-bye.

After she completed the course, I invited Wei Wan to write about her experience of the class, and her observations may offer insight for teachers. She talks about the importance of reading literature in class and studying *models*—though *not* of grammatical correctness, expository control, or organizational modes (compare/contrast, etc.), as had been her experience in previous English classes—but rather models of sophisticated, engaging imaginative writing:

The following class, the instructor lectured on how to read a story and how to understand the structure of a story. I realized that my first draft could be expanded. Some depth could be added to the piece. I have learned that some elements of a story are very important in order to form a story, such as setting, plot, theme, climax, resolution, and so forth. The professor guided and encouraged students to write down their thoughts. His words enlightened me to write my thoughts and explore my feelings.

I hope, as Wei Wan suggests, that my method is not prescriptive but descriptive. Effective creative writing comes from absorbing, often osmotically, the nutrients of other effective writing. Offering practicing writers a way to read with an eye, not so much to “objective” analysis as to understanding the nuts and bolts of writers’ techniques and gestures, puts a new kind of practical emphasis on structure. Writers want to understand the artifices other professionals have erected in order to build their own “machines made out of words” (p. 256), in William Carlos Williams’ (1969) felicitous phrase. One particular assignment I offer my creative writing students is to complete an “emulation project.” Students choose a writer they admire and read a significant amount of this person’s work, while keeping a journal of their responses, questions, thoughts, favorite lines, and other forms of “talk back.” Their final project is to produce their own work in the same genre (a set of poems, short story, or piece of creative nonfiction) that imitates and emulates the voice and vision of that writer.

Another important part of the creative writing experience, which differs from the methodologies students in academic programs are familiar with, is the peer workshop. Working with a supportive group of peers, reading one’s own work aloud to others and sharing reactions, is a unique and personal event. It is an encounter that encourages bonds among a community of workers engaged in what is usually seen as a solitary task. Here are Wei Wan’s comments on workshops:

The peer critiquing process workshops were very useful and helpful for writing. I was lucky that I had group members to help. They asked me insightful questions and reviewed my piece . . . The brainstorm sessions from the very beginning suddenly opened my thoughts and pushed me to think beyond what I normally would have done. Based on those questions and suggestions they gave me, the second revision developed into a more filled out piece. Later, I did third and fourth edition to polish off the piece.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, “Relief” offered just that: a complex, subtle, self-directed forum to explore emotions that may not be given time or space in students’ busy lives:

I was very happy to discover that I am able to express my emotions through writing. What I revealed in my story about my mother were thoughts which were deeply buried in heart and had never realized them before. I wrote “Relief” to reveal my feeling and relieve my soul. Through the writing process cycle, of repeatedly write-read-rewrite-reread, I felt more and more

relieved. My mom's image was clearer in my mind. I was happy that through this writing course I have remembered her more than I thought I did.

In part, this transferable relief is not only personal, but also built into the piece structurally in a way that allows it to be shared and to produce a cathartic effect in readers.

Part of that function has to do with the accidents created in the automatic writing process. One of the things that immediately attracted me to Wei Wan's early (minimally edited) work was its unique, non-standard way of expressing itself, a way that sounds "off" for most native English speakers. But this off-ness has a productive artistic value in the way that it *defamiliarizes* language—making it feel awkward, unsettled, non-transparent. Defamiliarization happens, as Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky (1965) tells us, when our standardized habits of perception and processing are challenged:

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things. .... The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself. (p. 12)

Writing by non-native speakers has a unique and particular way of making language *perceptible* by slowing down readers' processing when subjected to non-standard forms. And that slowing down allows for a different, sometime deeper, kind of engagement.

English instructors should perhaps pause even longer on these awkward, unfamiliar forms which offer both an opportunity and a danger in students' work. One part of the instructor's job is to teach Standard English and "protect" students from deviating. Another part is to foster and encourage original expression. With this in mind, creative language teachers should also, at least in some instances, interrogate their tendencies to correct out of existence what may well be most interesting and unique in a non-standard piece: that is, the accidental stylistic quirks that may be grammatically incorrect but creatively productive.

Take these sentences from Wei Wan's third draft of "Relief," describing the narrator's belief in her mother's presence:

Sometime I woke up and did not see her, I had never hesitated shouted 'mom~', then mom seemed to appear immediately and jumped onto my bed out of nowhere and then stayed with me. I had never thought she would ever no longer respond to me when I called her. I had never thought she would leave me.

Nonstandard syntax, run-on sentences, double negatives, and grammatically awkward repetition have the effect of defamiliarizing Standard English patterns. Instead of the phrase, "I always thought she would be there for me when I called her" (which is, in fact, Wei Wan's fourth revision, after instructional help), in her third revision she offers the reader a structure which is much more powerful. Longer, sadder, syntactically and emotionally troubled, the sentence calls for stronger reader engagement and ultimately has a more compelling effect as readers struggle through all the linguistic knotting: "I had never thought she would ever no longer respond to me," to arrive at the final poignant clause, "when I called her."

Minor errors or omissions also create poetic opportunities for readers. Moments of divergence from Standard English call for pauses, a “prolonging of perception” (in Shklovsky’s terms) that may allow new possibilities to emerge. Take, for example, Wei Wan’s description of the game of hide-and-seek: “When she found me, we stared each other and laughter filled our home.” Many readers will silently amend the passage to, “When she found me, we stared *at* each other,” suggesting a moment of longing fulfilled. But the gap that “stared each other” prompts might also be filled in other ways. It may suggest an underlying theme, a buried phrase: “we *stayed*” or “*stayed with* each other.” This dormant desire, unearthed by shifting “r” to “y,” foreshadows a deeper game of hide-and-seek the text plays with the missing mother. In search of relief from her loss, the text not only *stares*, but also *stores* the mother; it *stops* her in this moment of health, so both can stave off the already acknowledged future. At the same time, the game of hide-and-seek stirs up these secret feelings. The passage continues: “I liked to play this game because I like to hear her voice ringing like a song. The game did not continue right until the wardrobe could not fit my body, but I still waited for her calling.”

“Until the wardrobe could not fit my body” is a fortuitous inversion of grammatical sense, which would normally call for the body (grown larger) to no longer fit in the wardrobe. But the “error” again multiplies meanings: The phrase marks not just the end of the game of hide-and-seek, but a foreshadowing of other endings. We might be reminded of the “beautiful clothes” Shane promises her daughter which will never be bought, will never fit the narrator’s body or wardrobe. Or we might be prompted to consider the way Shane, too, fits her body less and less comfortably as her disease progresses: “A yellowish face, eyes deeply sunken, cheekbones highly raised, lips without any clear border and pale.” *The wardrobe that could not fit my body* reminds us of both women’s growing sense of being ill at ease in a body suffering from sickness or mourning. It also calls to mind the need for relief or escape from this oppressive space: “She took a deep breath and tried to raise her voice, hastening me to open the door, but the voice still mumbled, ‘open the door... someone’s coming ...and they will pick me.’”

One of the fortuitous effects of Wei’s uncertain command of English pronouns is to link the narrator and her mother. By creating grammatical confusion at times about subjects, the text brings the two closer together. For example, in the phrase “After 9 o’clock at night, we left her to stay lonely,” to whom does “stay lonely” apply, the mother or the daughter? The ambiguity amplifies the point of their joint loneliness, whether staying in the hospital or staying home. Again, in the final passage, “you” and “I” are elided in ways that cause productive confusion:

You are free because I permitted—You are relieved because I let you go

Both mother and daughter are freed from physical and psychological pain. Both are relieved from the burdens of holding on to something that can no longer be held. Wei Wan’s relief is *worked through* in creative writing—by breaking the rules of silence and decorum. The free writing process allows her to process her grief and her story in her own way, beyond the canons of culture or grammar, and it is this process that leads to the relief of both: “You are relieved because I let you go.” I want to end on Wei’s final words about the course. They highlight both the process of improving writing (the ostensible purpose

of the course for Wei Wan and for many students) and of improving life quality through the subtle restructuring that telling our own stories can achieve.

I am very satisfied with my choice of taking this course. It's because of this course I was able to write two pieces from my childhood that had such meaning for me. I do not know if I will continue writing creatively for joy and pleasure. But in the end, I have crafted a piece that I am very proud of called "Relief." I can hand this piece down to my daughter and my mom's legacy will continue on. This course gave me that chance to bring my mom to life again.

## Acknowledgment

I want to thank my student Wei Wan, whose dedication to her own process and to our Creative Writing course through the Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University was the impetus for these observations. I prepared this research while I was a Research Associate at the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre at Ryerson University, Toronto, and am grateful for the support.

## Note

1. Most teachers of creative writing will be familiar with this method as developed and explained by Goldberg (1986) in her best-selling creative writing book *Writing Down the Bones*.

## References

Carlos Williams, W. (1969). *Selected essays of William Carlos Williams*. New York, NY: New Directions.

Goldberg, N. (1986). *Writing down the bones: Freeing the writer within*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Shklovsky, V. (1965). Art as technique. In L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis (Eds.), *Russian formalist criticism: Four essays*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.



**Mark Silverberg** is an Associate Professor of English in the Department of Literature, Folklore, and the Arts at Cape Breton University and an Adjunct Professor at Ryerson University. He is the author of *The New York School Poets and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic* (Ashgate, 2010) and editor of *New York School Collaborations: The Color of Vowels* (Palgrave/ MacMillan, 2013). He is also the author of a prize-winning collection of ekphrastic poems, *Believing the Line: The Jack Siegel Poems* (Breton Books, 2013, Eric Hoffer Book Award).

# ***Klangfarbenmelodie: Learner Identity and the Creative Arts***

Sophia Xiang

## **Abstract**

Written from the perspective of a Grade 5/6 French Immersion teacher, this paper examines the role of music, poetry, and the visual arts in enhancing learner identity, in the context of the elementary school classroom. It begins with a focus on artistic metaphors that represent cultural and linguistic hyphenation. It then addresses practical applications of these metaphors into classroom activities, projects, and lessons, enhancing community, academic curricular goals, and student self-awareness.

## **Background**

Two of the most inspirational people in my life were school teachers. Through their teachings, community-building, their pushing me beyond my academic and artistic comfort zones, and their modeling of hard work and passion, I was inspired to pursue the creative arts and education. I am currently a French Immersion teacher in a Grade 5/6 classroom and a choir director, and owe much of my teaching style to their inspirational ways.

Mr. J's teaching style was unconventional, hands-on, and challenging. He taught English literature and creative writing, and all of my best memories of him extend beyond the classroom. Every month, he took us to the productions of UBC Theatre at the Frederic Wood Theatre (affectionately nicknamed "Freddy Wood" by Mr. J). The next morning, he taught us how to dissect and deconstruct meaning as we would analyze quotes, set design, plot, and character development. Mr. J took us to Gambier Island and to Ucluelet for overnight trips and writing workshops, where he invited us to walk off for a few hours into the wild and write and create. When we came back together, he would light a fire and encourage us to read our works to each other. Some students took out their guitars and sang their works out to the group, performing them timidly but passionately.

After lights-out on Gambier Island, I sat down at an old, charmingly out-of-tune piano and played songs by The Beatles, Elliott Smith, and Joni Mitchell with a new group of friends that played guitar, ukulele, and that harmonized beautifully. Instead of telling us to hush up because it was already 2 a.m., Mr. J pulled out his banjo and joined us. This authentic, artistic, safe sense of community felt magical. I was in awe. I will be discussing this identity-affirming creation of space, with references to Bhabha (1994), later in this paper.

At the end of my undergraduate studies, I lived and studied in Paris. Life felt like a dream when in the mornings, I would study the writings of Baudelaire and Apollinaire in the lecture hall, and in the afternoons, I would walk through the cemeteries, kept like beautiful gardens, stopping by their graves.

I became a French Immersion teacher soon after this. Mr. J is now retired and spends his days writing books and traveling. We have regular talks and laughs over coffee and tea, and he is a special guest lecturer in my classroom. My students adore him, and always eagerly await his next visit.

I was put into Mr. B's choir class because of initial bad luck—the spots in a drama class that I was hoping to take were full. Overhearing me tinkering around on the piano one day before class began, he appointed me as his accompanist for choir, and he wanted to recruit me for his jazz orchestra, because he said that I had an ear for improvisation. It was thanks to Mr. B's hard work and encouragement that I broke out of my traditionally classical roots and began exploring jazz and rock music. Having grown up learning piano from a rigid, traditional, and classical teacher, and scared to commit myself to more musical intensity, I declined his invitation. However, over several conversations, he pushed me to give it a try, and I finally did. It was one of the best decisions I could have made as a young teenager, since through his music program I met some of my best friends, felt enveloped in a sense of community and belonging, and gained the confidence that I needed to pursue music and performance at a professional level. I will address and explore my definition of this identity-affirming community, safe space, thirdspace (Bhabha, 1994) later in my paper.

At the time, I didn't know it yet, but Mr. J and Mr. B's teachings were helping shape the basis of my identity and teacher identity. I am the teacher that I am today because of many things, but if it hadn't been for Mr. B's enthusiasm for exposing me to the richness of genres beyond classical music, musical collaboration, and for Mr. J's quest to ignite joy and friendship through reading and writing, then I am certain that I would be a different educator.

## **Locating the Questions**

Through my inspiring, critical experiences as a learner and a teacher, my two central questions were formed. First, how can the creative arts reflect, complement, and enhance learner identity? Second, through the creative arts, how can teachers create a safe space for students to explore cultural and linguistic hyphenation?

Although some educators may view the creative arts as a door that should be opened only periodically, I strongly believe that integrating the arts across the curriculum allows for stronger academic engagement, as well as an enhanced understanding of learner self-identity. In this paper, I will be focusing on music, poetry, and the visual arts. I will begin by highlighting some artistic metaphors that represent cultural and linguistic hyphenation. I will then address practical applications of these metaphors into classroom activities, projects, and lessons.

## **Klangfarbenmelodie and Hyphenation**

The musical term *klangfarbenmelodie* is German for tone-color-melody. It was coined by the Expressionist composer, Schoenberg, in 1911. In musical composition, the term describes the texture and color that is added to a work due to the splitting of a melodic line among several instruments.



Klangfarbenmelodie challenges traditional rules of musical composition, because a melodic line is traditionally assigned to one instrument, or a group of instruments that are the same.

Kursell (2013) notes that

in the resulting sound, a listener cannot pick out the colors of individual instruments. Instead they are merged into a new, previously unheard color. The harmonic progression is in the service of this sound creation. It does not follow the rules of harmonic progression, but freely adds sound to sound. This happens in a fashion that juxtaposes and overlaps the tones so as to create dissonant and unruly chords that do not immediately evoke the demand of harmonic resolution in expert listeners. The harmonic effect that typically makes chords gravitate toward a continuation is suspended. Rather than traditional harmony, the listener hears a harmonious flow of shimmering sound shades. (p. 210)

On a metaphorical level, this musical term is important to my teaching practice because it represents the cultural and linguistic hyphenation that is present in my students. Not only do I teach in a French Immersion environment, but many of my students, like me, are trilingual and are either immigrants or First-Generation Canadians. Poetically, *klangfarbenmelodie* reminds us that the beauty of learner identity can exist in areas of dissonance and atonality, but that it is in these areas that creation and artistic development may occur.

On a practical level, the term *klangfarbenmelodie* is used in this paper to highlight the three main avenues of the creative arts that I will be exploring. *Klang* (tone) will represent music for obvious reasons, *farben* (color) will represent the visual arts, as much of the beauty in the visual arts is found in shading, color, and lines, and *melodie* (melody) will represent poetry. I see the writing of a poetic line much like the composition of a musical line: melody focuses on the sequence and relationship of notes to one another, much like poetry's form relies heavily on style and syntax. Klangfarbenmelodie inspires a synesthetic sense of artistic receptivity; I will note that the categories of music, poetry, and visual arts in this paper will not be static. Often, categories will blend into each other (e.g., I will describe a poem that has roots in visual arts, or I will describe a musical recording that was inspired by text) as artistic expression is often inspired and influenced by an overlapping of the senses.

The concept of cultural and linguistic hyphenation connects with Klangfarbenmelodie, as both concepts honor the in-between space; for Klangfarbenmelodie, the space where the senses intertwine, and for hyphenation, the space where cultural identities and expressions interact. Fred Wah (1992), a Canadian poet who is three-quarters Caucasian and one-quarter Chinese, refers to hyphenation as "the ability to remain within an ambivalence without succumbing to the pull of any single culture (resolution, cadence, closure)" (p. 38) It accesses and honors the in-between space, the hyphen; the space where documentarian Nakagawa (2005) ponders: "In Canada, diversity often means 'one ethnicity + hyphen + Canadian,' but what if you don't fit into an easy category? What if your background is a hybrid of ancestries and you live somewhere between, where cultural identities overlap?"

## Learning and Engaging in Music

Students in Grade 6 and Grade 7 at my school begin to receive formal, classical musical training through the school band program. For some students that did not receive instruction in an extracurricular home setting, or that don't participate in choir, it is their first exposure to learning to play music. Through instruction by the band teacher, students learn to read classical notation, write simple musical phrases, and perform composed pieces at least twice a year. Some students find immense joy in the band program, excited to go to band class every week, and practicing nightly. Some students, however, claim to be "bad at music" because they have failed a playing test or two, and leave their band instruments at school every night because they don't enjoy playing them.

Because many pedagogical methods of music instruction are very product-based rather than process-based, this fixed mindset that develops is unsurprising. These methods are very effective in encouraging students that are already excelling in music and performance, but can be detrimental to students that struggle with performing under pressure. In my journey as a music student, I learned to improvise long after I learned to perform sonatas, nocturnes, and preludes. Because of Mr. B's passion for jazz music, he introduced me to soloing and improvising within a jazz setting, and ultimately to trust my musical instincts within an unfamiliar context.

Sansom (2001) writes about the use of sand, glue, and burlap in the improvisatory process, saying "...the use of musical instruments in unconventional ways and more unusual sound sources (from children's toys to homemade electronic devices) has become established means of sound-production in freely improvised music" (p. 32) He compares this process to Jackson Pollock's action-painting. Using less traditional instruments would allow students to explore sound and creation in a less intimidating format.

In the same article, Sansom (2001) also states,

The emphasis upon process and material qualities enabled by 'freedom' from the image and more (traditionally) formal concerns is paralleled by 'freedom' from functional harmony and/or traditional modes of compositional construction, resulting in direct engagement with the medium of sound and the process of musical creation. (p. 32)

Although I believe that it is essential to teach improvisation skills and moving freely around a musical structure, I still believe that it is essential to teach traditional musical theory, technique, and practice habits. Breaking out of what students perceive as "right" or "wrong" ways of playing is crucial for the expansion of creative thought, collaboration, and openness to composition.

Skills taught in jazz improvisation can be transferred into musical activities that are accessible by the untrained musician. Listening, repeating, echoing, interpreting, playing a simple variation of rhythms can be practiced in a drum circle (e.g., with djembes, congas, and bongos).

For students with a more complex musical background, jazz improvisation can be taught in choir. Vocal scat patterns can be taught, and students can improvise on a simple I-IV-V-I chord pattern.

Because the focus of musical improvisation is often process-based rather than product-based, the practical classroom applications here will focus on the skills learned during the production of music.

Shifting between traditional musical pedagogy and more process-based practices would reinforce a growth mindset in students that are limited by stage fright and that are limited by their technical musical competencies. In this framework, assessing students on their abilities to think on the spot while adhering to some aspects of form (e.g., keeping a steady tempo and staying in the same musical key, while inventing a melody without written notation) can be the focus for some lessons, as opposed to marking them on their abilities in performance (e.g., playing a composition note-for-note in a concert setting). This would help shape a safe space where students can feel receptive to new information and open to taking risks in learning.

### **Learning and Engaging in Square Word Calligraphy and Calligrammes**

For students that feel as if they are floating in between two or more cultures, for students that feel as if they are living and learning between two languages, and for students that feel like their identities are beautifully chaotic and sometimes confusing, they may find comfort and understanding in the structure of artist Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy*.

Bing (as cited in Harper, 2003) states:

The absurdity of Square Word Calligraphy is that it takes two different words from two completely unrelated language systems and fuses them together into one entity. If you use existing concepts of Chinese or English to try and read or interpret these characters, you won't succeed. The total disconnection between outer appearance and inner substance places people in a kind of shifting cultural position, an uncertain transitional state. (p. 47)

Xu Bing's work challenges the viewer's conceptions of Western and Eastern writing systems, as at first glance, his characters appear to be Chinese. However, upon further examination, the characters, if read as Chinese, are meaningless. The strokes are misleading because they use the techniques that are applied in traditional Chinese writing.

This system of writing is described by de Mul (2011) as a "fusion of two linguistic horizons," and "a humorous comment or critique on asymmetry that often characterize the fusion of horizons (for example, when the discussion between a Chinese and English speaker takes place in English)" (p. 654).

A space of cultural and linguistic discomfort is created intentionally here. The viewer is engaging in an artistic space that is straddling the barriers between Chinese and English, as well as between picture symbols and letters. This space of hyphenation floats between two languages and traditional systems of writing. Square Word Calligraphy, in its form, celebrates the in-between space, and challenges the viewer with it as well.

Is it possible to elevate the viewer from discomfort once meaning is understood: although the brush strokes are inspired by traditional Chinese calligraphy, Western words are actually embedded within each invented character.



Fig. 1: Xu Bing's *Square Word Calligraphy*. From Asian Art Archive in America, *Square Word Calligraphy*, 2011, from <http://www.aaa-a.org/events/xu-bing-square-word-calligraphy-classroom/>

In a classroom setting, simple examples of Xu Bing's work can be displayed either on projector or by passing around books. Without any context or background information, students can be invited to answer questions such as, "What do you see? What do these paintings remind you of? Can you make any connections to what is on the paper?"

Eventually, the hidden English language within the Chinese-inspired strokes will be revealed to the students by the teacher. This can serve as an excellent hook to students' linguistic backgrounds and stories. Guided discussion questions include: "Do you speak any languages other than English and French? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't understand the languages spoken? How did it make you feel? Do you ever mix up the languages that you can speak? Do you ever feel as though you are floating in between two cultures? Do you feel that different parts of your personality show when you use different languages? When was the last time that you felt uncomfortable due to a language barrier? When was the last time that you felt proud due to crossing a language barrier?"

Much like it is difficult to put Xu Bing's work into a singular box (Is it calligraphy? Is it writing? Is it a painting? Is it truly Chinese? Is it truly English?), it will be difficult to place this lesson into a singular subject area. This fits into the design of BC's New Curriculum extremely well, as the subject areas are becoming more broad and astatic. For example, a unit surrounding Square Word Calligraphy could touch on inventions related to writing and printing (science, engineering), the history of Chinese calligraphy, paper making, brush making (social studies), the history of Western calligraphy (social studies), and painting and art interpretation (visual arts).

Art teacher and researcher, Wexler (2001), in her teaching practice, was inspired by the unfamiliarity of Xu Bing's symbols and used them as a tool for meaning-making with elementary school students. She invited kindergarten students to tell a story through creating their own symbols based on their knowledge of the alphabet, as well as encouraging them to invent their own picture symbols. She worked with fourth-graders in a similar way and found that students that struggle with spelling were receptive to this form of creating new forms of writing.

Giving students the opportunity to create their own forms of meaning and narratives allows for new avenues of engagement. A student that may not be as receptive to spelling in English and French may view this form as less intimidating, and therefore a safer space of engagement. Square Word Calligraphy may be a way for students with written output difficulties to connect with writing in an artistic structure that is less stressful and frustrating.

In a French Immersion setting, Square Word Calligraphy can also transfer over to the surrealist poetic form of the calligramme. In a calligramme, text represents meaning on its own, but also as a part of a whole picture. For example, in *Il Pleut* by Guillaume Apollinaire, a chain of metaphors describing rain are arranged descending, vertically. This arrangement highlights the falling nature of precipitation and also brings a visual way of accessing text, much like Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy. Students would benefit from exposure to Apollinaire not only because of the poetry and aesthetics, but also because of a historical and cultural context. Exploring poems in the Calligrammes form could serve as an entry into a history and art criticism lesson on surrealism. Apollinaire's connection to Paris in the 1920s links closely to artists and thinkers such as Salvador Dali, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, all stylistically unique and distinctive.

Writing and arranging calligrammes could function as series of lessons that could cross over into the visual arts. The teacher could provide students with a photograph (e.g., of a landscape, of an animal, of a group of people) as a prompt and students could use it as a starting point. This would also provide students with a shared theme, but their varied writings inspired by the same photograph would demonstrate the beauty in possibilities of divergent thinking.

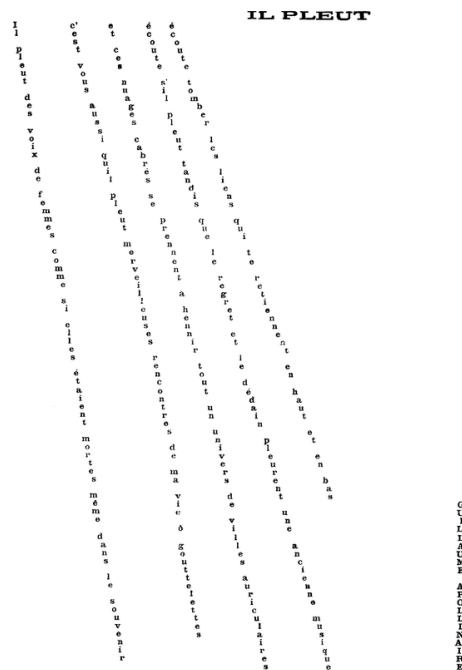


Fig. 2: *Il Pleut*. From Apollinaire, G., Greet, A. H., & Lockerbie, S. I. (2004). *Calligrammes: Poems of peace and war (1913-1916)*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

## Learning and Engaging in Poetry

Through his poetry, Wayde Compton, a local biracial black and white writer, explores ideas of belonging and identity that exist beyond cultural and racial binaries. Compton (2003) is also involved in sound poetry, adding another dimension to his writing through live performances that involve turntablism, manipulating sound with technology. He states:

I enjoy the idea of transforming my voice (myself, that is) into a static disc to be manipulated by the later me, the next me, from above. The remix is a way of—in one moment and one performance—re-enacting the manipulation of history and source culture. In *The Reinventing Wheel*, this happens in the body of one man made into two voices by the turntables...

The project is a duo of two people and four turntables, *The Contact Zone Crew*. Compton collaborates and performs with Jason De Couto, a jazz musician and turntablist. Jazz, when looked at structurally, is largely based upon variations and alterations of a musical melody while keeping a very similar harmonic structure, or musical backbone (Compton & De Couto, 2010). Its unpredictability to the listener is indeed largely based upon creativity and randomness. However, its uniqueness is often limited by some factors, such as the rules of music theory that have roots in some schools of classical music.

Turntablism, the main mode of performance for *The Contact Zone Crew*, is effective in its variance and distortion of an original melody. Since jazz and turntablism are both genres known for their variations, this remixing of poetry and music is a beautiful way to mimic the cultural, linguistic, and racial remixing that occurs in learner identities.

Upon turning on the radio, sometimes I begin listening to a jazz piece in the middle of it. In many forms of jazz, its main, composed melody is usually played at the beginning and end of a performance. Hearing a complex, improvised musical passage in jazz with limited context, the listener will often ask, “What was the composer’s original melody?” It still belongs to the song, although listeners may have a hard time locating it in the composition.

Much like many visual minorities belong to Canada, and are Canadian in culture, their identities as Canadians are still questioned on a day-to-day basis with questions such as, “Where are you really from?” and countless microaggressions dripping with assumptions and prejudices (e.g., “Your English is really good for an Asian person!” “I didn’t expect someone from your culture to be the way that you are!”)

In Nakagawa’s (2005) documentary on Canadian cultural hyphenation, mixed-race poet Fred Wah states,

I’m quite interested in thinking about that notion of the hyphen. That little thing that’s in-between. Let’s say, “Chinese-Canadian,” or “Japanese-Canadian.” I like to challenge those two poles, those two hegemonous poles who want to claim a part of me. Because I feel like I’ve lived in-between and I like the in-between. It’s a place that I would like to spruce-up a bit. I like to, you know, put some nice furniture in the in-between place.

It is no surprise that Wah was artistically influenced by jazz music when he was developing his style as a poet. Louis Cabri’s description of Wah’s work (2009) sounds much like a description of remixing and jazz, “The design [of the poem] itself is part of an ongoing improvisational process that changes the

design as it goes (but there is always, of course, a design—the improvisational moment does not occur freely, out of nowhere)” (p. 14).

For a Language Arts class, a unit of creative writing can be taught, centering around poetry and creative writing. With a connection to sound poetry, students can be taught about the art of slam poetry. This unit would focus on three aspects: listening, writing, and presenting/oral language.

A strong example of a slam poet is a local writer and performer, Shane Koyczan. I have seen him perform live numerous times, from the main stage of the Vancouver Folk Music Festival to an intimate café on Commercial Drive, Café Deux Soleils. Koyczan’s poem, *Inconvenient Skin*, challenges the celebration of Canada 150 and encourages Canadians to discuss its history of colonialism, injustices, and misuse of power.

The written text alone is powerful (Koyczan, 2017) as it contains lines such as, “150 years/is just us putting birthday candles/on top of smallpox blankets, teen suicides/and missing murdered women,” and

we strip, mine, a culture of its identity/allow our leaders to erode each treaty/and stab flags into the land/as if mountains can be owned/as if water is property/where is our dignity/if we cannot hold true to the promises we make?

The recording of *Inconvenient Skin* adds another layer to the poem, as Koyczan has teamed up with producer Corwin Fox, vocalists Tanya Tagaq (throat singer, of Inuit heritage), and Kym Gouchie (of Lheidli T’enneh heritage). The recording is powerful in its richness, a full sensory experience due to the layering of acapella vocals.

Slam poetry adds another dimension to processing poetry because of the added layer of listening and speaking. Poetry becomes more interactive, as text becomes animated through body language, variations in voice and volume, expression, and pronunciation. This is an effective way for teachers to get in touch with multimodalities. The listening aspect of this activity can be accomplished through cloze (or fill-in-the-blanks) activities, where students are given a copy of the text with blanks where key words should be. Through listening to the recording several times, students are to fill in the words. Once all text is completely written in, the teacher will go over the correct spelling of written words.

This poem is also extremely useful in a social studies context. It links directly to the Grade 5/6 Social Studies curriculum. This poem not only addresses Canadian history, but also poses critical questions. Through the lens of learner identity, it can pose the reader/listener questions of “What does it really mean to be Canadian? Who defines Canada? Who am I as a Canadian? Why are some people labeled more or less ‘Canadian’ than others?” As many of my students have grandparents, parents, or great-grandparents that are immigrants, this poem could also be an entry point to discussions regarding family history and identity.

There is a vibrant community of slam poets in Vancouver—putting words into action and sound. This could be an engaging way to connect students to the local arts community. WordPlay, run by the Vancouver Poetry House, provides school communities with visits from professional slam poets.



They have both performances and spoken word workshops, where students are trained to write and perform their own pieces. Field trip ideas can include a visit to a spoken word event or performance. Through this field trip, students can practice their active listening skills; and debriefing analysis, opinion, and interpretation afterwards, students can practice their critical interpretation skills. The Verses Festival of Words runs every year, mid-April, in Vancouver. There is a youth stream within this festival, called Hullaboo, that encourages youth to become involved in the listening and performing of slam poetry.

### **Regarding the Thirdspace**

I will define the safe community of students, teachers, and staff as a collection of hyphenated identities. The space that is created here is defined as a thirdspace, as a composite of individual fractals and hyphens. Only until individual hyphenations feel safe and definable can an evolving and dynamic thirdspace exist. What might a thirdspace in a classroom setting look like?

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) states: “It is the inbetween space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (p. 39). Through shifting the focus of pedagogy on the process of art-making rather than the product of art-making, teachers can help students access the Third Space within a creative context.

A Coltrane jazz solo and a Pollock-ian splatter painting both are rich in artistic knowledge, but also propelled by the beauty of uncertainty and indeterminacy embedded in the process of making these works. To review, some creative and process-based forms that create meaning through the in-between space include klangfarbenmelodie, remix, jazz improvisation, musical variations, calligrammes, and pointillism.

When we begin to explore this liminal space, not only do we shift the minds of young thinkers into stronger musicians, artists, and writers, but we also allow for them to more safely explore their own identities as learners.

Author Anais Nin (as cited in Nin & Stuhlmann, 1966) was famous for her journals, and reflective, introspective, and poetic writing style. She states:

We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations. (p. 127)

If we as teachers are responsible for guiding the growth of the complex constellations of our students’ learner identities, then it is important that we understand and nurture one star at a time. It is important to remember that identities are not static; that sometimes, one aspect of a learner’s identity will burn out in order to make space for new explorations and new learnings. It is also important to remember that shifts in learner identity are not always linear or predictable, nor should they expected to be this way.

## Conclusion

Bringing it back to the beginning of this paper—*klangfarbenmelodie*—it is interesting to note that a term that is now seen in every classical music dictionary, and taught in almost all Western musical theory classes, was once regarded as too radical and abrasive on the ears.

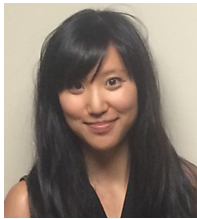
Kursell (2013) writes about Schoenberg's process of using *klangfarbenmelodie* in his compositions, stating, "Schoenberg embraced the effect of the missing beginnings and endings of sounds for his music. This compositional device enabled him to create colorings that were unheard in orchestral music" (p. 193).

As learners, teachers, and thinkers, it is essential to embrace the liminal, in-between spaces of artistic pedagogy. It is important to look past spaces of cultural and linguistic discomfort. It is essential to take risks in the creative process, because it is only through this modelling that our students will be encouraged to trust and thrive in their personal artistic expressions. Learning occurs in the gray space in between the black and white keys, in the brush strokes between English and Chinese, in the scratchy vinyl static of a remixed spoken word poem, of the meanderings of a new jazz variation, and in the nebulous territory between image and text of a calligramme. It goes without question that these spaces challenge us, but it is only through this that we can strengthen ourselves as thinkers, teachers, and students. Let us not be limited by the in-between space, but let us allow this hyphenated and complex space to be an avenue for exploration and enhancement of self. In the words of the jazz-inspired beat writer, Jack Kerouac (1957/1976), "There was nowhere to go but everywhere, so just keep on rolling under the stars" (p. 26).

## References

- Apollinaire, G., Greet, A. H., & Lockerbie, S. I. (2004). *Calligrammes: Poems of peace and war (1913-1916)*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Compton, W. (2003). The reinventing wheel: On blending the poetry of cultures through hip hop turntablism. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20160314232309/http://www.horizonzero.ca/textsite/remix.php?is=8&file=7&tlang=0>
- Compton, W., & De Couto, J. (2010). "Turntable poetry, mixed-race, and schizophonia." doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0354387>
- De Mul, J. (2011). Horizons of hermeneutics: Intercultural hermeneutics in a globalizing world. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 6(4), 628–655. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44259327>
- Harper, G. (2003). "Exterior form—interior substance: A conversation with Xu Bing." *Sculpture* 22, no. 1 (January-February 2003), 46–51.
- Kerouac, J. (1957/1976). *On the road*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

- Koyczan, S. (2017). Inconvenient skin [Recorded by S. Koyczan, featuring T. Tagaq and K. Gouchie]. On *Inconvenient skin*. Retrieved from <https://shanekoyczan.com/track/1346257/inconvenient-skin>
- Kursell, J. (2013). Experiments on tone color in music and acoustics: Helmholtz, Schoenberg, and Klangfarbenmelodie. *Osiris*, 28(1), 191–211. doi:10.1086/671377
- Nakagawa, A.M. (Director). (2005). *Between: Living in the hyphen*. National Film Board of Canada. Retrieved from [www.nfb.ca/film/between\\_living\\_in\\_the\\_hyphen/](http://www.nfb.ca/film/between_living_in_the_hyphen/).
- Nin, A., & Stuhlmann, G. (1966). *The diary of Anais Nin*. New York, NY: Swallow Press.
- Sansom, M. (2001). Imaging music: Abstract expressionism and free improvisation. *Leonardo Music Journal*, 11, 29–34. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1513424>
- Wah, F. (1992). *Alley alley home free*. Red Deer, AB, Canada: Red Deer College Press.
- Wah, F., & Cabri, L. (2009). *The false laws of narrative: The poetry of Fred Wah*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Wexler, A. (2001). Bringing image and language together: A workshop at the Lehman College Art Gallery. *Art Education*, 54(4), 33–37. doi:10.2307/3193901



**Sophia Xiang** is a Grade 5/6 French Immersion teacher and school choir director in British Columbia. With her background in music and performance, she is passionate about using the fine arts to enhance and complement her students' learning experiences in the classroom and in the school community. Sophia is working towards her Master of Education at the University of British Columbia, with a focus on Language and Literacy Education.

# Learners' Identity Through Soundscape Composition: Extending the Pedagogies of Loris Malaguzzi With Music Pedagogy

Matthew Yanko

## Abstract

It is astonishing to observe, listen, and co-learn with children as they engage with music to expand beyond the possible with their meaning-making abilities—immersing themselves in a hundred languages of music inspired by Loris Malaguzzi. In the current study, I examine how children in a split Grade 1/2 class explore and represent the sounds associated with city landmarks through soundscape composition. In particular, I focus on how students partake in the negation of identity. As a result of that, I have come to discover that by listening to children's soundscapes we may be able to feel something new about particular landmarks, contemplate its value to citizens, and learn more about the meaning making of children.

## Background and Purpose of Inquiry

"A hundred always a hundred  
ways of listening  
of marvelling of loving  
a hundred joys  
for singing and understanding  
a hundred worlds  
to discover  
a hundred worlds  
to invent..."  
(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 2)

Educators within the municipally funded early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia provide their young learners with the means to develop multiple ways of thinking, speaking, loving, and understanding. Those concepts stem from a poem by Loris Malaguzzi (cited above), the founder of those centers. Malaguzzi not only advocates for child and teacher to engage with diverse media to express understanding, but also provokes an empowerment of children to express understanding through a medium of their choosing—including that of music.

The ideology that supports Malaguzzi's hundred languages is woven into the philosophies and practices of the ateliers of Reggio Emilia. For them, the atelier is a space that blends qualities of an art studio with that of a laboratory; it is a place for children to explore, create, and express using many artistic media, including pencils, markers, clay, recycled items, and photographs. As young learners interact with materials in the atelier, they are encouraged to explore the communicative possibilities of their creations,

whereby they represent their plans, ideas, and understandings using one or more modes of expression. In that sense, the arts can be perceived as being “supraverbal,” in that they involve expressive, nonsymbolic, and symbolic modes of thinking, understanding, knowing, and communicating ideas (Wright, 2012, p. 8)—they offer young learners a means to interpret and express an understanding of their world. Thereby when children engage with various media to illustrate understanding, they open doors to face new possibilities and generate new questions that would not have occurred had they used only one way of knowing (Forman, 1996, p. 172).

Over the course of the previous five years I have adapted many pedagogies and practices from the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia. As a result of that, I have modified an elementary school music classroom to function as a Reggio Emilia inspired “music” atelier.<sup>1</sup> In the music atelier, I am able to scaffold my students’ understandings with musical provocations, co-learn alongside them, and empower them to explore and make music through traditional and nontraditional instruments, which in turn supports them in the development of a vivid musical language (Gouzouasis & Yanko, 2018). In that context, the art studio is transformed into a music studio where visual arts media becomes music media, and incorporates the sounds of traditional musical instruments and those found in nature and the city. When children explore and create in the music atelier, the abstract nature of music encourages them to represent their understandings in a manner that significantly differs from the conventional methods available to them—they engage in a language of music.

In the atelier, the construction of knowledge is socially constructed and ever dynamic—children work with one another to explore multiple ways of expressing, demonstrating, and interpreting their understandings. They also become aware of themselves as questioners, meaning makers, and learners while engaging in the construction and reconstruction of realities with those around them (Greene, 1995, p. 130). Thus, as teachers, it is important for us to draw upon pedagogies and practices that scaffold such concepts, and communicate to students a notion that reality is made of multiple perspectives, never complete, and that there is always more.

“When students choose to view themselves in the midst of things and have the imagination to envision new things emerging, more and more beginnings seem possible.” (Greene, 1995, p. 22)

Music may be considered the most abstract form of art, and it is astonishing to observe, listen, and co-learn with children as they engage their imaginations with music to expand beyond the possible. Students and teachers should not only be encouraged to illustrate understandings with music, but also reflect on it amongst the many conventional ways of communicating, as the arts provide a platform for children and teachers to see things in ways other than they are normally seen (Eisner, 2002, p. 83). A learning experience in Reggio Emilia that sought to understand the perception of children on their city brings to light such practices (Davoli & Ferri, 2000). During this endeavor, a child with special needs was given an opportunity to engage with photographs, drawings, and sound materials to communicate his understanding of the city. His response focused on the sonic elements of his town, whereby he provided an example of a saxophone player performing on a street corner (Soncini, 2012).

Inspired by that child's means of illustrating his understandings, in the current study I examine how children engage with music as media to express understanding. In particular, I focus on how children partake in the negotiation of identity. In doing so, I examine a project where students explore the sounds associated with city landmarks and co-compose soundscapes that illuminate the landmarks' importance and value. This study occurs over the course of three months and involves 20 students (ages 6-8) in a split Grade 1/2 class.

## **Storying the Research Experience**

Different ways of knowing and communicating experiences through music is a fundamental aspect of this investigation. As such, engaging with impressionist qualitative methodologies can provoke "other" ways of knowing (Ellis, 2004, p. 39); specifically, ethnographic methods that enable storytelling can illustrate new ways of writing that reconceptualizes teaching and learning. The epistemology of story as method is that story is a way in which we tell ourselves to ourselves—we live storied lives. To bring light to how identity is negotiated in the city project, I employ an autoethnographic storying approach (Ellis, 2004), which empowers me to create stories written in a creative nonfictional style based on collected data from observations, notes, and artifacts. In doing so, I pursue "essences" and "meanings," rather than portraying and representing precise "facts" (p. 116)—as to autoethnographers, a truthful account is more important than a factual account (Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002; Gouzouasis, 2008).

I present my experience of the city project using narrative elements to evoke a feeling that the described situation is lifelike and truthful (Ellis, 2004; Gouzouasis, 2008), while preserving the authenticity of it. I embrace a position that I am neither detached nor objective in my research position, as I not only draw from self-experience, but from those experiences I share with my students. To illustrate and elaborate multiple points of view and skillfully draw the reader into the story, I use various forms of voice (Gouzouasis, 2008). Autoethnography not only enables me to illuminate how the children imaginatively depict understanding through music, but also provides insights into the teacher's perspective.

## **Grounding Literature**

When young learners engage in music making in the atelier, their interpretations are not only influenced by developmental characteristics, but also by the materials at hand. "The characteristics of the materials call up different conceptions and skills that function within the limits and possibilities of the material, and it is within the limits and possibilities of the material that cognition proceeds" (Eisner, 2002, p. 80). With that in mind, in this review I focus on research that examines children as they explore, express, and interpret with diverse musical elements to illustrate understanding.

Minimal research exists concerning children's views, perspectives, and accounts of the processes and products of compositional activity (Glover, 2000). However, studies by Moorhead and Pond (1941; 1942), Marsh (2000), and Sundin (1998), tend not to view data as something to be collected, measured, and tested, but as a social activity where children can creatively explore and learn. In reflecting on that, the research paradigm for the current study allows for contextual and situated understandings,

as the ways in which children approach making learning visible with music must be flexible, open, and varied to encourage attentive creativity and heartfelt expression.

To examine multiple perspectives and co-learning, I turn to Eisner (2002), who elucidates that the arts celebrate multiple perspectives and that there are multiple ways to see and interpret the world (p. 83). Furthering that notion, I refer to Marsh (1995) who postulates, “Children’s varying levels of understanding or skill may be accommodated and extended by this process of musical joint construction” (p. 7). I also draw from research by Burnard (2006) that illuminates how classmates can influence one another when engaged in composition, exploration, and music making, and Sangiorgio (2015) that shows how creating music in a group setting can enhance a child’s sense of competence, ownership, and belonging. With that in mind, I strive to support and guide these young learners as they co-explore, co-construct, and negotiate understandings of their city through music.

As the children in this study partake in a co-construction of knowledge, they also partake in a negotiation of identity. To scaffold my inquiry into identity, I turn to the fourth stage of Erik Erikson’s (1977) theory of psychosocial development, which centers on school-aged children. In that stage, the most significant relationship for children involves their school and neighbourhood—where teachers and classmates play an important role and parents are no longer viewed as complete authorities. It is a period where children begin to demonstrate specific competencies that are valued by society and begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments (pp. 232–234). Taking Erickson’s theory into account, the students in the current study actively and effectively negotiate their identities within a significantly complex space, that of the atelier where they co-construct knowledge with one another and the teacher.

As there are limits to written and visual understanding, music is able to provide the potential for new perspectives into human understanding (Gouzouasis, 2008). With that notion in mind, the students in this study are encouraged to engage with soundscape composition, inspired by Murray Schafer (1969; 1976), to elucidate the sonic environments of their city. The emergence of the soundscape in the 1960s was influenced by acoustic ecology and its focus on the interrelationship between sound, nature, and society (Westerkamp, 2002, p. 52), which correlates well with the students’ city project. A soundscape composition contains recognizable environmental sounds that invoke listeners’ associations, memories, and imaginations related to the soundscape. The original sounds must stay recognizable and the listener’s contextual and symbolic associations should be invoked for a piece to be a soundscape composition (Truax, 2008, p. 105).

As the intent of a soundscape is to reveal a deeper level of signification inherent within the sound and invoke the listener’s semantic associations without obliterating the sound’s recognizability (Truax, 1995, p. 2), I believe it can encourage learners to not only reflect on their imaginative music-making abilities, but also empower them to develop a deeper connection and understanding of their city. Thus, as the children represent their theories through soundscape composition, they can begin to “re-know” and “re-cognise” them (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 50)—they are able to make audible the intuitions, sounds, and experiences of their landmarks that take shape and evolve through action, emotion, expressiveness, and symbolic representations.



Students are encouraged to notate their compositions and keep track of the musical elements and instruments involved. To scaffold that for young learners, I seek guidance from a study by Auh and Walker (1999) that examined student composition using traditional staff notation with nontraditional graphic notation and found that the use of nontraditional notation resulted in more musically creative compositions. As a result of that and the practices and pedagogies of the Reggio Emilia approach, the children in this study are encouraged to engage with diverse media to illustrate and keep track of their compositions—drawings, pictures, musical notes, and words. In addition, Barrett (1999) found that when lyrics were introduced to kindergarten students' composition practices, they focused on the lyrics and minimal attention was given to the music. However, it can be argued that lyrics can bind a composition since children are already familiar with rhyme and story structures, and may be able to structure words sooner than music (Glover, 2000, p. 31). That being said, one group is arranging lyrics for a song instead of composing a soundscape.

### **Music for Our City—Three Autoethnographic Vignettes**

As a means to illuminate the learning that unfolds and the negotiation of identity in the city project, I present three autoethnographic vignettes. The first story brings to light the learning process and negotiation of identity as the children engage in creating musical pieces about landmarks. The second vignette illuminates discourse that occurs between the students' classroom teacher and music teacher on the progress of the project, while the third depicts reflections by the learners on the entire experience.

**Vignette one: Swimming pools, hockey rinks, and street signs.** As the children work on their soundscapes, the sound of excitement catches my attention. I head over to three children sitting amongst a stack of percussion instruments.

"Wee – weee – weeee!" exclaims Louie waving his arms in the air, then suddenly stops and looks up at me.

"What's going on over here?"

"We are working on our swimming pool."

"The swimming pool? Why is that an important landmark?"

Justin replies, "Because it's a good place to learn to swim."

"It is useful to swim. If you get into trouble in the ocean you can swim or even save somebody else," adds Giovanna.

I prod a bit more, "Are you trying to show a specific pool in the city through your music?"

Justin replies, "Canada Games Pool. That's where I swim. So far we have Louie saying weeee for people having fun and going down the whirly slide."

I notice a hand drum resting on the floor adjacent to Justin. "What are you using that for?"

"I want to make beats for splashes."

"That all sounds great so far. Have you thought about using the ocean drum?"

"No, you mean that blue shaking drum? I'll go find it," Giovanna blurts as she runs off to a shelf full of instruments.

I leave them to continue their soundscape about the swimming pool and walk over to some students huddled over a bass xylophone.

"What are you working on?"

"Evelyn is showing us her part so we can learn it," Jessica replies.

"Can you show me how it sounds so far?"

Evelyn picks up a red yarn mallet and begins tapping a chromatic melody.

"Something like that but I don't know the next part, Casey is still creating it."

"The two of you are composing together?"

"No all of us are," Peter interrupts, "We all live in the same neighbourhood so we want the music to be from all of us."

"Can you tell me why you picked the neighbourhood as your landmark?"

Evelyn answers, "I know all of my neighbours and they are super nice. That's why it's my land ..."

Peter cuts in again, "My landmark is my house. If you don't have a home you would be homeless. A home keeps you safe and warm."

"Well, mine isn't our neighbourhood," Jessica pauses then continues, "it's the Capilano Street sign. I picked it because I live there. Street signs are important because they tell where you are."

\*\*\*\*\*

The next class Calvin comes up to me and asks for help with his project.

"Mr. Yanko, Luisa and I are working on a school soundscape, but can't seem to find the right music."

"Well why did you pick school for your landmark?"

"Because your brain can develop more ideas there and you will become smarter."

I try to guide him toward a starting point, "What do you want to represent with your music?"

"We want music to show what we do at school to become smarter. So we need to create sounds for the start of the school day, recess, and lunch, but we don't know how to do that," he states with frustration.

"Well, let's start at the beginning. What happens at the start of the day?"

"We walk to school and unzip our backpacks and then do calendar."

"Ok how can we do that with music? What can we do for walking to school?"

"Maybe we can stomp our feet," suggests Calvin as he shrugs his shoulders, then continues.

"Oh, we can also use the zippers on our backpacks for when we arrive."

"You see, you don't need instruments, you can also use your bodies or other objects."

I leave Calvin to work on his project and walk over to three boys at the piano. Two of them are singing and one is playing the piano.

"And then he shoots,

And then he shoots,

And then he shoots and scores."

"Have you found a hockey player yet for your song?" I interrupt.

Ricardo answers, "Joe Sakic because he's from here. My dad says that there is even a street named after him by the hockey rink."

"Can you remind me of your landmarks about sports?"

Scott replies, "I chose Lynn Valley because I play soccer there. It's important to me because if you don't play sports you might always be tired. Sports make you stronger."

Clint adds, "I chose the Vancouver Sports Complex. It was the first place I played sports at. It is special to me because I can play four sports there. Hockey, football, soccer and ..."

Ricardo finishes his sentence, "... and baseball. I chose Squint Lake because I play hockey there. There are a lot of ice rinks beside the lake. There's even a swimming pool, gym, and archery."

"How is your song coming along?"

"Well if I play the piano accompaniment by myself I making mistakes and have to stop, but when I play with them it is easier for me. They keep me going," Scott replies.

"You should pull apart the section that you keep on stopping at and practice it slowly many times until you feel comfortable with it. That may help. Can you tell me why you choose to write a song instead of doing a soundscape?"

Clint thoughtfully contributes, "We chose this song because I hear it at hockey all the time. I thought it would be easy to change the words to make it our own but it was hard."

Ricardo adds, "It was hard to find new lyrics. The ones we came up with make you think about scoring lots of goals and being a champion like Joe Sakic."

**Vignette two: Discourse between two educators.** A few weeks of exploring, arranging, and practicing go by and we begin to record our compositions. One day during the recording process I stop by the students' classroom to touch base with their teacher, Jillian, about their progress.

“How did the reflection part of their recordings go this afternoon?”

“I thought we would only get through one or two and that I would have to prompt them and do many takes, but things went smooth. These students are showing signs of confidence. I don’t know where it is coming from,” she replies.

“Perhaps it’s from their recording experience with the soundscapes. We had to stop and rerecord things over and over because they weren’t happy at times with the instruments and some of the harmonies were too loud. It took a long time to get the music the way they wanted.”

Jillian continues, “The same thing is happening in my class, they are taking an ownership of the recording process. You should see the focus some of the students’ put into their announcements when recording their ideas of what can be added to improve the city. They really do have high standards for this project and thoughtful ideas of what new landmarks the city could use. There is merit to their ideas because they are founded on real issues they hear from the playground, their parents, or the news.”

**Vignette three: Reflection on the learning experience.** After we finish recording the projects and share them with our community, the students and I gather to reflect on what they had learned. As we settle into our music atelier, the children gather in a semicircle shape, some take a seat on wooden stumps, while others sit on the carpeted floor. I begin the conversation.

“Through this project, I learned that all of you are very imaginative, that you can compromise with one another even if your musical ideas are different, that some of you had a keen ear for recording, and that with dedication and practice many of you were able to compose and play challenging music about your landmarks.”

Justin cuts in without raising his hand, “I learned that the ocean drum sounds nice like the ocean,” and Giovanna adds, “But not always, sometimes during the recording when you moved it too fast and hard it didn’t sound the way we wanted it to, so we had to do it a few times until it was just right.”

Samantha states, “I learned that you can make so many cool sounds with the top part of the flutes.”

“You mean recorder,” I correct.

“Yah, the flutes,” she replies as I roll my eyes. “We made so many different chirps with it for bir...”

“Working with my group was hard because everyone had different ideas,” Casey blurts out.

Evelyn adds, "It's better to work with a group because you get more ideas and it's fun.

That's what I learned."

"A few of you played piano for the first time. Did anyone else learn anything about the piano?"

Scott answers, "Learning to play the song on the piano was fun. I don't take piano lessons so it was fun to be able to learn a song for my friends." Clara immediately adds, "My piano song took a lot of work. I had to practice it over and over and over again. It took me a million classes to learn the song and now it's stuck in my head." She begins to sing the pitches of her melody, "BB GG DD C ..."

"Singing was hard for me. It was hard to sing at the same time as Scott playing the piano. It took a long time for us to sing and play together," Clint remarks.

"What did you learn about recording?"

"Not be goofy because we would have to start all over again. We had to be serious when recording," states Louie with a stern tone.

"The recording part was the best part of the project. It was fun to play the instruments and hear a recording of the music we made. Also, when we did the recording I didn't know that your voice sounds different when it is recorded," adds Krista.

Giovanna comments, "Yah, it was weird to hear myself sing because the recording was different from how I hear myself."

### **An Exegesis on the Negotiation of Identity**

"Through the arts we learn to see what we had not noticed, to feel what we had not felt, and to employ forms of thinking that are indigenous to the arts." (Eisner, 2002, p. 12)

As children engage with instruments and materials in the music atelier, they persistently use unique representations as a means to frame their understandings of the world around them. Some research postulates that music can be viewed through a semiotic lens as a mode, or way of expressing knowledge (Tomlinson, 2013), whereby the engagement of a child in making music illuminates how music shares common semiotic processes with other modes of meaning making. While that may be the case, Reggio Emilia pedagogy elucidates that we need to move children beyond a level of making symbols into a level of inventing language (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, pp. 248–249). Thus, the current investigation does not focus on critiquing the students' musical scores and recorded compositions, but examines how they frame, discuss, and reflect on music as a language for meaning making.

Learning experiences like those narrated in the present inquiry can have a substantial influence on how young learners negotiate and develop a sense of identity. As the students work with various media in the atelier to illustrate an understanding of particular landmarks, they begin to develop a routine that has a resemblance to the way people produce and reproduce their individual and collective identities:

“being human—human being-ness—means to be creative in the sense of remaking the world for ourselves as we make and find our own place and identity” (Willis, 1990, p. 11). Therefore, the children not only engage in creatively portraying the essence of landmarks through soundscape composition, but they also partake in defining an identity of their own. In accordance with Erikson’s (1977) theory of psychosocial development, a sense of identity amongst peers emerges as some of the students co-compose, negotiate, and teach one another a xylophone piece about a particular neighbourhood. Also, the participation in a routine of co-exploring, -composing, and -recording elucidates that in seeking to collectively make meaning, students are able to cultivate a supportive network within their learning community—one that empowers the development of the individual voice amongst others.

To be yourself is to be in process of creating a self, an identity. If it were not a process, there would be no surprise. The surprise comes along with being different—consciously different as one finds ways of acting on envisaged possibilities. (Greene, 1995, p. 20)

Participating in a learning community that fosters the individual voice among peers can encourage children to reflect on different perspectives—a reflection that involves embracing differences with a sensitivity to that what binds us together. Greene (1995) posits,

When we see and hear more we take risks into the unknown. We embark on new avenues for choosing and action where we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, and can take an initiative in the light of possibility. (p. 123)

Several children illustrate such ideas in the current study. For instance, Evelyn reflects on her appreciation for diverse musical ideas and sees them as an opportunity to voyage into new possibilities, while others, like Casey, struggle with compromising their opinions.

Although it can be a challenge, many students embrace listening as a way of welcoming others and their differences—a way of opening up to different theories and perspectives. As the students engage in a manner of reciprocal listening, they are able to represent their theories and interpretations through a medium of music, and in doing so they are also able to offer their peers the possibility of becoming part of their theories, developments, and thoughts (Rinaldi, 2004, p. 4). In particular, many of the students alter their listening abilities, resulting in them taking ownership of the recording process, whereby they stop the recording if a part is not in sync and rerecord it if words are not clearly enunciated or if the music is harmonically off. Furthermore, the dynamics between the three boys in the songwriting group depict an intricate and supportive relationship based on reciprocal listening, by which they collaborate to write lyrics and sing in tune while one of the boys accompanies on piano. Also, playing sports to grow stronger is a powerful message that could be hindered if portrayed through soundscape composition instead of song.

Deeper meaning making can occur when children engage in a process of music composition. However, when a final piece is shared with those not involved in the process, there should be some sort of resemblance that enables the listener to make a connection between the landmark and music written about it. For instance, the discussion with Calvin exemplifies that he is not only pondering the importance of his landmark to himself, but also attempting to illustrate how his composition enhances the listeners’

connection to school—"We want music to show what we do at school to become smarter." In addition, many of the children in this study are not only cognizant of a need to depict sounds associated with particular landmarks, but also illustrate an understanding of subjectivity and its effect on how music is co-composed and listened to.

### **Moving Forward: Considerations for Practice**

"Listeners bring their own musical experience and understanding to what they are hearing, influenced by their personal and cultural musical biography. This understanding may be stretched or challenged by the unfamiliar, which then demands an effort of accommodation and an attempt to shift perspective in order to enter more fully into the musical experience and to understand it better."

(Glover, 2000, p. 22)

If we listen to children's soundscapes, we may be able to feel something new about particular landmarks, contemplate its value to citizens, and learn more about the meaning making of children. From this study, I have come to understand the value of pedagogy and practice that supports the negotiation of identity for young learners by enabling them to freely represent their own theories and interpretations. However, if teachers seek to guide students away from traditional means of music making to allow them to freely engage with their imaginations in abstract ways, they themselves need to be willing to venture into the unknown. This can be made possible by reimagining and retuning our ears to hone in on our listening skills so that we not only perceive ourselves in particular landmarks, but in the creative ideas, concepts, and offerings of our students.

The young learners in this study reveal the potential of music as a means to depict understandings of their world. Their engagement with music to make meaning illuminates the limitless possibilities of the hundred languages of music, and has triggered memories of my childhood to resurface. Much of my adolescence was spent with my grandparents who only spoke Italian. The means of communication between us mainly involved interpretation, gestures, patience, and love. When we attempted to communicate through spoken words, only a glimpse of what was meant was understood, and the true meaning was lost in language. Those memories remind me as to why the hundred languages of music is important for young learners. Since verbal language is often unable to clearly articulate abstract acoustical experiences, young learners need a means to imagine and illustrate their explorations, interpretations, understandings, joys, and love of music.



## Acknowledgment

This research was produced with the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship. I would like to thank Dr. Peter Gouzouasis for reading a version of this paper and providing helpful suggestions.

## Note

1. The ateliers of Reggio Emilia draw from the visual arts and tend not to employ elements of music.

## References

- Auh, M., & Walker, R. (1999). Compositional strategies and musical creativity when composing with staff notations versus graphic notations among Korean students. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 141, 2–9.
- Barrett, M. (1999). Modal dissonance: An analysis of children's invented notations of known songs, original songs, and instrumental compositions. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 141, 14-20.
- Burnard, P. (2006). The individual and social worlds of children's musical creativity. In G.E. McPherson (Ed.), *The child as musician. A handbook of musical development* (pp. 353–374). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Davoli, M., & Ferri, G. (Eds.). (2000). *Reggio tutta: A guide to the city by the children*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.
- Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *Autoethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1977). *Childhood and society*. London, UK: Paladin Grafton Books.
- Forman, G. (1996). The project approach in Reggio Emilia. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice* (pp. 172–181). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Forman, G., & Fyfe, B. (1998). Negotiated learning through design, documentation, and discourse. In C. P. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach - Advanced reflections* (2nd ed.) (pp. 239–260). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.
- Glover, J. (2000). *Children composing 4-14*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gouzouasis, P. (2008). Toccata on assessment, validity, and interpretation. In S. Springgay, R.L. Irwin, P. Gouzouasis, & C. Leggo (Eds.), *Being with a/r/t/ography* (pp. 219–230). Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers.

- Gouzouasis, P., & K.V. Lee. (2002). Do you hear what I hear? Musicians composing the truth. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 29(4), 125–141.
- Gouzouasis, P., & Yanko, M. (2018). Reggio's arpeggio: Becoming pedagogical through autoethnography. In W. Parnell & J.M. Iorio (Eds.), *Meaning making in early childhood research: Pedagogies and the personal* (pp. 56–70). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Malaguzzi, L. (1998). No way. The hundred is there. In C. P. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach - Advanced reflections* (2nd ed.) (pp. 2–3). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.
- Marsh, K. (1995). Children's singing games: Composition in the playground? *Research Studies in Music Education*, 4, 2–11.
- Marsh, K. (2000). The composers in the playground. Paper presented at the Creativity Special Research Interest Group session, *Music Educators National Conference*, Washington, DC, 8–11 March.
- Moorhead, G., & Pond, D. (1941). *Music of young children: I. Chant*. Pillsbury Foundation Studies. Santa Barbara, CA: Pillsbury Foundation for Advancement of Music Education.
- Moorhead, G., & Pond, D. (1942). *Music of young children. II. General Observations*. Pillsbury Foundation Studies. Santa Barbara, CA: Pillsbury Foundation for Advancement of Music Education.
- Rinaldi, C. (2004). The relationship between documentation and assessment. *Innovations in Early Education: The International Reggio Exchange*, 11(1), 1–4.
- Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sangiorgio, A. (2015). *Collaborative creativity in music education: Children's interactions in group creative music making*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Exeter).
- Schafer, R. M. (1969). *The new soundscape: A handbook for the modern music teacher*. Don Mills, ON: BMI Canada Limited.
- Schafer, R. M. (1976). Exploring the new soundscape. *Unesco Courier*, XXIX, 4–8.
- Soncini, I. (2012). The inclusive community. In C. P. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. E. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation* (3rd ed.) (pp. 187–212). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Sundin, B. (1998). Musical creativity in the first six years. In B. Sundin, G. McPherson, & G. Folkestad (Eds.), *Children composing* (pp. 35–56). Malmö, Sweden: Malmö Academy of Music, Lund University.
- Tomlinson, M. M. (2013). Literacy and music in early childhood: Multimodal learning and design. *SAGE Open*, 3(3), 1–10.
- Truax, B. (1995). Sound in context: Soundscape research and composition at Simon Fraser University. Proceedings of the *International Computer Music Association*, 1–4.
- Truax, B. (2008). Soundscape composition as global music: Electroacoustic music as soundscape. *Organised Sound*, 13(2), 103–109.

Westerkamp, H. (2002). Linking soundscape composition and acoustic ecology. *Organised Sound*, 7(1), 51–56.

Willis, P. (1990). *Common culture: Symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Wright, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Children, meaning-making and the arts* (2nd ed.). Frenchs Forest: Pearson Education Australia.



**Matthew Yanko** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. Under the supervision of Professor Peter Gouzouasis, his research focuses on formative assessment practices in music education. Inspired by the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Matthew has adapted this approach to his elementary school music classroom, which has inspired the creation of a musical atelier for his students to participate in music making, learning, and inquiry.

# Connecting Classroom to Community Through Photovoice: Pedagogical Implications

Inci Yilmazli Trout, Beatrix Perez, and M. Candace Christensen

## Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical implications of using arts-based research in an advanced community practice course in a Master of Social Work program. Per the course design, graduate students implemented a photovoice project with undergraduate students focusing on transforming campus rape culture. At the end of the project, graduate students wrote reflection papers that constitute the data for this paper. The data analysis resulted in three categories: enhancing the learning of content, understanding the role of a social worker in macro-level practice, and engaging with the community.

The premise of social work education builds on values, skills, and qualities necessary to equip future social workers as critical, socially responsible citizens who contribute to the well-being of the society (Maistry, 2012). The nature of social work involves engagement with vulnerable and underserved communities, which requires value-based, collective approaches to embracing social work knowledge and relationship building, collaboration, and mobilization (Dixon & Hoatson, 1999; Barron & Taylor, 2010). Considering the skills social workers need, their education should include new ways of addressing each component through hands-on experience. The goal is to not only teach content, but also use innovative approaches to research with communities. The focus of using photovoice in an advanced community practice course was to enhance research skills, raise awareness of social issues, and foster students' learning.

Prior studies have shown how incorporating a participatory research project as part of coursework provides an opportunity to engage with the community (Holley, Risley-Curtiss, Stott, Jackson, & Nelson, 2007; Lucero, 2015). This engagement is an essential aspect of social work education. Expanding on this premise, the present study explored the learning and research implications of using arts-based research (ABR) as a method for teaching community practice. The researchers used a constructivist paradigm in the design of this study and a grounded theory approach for the data analysis. As part of a Master of Social Work (MSW) program, one faculty member (and author of this paper) transformed an advanced community practice course into the implementation and evaluation of a photovoice project. The topic for the project was "Transforming Campus Rape Culture." The research question guiding this study was, "What role does ABR play as a pedagogical tool for instructing MSW students in community practice?"

## Background and Context

### Community Practice

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredits Social Work programs across the United States. This accrediting body established Educational Policy Standards (EPAS) or competencies to ensure that social work curricula meet educational outcomes or practice behaviors defined by the Council (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). Educators develop competency assignments to help students learn specific practice behaviors and skills. The EPAS provides the basis on which to assess skills that demonstrate professional social work practice. Therefore, social work program curricula are constructed to ensure students learn social work values, skills, and knowledge necessary for ethical and culturally competent practice.

The community practice aspect of social work education focuses on teaching students the values, knowledge, and skills necessary to build relationships with communities, help communities to identify issues they wish to change, and to harness community strengths and develop resources to create the change (Ohmer, Reisch, & Weil, 2013). As part of a master's level social work curriculum, students learn how to build relationships with(in) communities, design and implement interventions, and evaluate practice outcomes (Ohmer et al., 2013). Therefore, the faculty member, who is one of the authors of this paper, designed an "Advanced Community Practice" course to provide an opportunity for students not only to learn how to build relationships, but also how to implement an intervention, and evaluate the outcomes. The photovoice project was the primary competency assignment linked to specific social work practice behaviors associated with macro-level community practice. Competencies associated with this course included the following: a) understanding diverse and oppressed populations, b) engaging with diverse groups in various settings, understanding ethical decision making to address community dilemmas, and c) engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, organizations, and communities as partners in the change process. Other competencies required social work students to gain experience with constructing and evaluating interventions, advocating for policy change, providing leadership in collaboration with clients and stakeholders, and understanding the impact of community participatory action research.

Using ABR methodology and methods to teach community practice combines the processes of generating community-based data in the form of art artifacts while helping the community to organize around identified issues (Minkler, 2000). In alignment with this purpose, the instructor required students to conduct a photovoice research project focused on transforming campus rape culture and to evaluate the impact on the campus community. As a tool for teaching community practice, photovoice teaches students how to build relationships with a given community, collect multiple forms of data that illustrate community concerns, engage the community in the analysis and presentation of the data, and evaluate the impact the photovoice project has on the stakeholders who view the photographs and read the narratives (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999).

## Arts-Based Research as a Pedagogical Tool

ABR is becoming more commonly used in qualitative research as a way of generating knowledge and conveying an understanding that draws from creative arts in research contexts (Schell, Ferguson, Hamoline, Shea, & Thomas-Maclean, 2009; Leavy, 2018). Scholars and practitioners consider ABR as methodological tools that researchers can use in all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation (Leavy, 2009). Visual methods, mainly, are receiving attention from qualitative researchers in the social sciences (Holm, Sahlström, & Zilliacus, 2018). Human understanding can be increased with the use of visual arts, as artistic images allow us to access knowledge that is hidden or ignored. Also, through these images, new ways of seeing or doing can be achieved which result in influencing human thinking or behaviors (Weber, 2008). More importantly, arts-based visual studies have the potential to provoke critical questions and move people (Finley, 2008). While using artistic ways of knowing allows for accessing human experiences deeply, it also strengthens the impact of the study as the art—in this case, the photographs—speak without words and create an emotional effect on the audience. In other words, aesthetic knowing complements the scientific aspect of the research in a creative way (McNiff, 2018). Artistic means of sharing human experiences eliminates an objective view of the data and privileges the perspective of the person who has taken the photographs (Cooper, Sorensen, & Yarbrough, 2017; Chio & Fandt, 2007).

Photovoice, a visual method, strives to generate positive change in communities by engaging community members in articulating their point of view on given phenomena through photographs, narratives, and dialogue with stakeholders (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999). These characteristics of photovoice make it a perfect tool to apply in social work education. Photovoice method involves a lead researcher recruiting a small group of community members to document their perceptions and experiences about their community by taking photographs and describing the pictures, then displaying the prints for stakeholders. After the public display, the community members critically reflect on the data they presented and the new data they gathered from the stakeholders' response to the photographs. This critical reflection is used to develop a tangible list of solutions targeting the problem (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999).

## Methodology

The design of this study engaged a constructivist perspective, which infuses the design of a study with a methodical examination of how communities construct knowledge according to context, perceptions, and experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective situates an individual's unique perceptions and experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge that can be used to further our understanding of a given phenomenon. It also examines how our social context contributes to the invention of social norms and customs, which brings into question what is considered "normal" and counters with a vision for supporting multiple truths. The current study is qualitative in design with the purpose of exploring the learning experiences of MSW students who recruited and trained participants in using photovoice to generate knowledge, dialogue, and activity focused on addressing campus rape culture. The data artifacts

included the coursework produced by students from courses taught in the Spring 2017 and Fall 2017 semesters. The data analysis methods were grounded theory techniques as described by Charmaz (2014).

## Participants

Fifty-five graduate students (women n=47, men n=8) who are enrolled in an Advanced Community Practice course in the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at a Hispanic serving, state university in the south region of the U.S. volunteered to participate in the study. As part of the requirements for the course, MSW students conducted a photovoice project within the university community where they recruited undergraduate students to be the participants of the photovoice project. Considering the nature of the advanced community practice course in which students are expected to learn how to engage with and organize a community, graduate participants took on the researcher role to conduct the photovoice project with members from the university community. The university internal review board (IRB) determined that this study is considered nonregulated research. MSW students generated the data used for this study as part of a coursework requirement. The researchers analyzed the data with the intention of examining the impact the course curriculum has on students. The names of students mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

## The Course Design

This paper focused on the pedagogical process involved with guiding three classes through the implementation and evaluation of three photovoice projects. Each project consisted of multiple phases. In the first phase, the MSW students reached out to the undergraduate student population of the university to explain the purpose of the research project and recruit them as voluntary participants. After the recruitment phase, the MSW students held an information session to train the undergraduates on how to take photographs that illustrate a) how they perceive campus sexual violence and b) how they believe the campus community could transform the campus culture to support the prevention of the perpetration of sexual violence. Also, the MSW students provided training on the goals of photovoice, ethical issues related to taking the photographs, and how to compose images that convey both a symbolic message about sexual violence and incorporate technical aspects of photography. The MSW students gave the undergraduate participants three weeks to complete their photo taking and move to the next phase of the project, which was a focus group session.

The instructor of the course led the focus group discussion and the MSW students observed how to lead the undergraduate students through a critical analysis of the photographs. The instructor led the focus group discussion because the instructor has years of focus group facilitation experience. From a learning perspective, having the students observe the focus group process is valuable as a scaffolding tool (Vygotsky, 1978). The instructor structured the focus group discussion on how to use ABR to generate local knowledge about how a community perceives a given topic. During this session, undergraduate students observed, discussed, and analyzed all the photographs produced for this project. For discussion, the instructor used the SHOWeD method which stands for: what do you **See** here? What is really **H**appening? How does this relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this problem exist?



What can we **Do** about it? (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004). Then, the instructor invited the undergraduate students to write a caption for their photos based on the SHOWeD prompts. Each MSW student wrote field notes as to what they heard and observed during the focus group discussion. Next, the focus group participants, MSW students, and instructor discussed logistics for how they would exhibit photos at a public event at the end of the semester.

After discussing these logistics, the instructor led the MSW students through a group discussion about their observations from the focus group. One MSW student took notes on details from the class group discussion. After this discussion, the instructor showed the students how to use the focus group data to discover themes that emerged from the participant discussion of the photographs. The instructor connected these themes to a constructivist understanding of how the undergraduate student participants perceive campus sexual violence.

Through social media, press releases, and flyers, the MSW students widely publicized the final exhibit with the goal of reaching as many people as possible to raise awareness or educate them on the subject matter. For the final phase, the MSW students developed and implemented a mixed methods survey to evaluate how the photovoice exhibit attendees perceived and experienced the exhibit. Figures 1 and 2 are examples of photographs and captions generated by the undergraduate students. Figure 1 demonstrates how one student perceives rape culture:



Fig. 1: "This picture represents the feeling of isolation and helplessness that rape victims feel when family, friends, and even the justice system turn their backs to them. They are forced to suffer in silence and live with the fact that their attacker remains free to target others" (Miguel).

Figure 2 illustrates how another student believes we can transform rape culture:



Fig. 2: “No matter how dark things get, there's a clear, blue sky on the other side of it all. Clear skies, clear roads, clear mind. We transform not by looking back, but by looking forward at the road ahead” (Ashley).

## Data Analysis

The data for this study consisted of reflection papers submitted by the MSW students at the end of the semester. In analyzing the data, the researchers used grounded theory methods as described by Charmaz (2014). Grounded theory is a systematic and iterative set of methods aimed at constructing theories that are “grounded” in the data (Charmaz, 2014). For this study, line-by-line coding was used, which involved developing in-vivo codes of particularly rich segments of the data followed by focused coding, which consisted of recoding the data with conceptual codes that emerged from the line-by-line analysis. The focused coding process resulted in the emergence of three categories.

## Findings

Our analysis of reflection papers yielded three categories that are: a) understanding the social worker’s role in macro-level practice, b) enhancing learning of content, and c) engaging with the community.

### Understanding the Social Worker’s Role in Macro-Level Practice

Using ABR, specifically photovoice, to teach community practice resulted in the students understanding a fundamental role of social work in macro-level practice. Specifically, one role the students described

learning is how to support the community members with generating and sharing local knowledge about community issues. In this case, the topic was on campus rape culture.

This experience also expanded skills I already have, including listening to the concerns of clients (participants) and finding innovative ways to engage the community, as well as utilizing careful planning of an outreach event, and relying on resilience when the best laid plans fell through. More importantly, I realize not to take lightly my influence as a social worker to impact the community in a positive way, a way that recognizes and understands that a collective voice has the power to make lasting changes. (Emerald)

Emerald articulated how her experience in the course facilitated a tangible understanding of the role of social work in macro practice. The course experience expanded skills that Emerald already possessed, particularly her ability to listen and engage the community through innovative methods. Emerald also mentioned the importance of creating a careful plan for the practice effort and to trust the resilience of her colleagues when plans fall through. Most relevant to this category is Emerald's understanding of her role (as a social worker) is to recognize and understand the collective voice of the community. It is through this recognition that a community gains the motivation necessary to create positive change.

Tabitha also viewed her experience with implementing a photovoice project as teaching her the importance of helping the community to articulate their lived experiences with stakeholders and the broader community.

Finally, what I also appreciate about the Photovoice is that it gives a voice to the community... I felt that this empowered our participants to speak their true feelings and have the opportunity to be heard by stakeholders and the community. I would like to replicate something similar to this in my future work, especially as I am sure I will be working with vulnerable populations who probably have little chance to make their voices heard. (Tabitha)

Based on this quotation, the course taught Tabitha a clear understanding of the roles social workers play in macro practice. Tabitha learned that one important role is to help the community locate mechanisms through which they can share their "true feelings" with stakeholders and the broader community. Tabitha also understands that another role is to help stakeholders to bear witness to the perceptions and experiences of community members. Learning these roles through the implementation of a photovoice project inspired Tabitha to say she would consider this approach in her future social work practice.

Many other students observed how the photovoice method facilitates the role of social work in macro practice. Students articulated how photovoice supports a community in sharing their perspectives on and experiences with an issue such as campus rape culture. "This project gave a great visual to their [the community] perceptions" (Crystal), "The impact of the focus group was a surprise for me. It turned out to be very informative and gave us insight to how students around campus and outside of the social work field view sexual assault" (Chandra), "It [photovoice] is a powerful tool for addressing sexual harassment as photos can reflect the victims' subjective experience (if a participant is a victim)... the images we received were very thoughtful and poignant" (Sarah).

Using ABR, in particular, the photovoice method, as an approach for instruction on community practice illustrates an essential role that social workers must take when working at the macro level. Social workers focus on building relationships with communities and helping communities to identify and gather community resources to create change. An essential step in that process is giving the community a mechanism and space where they can demonstrate their lived experiences and local perspectives on given issues. MSW programs need to train social workers on how to support communities in collecting, organizing, and describing these perceptions and experiences. The data provided by the MSW students in this study illustrate how the students view photovoice as an effective method for providing this support.

### **Enhancing Learning of Content**

Students learned to take on the role of a researcher, which included engaging in learning content and turning the research into action throughout all phases of the project. The photovoice method allowed them to understand the topic better through having a dialogue with their participants. As Paul stated, “the photovoice method allowed us to capture the varying perspectives of the photographs that the participants took. Hearing what the participants had to say about their pictures put into perspective on why this topic is so important,” which is supported by another student’s comment, “The viewing of the photos helped me to conceptualize what rape culture means” (Arianna).

Photovoice not only provided students with a greater understanding of rape culture and sexual assault, but also a noninvasive way to discuss the issue. Students described how using photos as a medium for addressing a sensitive topic was beneficial for making conversation about the topic less strenuous or easier. Tabitha described how using abstract images helped to create discussion about the issue,

...the photographs were not a directly worded opinion, but rather a symbolic picture. It felt easier to talk about the subject at the event... I learned through the use of photovoice the impact that a photograph can have; the interpretations of the symbolic image from not only the photographer, but the viewer, allowed for a unique dialogue to form. The photographs were a great conversation starter, as there was a wide array of questions that could be asked by looking at the images. (Tabitha)

She elaborated on the power of photos and how interpretation contributed to the discussion between the photographer and the viewer. This finding indicates that students learned about the value of symbolic images in creating dialogue.

Students expressed how the project allowed them to apply theories to practice. Throughout the semester, students engaged in class discussions and weekly readings centering around community practice theories and the photovoice method. As they learned the content, they were able to apply their knowledge in conducting the photovoice project and organizing the exhibit. One student described the effectiveness of course readings and discussion assignments in providing preparation to transform theory to practice,

The course was designed in such a way that each week we were gradually exposed to theories and methods of community organizing through our course readings. These readings and the Blackboard discussions connected to them were directly related to tasks that our class was tackling that week in our project planning process. I found the connection between our weekly readings and project tasks to be extremely helpful throughout the process because the readings highlighted that there was logic and research behind what we were working on as a class. (Andrea)

Andrea emphasized the importance of the course structure in providing necessary tools each week that linked directly to project tasks. This structure provided students with a crucial grounding in understanding the role of course readings for the successful completion of each phase of the project. Students learned firsthand how to apply course content to practice. The course readings were instrumental in providing students with the background they needed to develop and implement the photovoice project. Students described the benefits of course content to real-world application. Michael stated, "I appreciated the experience of being able to think through the materials learned throughout the textbook and apply it to a real-world example." Another student expressed the importance of course content in planning and implementing the community event and the importance of class time to discuss the project,

The content of the class directly helped us to be able to create, build, and execute the event and make it successful. I believe that being able to use class time to talk about the event and being given examples were a lot of help. (Samantha)

Students were able to engage in learning through course content and examples as well as in-class discussion.

Learning course content provided the knowledge needed to complete the photovoice project. The content provided a foundation and gave students an appreciation for photovoice as an essential research method for addressing community issues and social problems affecting marginalized groups. One student expressed the unique ways in which photovoice as a research method can influence change,

I learned what photovoice is and how it can be implemented as a tool to collect information to bring light to an issue. Photovoice provides a visual that is hard to avoid or deny. We often hear that "a picture is worth a thousand words" and by utilizing photovoice as a research tool it gives a voice to the voiceless. It is a powerful and creative way to bring issues to light and affect change. Images transcend the barriers of language and it makes the issues harder to be ignored. (Luz)

Luz emphasized the power of photos and images to address community issues and transform language as well as the significance of learning about photovoice as a research tool. She expressed the value of using photos through photovoice as a method to bring awareness to sensitive and vital issues.

Other students expressed the value of photovoice and the focus group to reinforce course content. One student described how the photos and focus group provided an understanding of the readings.

It [photovoice] is a simple concept now that I have learned the process and for whom it is used. It was not until I saw the images created by our volunteers and the focus group session where they explained their photographs that I was beginning to understand our readings. (Ramon)

This statement also highlights the reciprocal effect of how photos and the focus group enhanced learning.

Engaging in the various phases of the photovoice project allowed students to learn about the research role and the benefits of ABR in addressing community issues. At each stage of the project, students learned content about sexual assault and rape culture on college campuses, photovoice as a research method, and the process of developing, planning, and implementing a community event to engage community stakeholders in dialogue. The firsthand experience of bringing knowledge and practice together in organizing a community through photovoice helped enhance student learning in the process. This finding adds another aspect to ABR's multi-faceted implications for community practice courses in social work education.

### **Engaging With the Community**

The process of photovoice allowed students to understand the macro-level community practice aspect of social work by enabling them to engage in critical thinking. This finding is particularly important and significant as the experience led students to identify their role as a social worker. Photovoice allowed students to experience the macro-level community engagement, which led them to a better understanding of how to align critical thinking with the macro-level practice. Each phase of the project helped students gain a different perspective.

The focus group session of the photovoice phase provided an opportunity to hear the community members' perspectives. While community practice involves advocating for them, it is imperative to hear and understand the views of the community members for successful advocacy. Providing solutions for perceived problems or felt needs would be one approach. However, what constitutes success in these circumstances is to empower community members and allow them to contribute to the solution by giving them a voice. This finding was prevalent in the focus group phase as stated by one student:

The impact of the focus group was a surprise for me. It turned out to be very informative and gave us insight to how students around campus and outside of the social work field view sexual assault. It was insightful to hear their different perceptions of the sexual harassment. (Chandra)

By being a part of this project and working with undergraduate members of the university community, participants "moved" the larger community to address and center around a conflict that affects the entire campus. This effort is directly related to the purpose of the project and the photovoice method. The final exhibit allowed the MSW students, undergraduate participants, and community stakeholders to view others' perspectives and opinions as well as to engage in meaningful discussion. This exchange yielded new insights and ideas for transforming campus rape culture.

We empowered our participants to share their understandings and perceptions of sexual assault. They are members of the community, and it is imperative that their voices be heard. We gave them a unique platform to do this and it showed me how impacting an opportunity like that could be for my future clients. Finally, I feel that we empowered community members by providing a safe, nonjudgmental space to talk openly and honestly about sexual assault.

Although the topic may have been difficult to talk about, we provided an environment which made it okay for them to speak up and share their own perceptions. (Tabitha)

Students also learned and experienced what it entails to organize a community. One participant clearly described the process regarding what is needed and what outcomes the students could expect:

Organizing a community around what it feels is their needs is important. Many times, there are instances when the social worker will go in with their own idea of what a community needs and that project will fail. Being able to ask questions and being open to those in the community will not only give you the report needed to gather participants but also at the same time educate the social worker on issues they may not have been aware of. (Ricardo)

Community engagement involves building relationships between the social workers, who are supporting the community, and stakeholder groups. Collaboration with community organizations to hold the exhibit was another aspect of community engagement that was mentioned by students: “Working with partner agencies is very crucial to providing services and resources to community members. They are just as equally important in dealing with a community awareness problem” (Sarah).

Overall, this project allowed the campus community to engage with the broader community by holding an exhibit of photographs produced. Using an innovative approach to address an important and, yet difficult, issue, helped students to connect with the roots of social work community practice while drawing attention to the problem and engaging with the broader community.

## Challenges With the Photovoice Process

The current project was not without challenges which revolved around two main areas that are related to the nature of a research process, and the topic of this research project which was “transforming campus rape culture.”

A primary challenge the students identified was with participant recruitment. As coresearchers, graduate students had difficulties in recruiting and retaining participants for the project. Considering the target participant profile, which was undergraduate students, one main problem in recruiting them was a commitment to the research process that involved multiple phases such as training and info session, focus group session, and the final exhibit at the end of the process.

One of the major challenges I noticed from the start was finding participants who were willing to commit their time and energy to the project. I felt that I had a tactical plan to recruit participants by sending out emails, detailing our project...No response was received... For the participants who were willing to participate, it was difficult for them to commit to attending the event and, more importantly, in my opinion, the focus group. (Ashley)

Given that the undergraduate and graduate students were located at two different campuses in the city, it was difficult to schedule meetings at mutually convenient times. “We wanted to recruit undergraduate students...but since we (the MSW program) were downtown, and many undergraduate students are at the main campus it was hard to recruit students” (Fonseca).



As for the retention of participants, a challenge was that participants would show enthusiasm initially, but as the semester went on, they disappeared—they did not take the photos or did not respond to follow-up emails. This lack of involvement caused disappointment and discouragement among graduate students.

[I] did find the recruitment of a participant for the Photovoice project to be extremely difficult. Communication was one-way and I was not prepared for that. In the end, our participant did participate the night of the event, [but] without...participating in the focus group. I found this to be a personal challenge. My personal work ethic is set fairly high and the end results...were less than satisfactory in my opinion. (Ramona)

The second challenge was emotional dissonance over focusing on sexual violence. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, which was campus rape culture, it is understandable that participants would not feel comfortable participating or sharing experiences related to rape. The project addressed a sensitive issue, which not only led to difficulties in finding participants, but also created personal challenges for some graduate students who were leading the project. Dolores shared one example:

There were times I wished nothing more but to end the conversations. I am a survivor, and only one person knows my story and that was the result of being in this class; the re-traumatization became difficult to bear and I finally confided in my significant other. I did not want others in class to know, so it was a struggle to be there every day and talk about it at a deeper level.

Another student also had similar experiences to Dolores:

The topic of sexual assault and harassment is a sensitive topic for me. The entire project was difficult and brought many emotions to the surface. The day of the event was the worst for me. As I was driving to the event, I started to have a heavy feeling in my chest that lasted all night. After the event, I cried on my way home. (Luz)

Such negative experiences at a personal level helped graduate students to better understand their roles as social workers regarding how to approach vulnerable people they serve. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, as social workers, graduate students recognized that they needed to be careful in their behaviors and choosing their words carefully so that they would not trigger adverse reactions or emotions in their participants. In addition to their role as social workers, graduate students were able to reflect on how negative feelings led to different movements and community initiatives and saw the value in it: “It seems as if that negative experience is what moves the efforts and the desire to change that keeps the movement alive” (Luz).

Though there are numerous benefits to using photovoice as a participatory action research project for addressing community issues, there are also challenges and limitations observed across studies. The challenges experienced in this project are not unique. Researchers note various issues that arise in project implementation and photo exhibit events. Challenges include time constraints, recruitment concerns, problems with participant involvement and attrition, sample size, ethical concerns, photo exhibit participation, limited resources, and student project issues.

Time constraints affect photovoice research in several ways. The length of projects can affect participant attrition (Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014; Baker & Wang, 2006; Budig et al., 2018). Time limitations influence the quality of photos when participants feel pressed and are unable to produce effective and meaningful images to identify and capture community issues (Findholt, Michael, & Davis, 2010; Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014). Lack of meaningful engagement of participants, and lack of clarity on participant responsibilities and obligations, can compete with data collection timelines and can complicate focus group sessions, and exhibit participation (Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014; Budig et al., 2018; Johnston, 2016). These issues affect the recruitment and retention of participants. Also, recruitment of participants who belong to groups affected by social stigma may require more time to create trust and rapport building (Bukowski & Buetow, 2011; Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014; Povee, Bishop, & Roberts, 2014).

There are also ethical challenges. Prime issues are related to confidentiality, which complicates the allowable content of photographs. Using images of people, protections of privacy, intrusions of public space, use of personal likeness for commercial gain, and presenting a person in a false light (Goodhart et al., 2006) are areas of concern in a photovoice project. Other ethical concerns center on the use of photovoice in community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR values the involvement of multiple stakeholder groups, which can be challenging. Three areas that involve ethical sensitivity—making sure to engage decision-makers in projects, managing the sorting and analyzing the abundance of data collected, and accurately presenting photos and narratives—are most important to participants (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Latz, 2017). Also, researchers note conflict with the power and control dynamic between the researchers and participants when using photovoice (Povee et al., 2014). In an effort to diminish the power and control dynamics, researchers tend to be more friendly and less formal with participants to pacify power and inequality (Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014). Ethical considerations also include managing participant expectations of definitive change in issues the community identified (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001) and negotiating whether participants want to be in the position of being agents of social change (Latz, 2017).

Incorporating a photovoice exhibit at the end is a key aspect of a photovoice project with the purpose of influencing policy makers and other stakeholders who interacted with the work. If these actors are not invited or fail to attend the exhibit, an opportunity is missed for a dialogue (Capous-Desyllas & Forro, 2014). A photovoice exhibit is different from a photography exhibit as it is about stories told through photographs and narratives—the intention is to raise the critical consciousness of people who observe the exhibit (Latz, 2017). Given this intention, educators must consider how the photos and narratives interfere with or expand attendees' understanding of the issue presented. Thus, it is important to assess community and individual impact adequately (Baker & Wang, 2006; Pruitt et al., 2016; Seitz et al., 2012).

Researchers noted additional challenges using photovoice methodology with undergraduate students. Findholt and colleagues (2010) noted the following: 1) inadequate photography training, 2) inability for students to conceptualize themes and orient to the bigger picture, and 3) difficulty identifying community issues as student participants focused on photos of family and friends. Other challenges observed by researchers included students struggling to locate the decision makers to participate in the project and

classroom projects where teachers did not trust undergraduate student researchers to complete tasks (Warne, Snyder, & Din, 2012).

## Discussion

Our findings provided evidence of the characteristics of using photovoice to teach community practice. While we identified three categories that emerged from the data, they overlap and complement each other to present the big picture. Incorporating a photovoice project as part of the coursework provided an opportunity to take the classroom into the community. This practice had multiple implications for the community engagement aspect of social work. As the social work profession entails working within communities, it is vital to equip future social workers with skills and tools they need in practice, which includes empowering community members by giving them a voice, listening to and hearing their perspectives, organizing them, and advocating for them to make a positive impact.

While different fields use ABR in various ways, incorporating ABR into social sciences has been slow. Previous research illustrates examples of how to use ABR, such as photovoice, in classroom practices, but most of the time this work is limited to the classroom setting (Schell et al., 2009; Tracey, 2009). However, using creative approaches such as ABR to teach community practice, gives the students the opportunity to share the coursework and ABR results with the public, which makes student learning authentic. Considering the nature of social work, which addresses community needs and strengths, it is essential to share the results of the coursework with the public because it engages students in higher-level learning. Doing exhibits or events that are open to the public gives students the opportunity to interact with community members, participate in public dialogue, and produce authentic learning through the experience of presenting their work (Massengale, Strack, Orsini, & Herget, 2016).

This study is significant in multiple ways:

- (i) social work students had hands-on experience in conducting photovoice research and engaging with the community;
- (ii) they applied theory to practice;
- (iii) the project culminated with a public event that had an impact on the students, the project participants, and the community members who attended; and,
- (iv) the arts-based approach acted as the tool to link the communities of the campus and the public.

We believe that ABR as a pedagogical tool has great potential to enhance student learning in community practice in the social work field. Integration of photovoice in community practice curriculum in social work programs allows students to engage in their education and the community, start to see their environment or the subject matter from a different perspective, and increase subject awareness among local community members (Massengale et al., 2016; Goodhart et al., 2006).

## References

- Baker, T. A., & Wang, C. C. (2006). Photovoice: Use of a participatory action research method to explore the chronic pain experience in older adults. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(10), 1405–1413. doi:10.1177/1049732306294118.
- Barron, C., & Taylor, B. J. (2010). 'The rights tools for the right job: Social work students learning community development'. *Social Work Education, 29*(4), 372–385.
- Budig, K., Diez, J., Conde, P., Sastre, M., Hernán, M., & Franco, M. (2018). Photovoice and empowerment: Evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project. *BMC Public Health, 18*, 432. doi:0.1186/s12889-018-5335-7.
- Bukowski, K., & Buetow, S. (2011). Making the invisible visible: A photovoice exploration of homeless women's health and lives in central Auckland. *Social Science and Medicine, 72*, 739–746.
- Capous-Desyllas, M., & Forro, V. A. (2014) Tensions, challenges, and lessons learned: Methodological reflections from two photovoice projects with sex workers. *Journal of Community Practice, 22*(1–2), 150–175. doi:10.1080/10705422.2014.901269.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Chio, V. M., & Fandt, P. M. (2007). Photovoice in the diversity classroom: Engagement, voice, and the 'Eye/I' of the camera. *Journal of Management Education, 31*(4), 494–504.
- Cooper, C., Sorensen, W., & Yarbrough, S. (2017). Visualizing the health of communities: Using photovoice as a pedagogical tool in the college classroom. *Health Education Journal, 76*(4), 454–466.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=81660>
- Dixon, J., & Hoatson, L. (1999). 'Retreat from within: Social work's faltering commitment to community work'. *Australian Social Work, 52*(2), 3–9.
- Findholt, N.E., Michael, Y. L., & Davis, M.M. (2010) Photovoice engages rural youth in childhood obesity prevention. *Public Health Nursing, 28*(2), 186–192.
- Finley, S. (2008). Arts-based research. In J.G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 71–81). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Goodhart, F. W., Hsu, J., Baek, J. H., Coleman, A. L., Maresca, F. M., & Miller, M. B. (2006). A view through a different lens: Photovoice as a tool for student advocacy. *Journal of American College Health, 55*(1), 53-56.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holley, L. C., Risley-Curtiss, C., Stott, T., Jackson, D. R., & Nelson, R. (2007). 'It's not scary': Empowering women students to become researchers. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 22*(1), 99–115.
- Holm, G., Sahlström, F., & Zilliacus, H. (2018). Arts-based research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 311–336). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Johnston, G. (2016). Champions for social change: Photovoice ethics in practice and “false hopes” for policy and social change. *Glob Public Health*, 11, 799–811.
- Latz, A. O. (2017). *Photovoice research in education and beyond*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Leavy, P. (2009). Arts-based research as a pedagogical tool for teaching media literacy: Reflections from an undergraduate classroom. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 3(1), 225–242.
- Leavy, P. (2018). Introduction to arts-based research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Guilford Press
- Lucero, J. L. (2015). Engaging undergraduate social work students in community-based research: Developing research skills through hands-on learning. *Council on Undergraduate Research*, 35(4), 18–24.
- Maistry, M. (2012). Community engagement, service learning and student social responsibility: Implications for social work education at South African universities: A case study of the University of Fort Hare. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 48(2), 142–158.
- Massengale, K. E. C., Strack, R. W., Orsini, M. M., & Herget, J. (2016). Photovoice as pedagogy for authentic learning: Empowering undergraduate students to increase community awareness about issues related to the impact of low income on health. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*, 2(2), 117–126.
- McNiff, S. (2018). Philosophical and practical foundations of artistic inquiry. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 22–36). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Minkler, M. (2000). Using participatory action research to build healthy communities. *Public Health Reports*, 115(2–3), 191–197. doi:10.1093/phr/115.2.191.
- Ohmer, M. L., Reisch, M., & Weil, M. (2013). *The handbook of community practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Povee, K., Bishop, B. J., & Roberts, L. D. (2014). The use of photovoice with people with intellectual disabilities: Reflections, challenges, and opportunities. *Disability & Society*, 29(6), 893–907. doi:10.1080/09687599.2013.874331.
- Pruitt, A.S., Barile, J. P., Ogawa, T. Y., Peralta, N., Bugg, R., Lau, J., et al. (2016). Housing first and photovoice: Transforming lives, communities, and systems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 61, 104–117. doi:10.1002/ajcp.12226.
- Schell, K., Ferguson, A., Hamoline, R., Shea, J., & Thomas-Maclean, R. (2009). Photovoice as a teaching tool: Learning by doing with visual methods. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 21(3), 340–352.
- Seitz C. M., Strack, R. W., Rice, R., Moore, E., DuVall, T., & Wyrick, D. L. (2012). Using the photovoice method to advocate for change to a campus smoking policy. *Journal of American College Health*, 60(7), 537–540. doi:10.1080/07448481.2012.688781.
- Tracey, S. (2009). Crossing thresholds and expanding conceptual spaces: Using arts-based methods to extend teachers’ perception of literacy. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 3(1), 243–262.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. M. Cole et al. (Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wang, C., & Redwood-Jones, Y.A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from Flint photovoice. *Health Education and Behaviour*, 28, 560–572.

Wang, C.C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education and Behavior*, 24, 369–387. doi:10.1177/109019819702400309

Wang, C.C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health*, 8(2), 185–192. doi:10.1089/jwh.1999.8.185

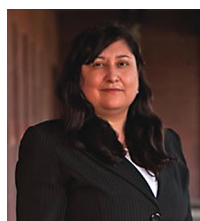
Wang, C.C., Morrel-Samuels, S., Hutchison, P. M., Bell, L., & Pestronk, R. M. (2004). Flint photovoice: Community building among youths, adults, and policymakers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(6), 911–913.

Warne, M., Snyder, K., & Din, K. J. (2012). Photovoice: An opportunity and challenge for students' genuine participation. *Health Promotion International*, 28(3), 299–310. doi:10.1093/heapro/das011.

Weber, S. (2008). Visual images in research. In J. G. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 41–53). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.



**İnci Yılmazlı Trout** is a doctoral student in education at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX. Her research interests include research methodology, particularly arts-based research and action research, doctoral education, doctoral student experiences, and identity development. İnci is the recipient of the Frost Play Research Collection Fellowship for 2017-2018, and the UIW Excellence in Inquiry Award in 2018.



**Beatrix Perez** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at San Antonio College. Her research interests include sociology of education, foster care, homelessness, social capital, arts-based research, and qualitative research methodologies. She has published work on the residential instability of youth aging out of the foster care system, educational experiences of Latino youth in foster care placements, structural barriers to Latino educational achievement, and the impact of poverty and homelessness on education. She has worked on various grants including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the United Way, and the University of Texas Health Science Center. Beatrix is a recipient of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) Teaching Excellence Award for 2019.



**M. Candace Christensen** is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Candace's research centers on using feminist and arts-based methodologies to address gender-based violence (GBV). Candace was awarded the Feminist Manuscript Scholarship Award for 2013 from the Council on Social Work Education and the UTSA Presidential Achievement Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2018.





# Knowing Teaching Poetically

Aaron Zimmerman, Linnie Greenlees, Elizabeth Isidro, and Stacey Sneed

## Abstract

In this article, we present a set of poems that have helped us to come to know teaching in particular ways. We argue that the artistic medium of poetry can provide unique and important insights into what it is like to live through classroom moments. Using connoisseurship as our mode of inquiry, we share these poems, our interpretations of these poems, and our justification for why poetry is a valid way of knowing teaching. We invite our readers to join us in exploring the aesthetic dimension of teaching.

## Background

In this article, we present a set of poems that have helped us to come to know teaching in particular ways. We believe that the knowledge that we have gained from these poems is, indeed, just as (if not more) truthful than the knowledge about teaching that we have learned through standardized, empirically verified data sources (cf. Muijs & Reynolds, 2018). Although empirical research may present us with useful conceptual frameworks for how teaching and learning works (cf. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010), such research does not necessarily present us with lifelike portraits of what it is like to experience teaching and learning (van Manen, 2014). While it may be important to know, conceptually, which pedagogical practices produce the largest gains in student achievement (cf. Marzano, 2003), it is, we argue, equally important for scholars and practitioners to know, affectively, what it can be like to live through moments of teaching in real classrooms, in real time, alongside real human beings. Teachers must recognize and be responsive to the mood of the classroom if they are to exercise pedagogical sensitivity and tact (Garcia & Lewis, 2014; van Manen, 2007; van Manen & Li, 2002).

We believe that, too often, teachers overlook—or disregard—the affective qualities that characterize their experiences in classrooms, in part because policymakers and administrators tend to prioritize the measurable and controllable aspects of teaching above all else (Bengtson & Connors, 2014; Brown & Weber, 2016; Timberlake, Thomas, & Barrett, 2017). We believe that poetry is one way to illuminate teachers' hidden understandings and "to reveal what [previously] had not been noticed" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 102). In order to explore this thesis, we present three poems and explore the unique insights that these poems have afforded us as practitioners and scholars of teaching. As we share these poems and our justification for why poetry is a valid way of knowing teaching, we invite our readers to consider the prospect that there is an aesthetic dimension to teaching and that this dimension can be deeply revealed through aesthetic, poetic perception.

## Aesthetic Perception and Connoisseurship

The arts reveal the qualitative nature of human experience (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Belanger, 1998; Eisner, 2002, 2006). Moments are characterized through moods (Heidegger, 1962), and, if we attune ourselves to these moods, we may be able to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of our everyday experience (Dewey, 1934). As Sinclair (2009) writes, “the aesthetic does not describe the qualities of perceptual artifacts; rather, [the aesthetic] characterizes experiences...Aesthetic experiences can be had while appreciating art, while fixing a car, while having dinner, or while solving a mathematics problem” (p. 50).

When we solve everyday problems (whether fixing a car or preparing a meal), we do so by employing rationality but also by discerning the aesthetics—or affect—of the given moment, namely, by responding to “what is felt emotionally” (Eisner, 2002, p. 76; see also Anderson, 2014). In this way, we engage in the world both cognitively and affectively, and our aesthetic perception helps us, in particular, to “pay attention to matters of...the way qualities are configured” (Eisner, 2002, p. 85). By appreciating the particular quality of an experience, we are able to tune ourselves to what is actually happening in the given moment (Heidegger, 1962; Küpers, 2002; Schön, 1983; van Manen, 2007).

Given that noticing and appreciating the aesthetic dimension of our experience helps us to better understand our world and our experience, the arts can be understood to be a representation of this aesthetic perception (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002). In this way, the arts signify a particular way of knowing, and one way to curate this knowledge is through connoisseurship (Eisner, 2003, 2017; Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017). Connoisseurship is a holistic method of qualitative inquiry that invites researchers to pay close attention to aesthetic perceptions and to argue for how and why these perceptions have implications for how we engage in the world (Brinkmann, 2014; Kaysi, Bavli, & Gurol, 2017; Kelehear, 2008). In this context, the researcher makes explicit value judgments and functions as an artistic critic, attending closely to the “appreciation of qualities” (Eisner, 2017, p. 66) and making these appreciations public. In other words, the role of the critic or connoisseur is to reeducate one’s audience so that one’s audience is better able to perceive a given work of art. Within this mode of inquiry, the validity of the connoisseur’s work rests in the extent to which others are able to appreciate a work of art with a newfound richness.

## Poetry as Art and Data

Although the method of connoisseurship can be applied to any aesthetic medium, in this article, we choose to focus, in particular, on the understandings uniquely revealed through poetry. Poetry is a particularly powerful medium through which to explore the realities of teaching, given that effective poetry is able to capture the ineffable qualities of a real-life moment in time: “Poems, surrounded by space and weighted by silence, break through the noise to present an essence...[Poems capture] heightened moments of social reality as if under a magnifying glass” (Leavy, 2009, p. 63).

Knowing teaching through poetry, therefore, is more than simply describing a classroom situation; rather, poems are able to capture evocative portraits of intense, singular moments of human interaction with the world (Gold, 2013; Prendergast, 2009; Richardson, 1998). Thus, poetry focused on teaching can “work through a different set of issues” (Leavy, 2009, p. 64) than alternative representations of teaching in which the aim is to describe teaching with as much generalization as possible (cf. Ambrose et al., 2010; Lemov, 2010; Marzano, 2003). While having an abstracted, generalized understanding of teaching serves a purpose, poetry can help practitioners and scholars refocus on the empathic and evanescent features of the classroom (van Manen & Li, 2002). In other words, poetry can sharpen a teacher’s aesthetic perception.

Using the method of connoisseurship, we will present three poems and argue that these poems reveal important dimensions in/of teaching. These poems, thereby, function as data that manifest truths. How can the truthfulness of these poems be evaluated? Adhering to the role of the connoisseur, we ask our readers to evaluate for themselves whether or not “the poem[s] call forth something from your [own] experience” (Leavy, 2009, p. 82). In other words, the poems—and our respective interpretations—should be considered to be truthful if, and only if, they feel truthful (see Faulkner, 2005; Richardson, 2000; Bochner, 2000).

**“Love in the Classroom” by Al Zolynas**

Afternoon. Across the garden, in Green Hall,  
someone begins playing the old piano –  
a spontaneous piece, amateurish and alive,  
full of a simple, joyful melody.  
The music floats among us in the classroom.

I stand in front of my students  
telling them about sentence fragments.  
I ask them to find the ten fragments  
in the twenty-one-sentence paragraph on page forty-five.  
They’ve come from all parts  
of the world – Iran, Micronesia, Africa,  
Japan, China, even Los Angeles – and they’re still  
eager to please me. It’s less than half  
way through the quarter.

They bend over their books and begin.  
Hamid’s lips move as he follows  
the tortuous labyrinth of English syntax.  
Yoshie sits erect, perfect in her pale make-up,  
legs crossed, quick pulse minutely  
jerking her right foot. Tony,  
from an island in the South Pacific,  
sprawls limp and relaxed in his desk.

The melody floats around and through us  
in the room, broken here and there, fragmented,  
re-started. It feels mideastern, but

it could be jazz, or the blues – it could be anything from anywhere.

I sit down on my desk to wait,  
and it hits me from nowhere – a sudden sweet, almost painful love for my students.

“Never mind,” I want to cry out.  
“It doesn’t matter about fragments.  
Finding them or not. Everything’s a fragment and everything’s not a fragment.  
Listen to the music, how fragmented,  
how whole, how we can’t separate the music from the sun falling on its knees on all the greenness,  
from this movement, how this moment contains all the fragments of yesterday and everything we’ll ever know of tomorrow!”

Instead, I keep a coward’s silence.  
the music stops abruptly;  
they finish their work,  
and we go through the right answers,  
which is to say  
we separate the fragments from the whole.  
(Zolynas, as quoted in Milosz, 1996, pp. 193–194).

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this poem is the way that the poet is able to juxtapose the profundity of his unfolding lived experience with the banality of the prescribed exercises from the textbook. The bodies of the students, the distant sound of the music, and his strong feeling of love are unmistakably more compelling than the “twenty-one-sentence paragraph on page forty-five.” The significance he felt being revealed through body, time, space, and relationship were, however, minimized and relegated as he chose to prioritize the prescribed grammar lesson. This poem illustrates how meaningful moments in the classroom may unexpectedly reveal themselves through moods—including moods of pleasure, appreciation, love, and awe—and that these fleeting moods cannot necessarily be found within textbooks or academic exercises.

Commenting on his own poem, Zolynas (2011) writes,

I’ve once in a while found myself in those gifted moments when the presence of my students has unexpectedly been bathed in sweet light, indeed, when Love was suddenly present. Here, I’m not speaking of that warm and sappy thing we sometimes mistake for Love, but...the thing that can bring us to our knees if we allow it...that moment of sacred reverence and wholeness. (p. 1)

The poem, thus, teaches us that moments of profundity are available to teachers if teachers surrender to profound moments as they appear; however, the inclination to prioritize government mandated subject matter outcomes over lived experience sabotages these revelations. When teachers regard textbooks and lesson plans as more real than their own intuition and affect, teachers may be hijacking the flow of their own experience (Garcia & Lewis, 2014; Latta & Field, 2005; Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Conrad, 2016).

**“I Can Hear You” by Korrine Patterson**

I can hear you  
 Do you?  
 I am sitting here  
 In this chair  
 Trying my best or at least I was  
 Are you?  
 You ask me questions  
 That I do not know  
 But still you don't wait for me to answer  
 You talk to fast  
 And you don't even check to see if I'm ready  
 You tell me to take notes  
 But still I don't  
 When I'm quiet I am good  
 But when I'm noisy I am bad  
 You always tell me what to do  
 Write this or write that  
 It doesn't matter  
 You have already decided that I can't hear you  
 You have decided that I can't understand  
 But I can  
 I can hear you  
 I can understand  
 Maybe I can't understand every concept  
 But I do understand your tone  
 I understand that your weekend  
 is more important then me  
 I understand your data sheet  
 Is more valuable then me  
 I can hear you  
 When you talk about your child, your weekend camping trip  
 Or how you say some of us just aren't getting it  
 I can hear you  
 I know that student is me  
 I know and  
 I can hear you  
 (Patterson, 2017).

It is vitally important that teachers not make assumptions about the abilities of their students with diverse learning needs (Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2000; Kliwer & Biklen, 2001; Naraian, 2008). Instead of making assumptions, it is critical that teachers cultivate engaging, supportive, and trust-based relationships with their students (Alton-Lee, 2003; McNeilly, Macdonald, & Kelly, 2015). Unless these relationships are cultivated, students may experience a deep sense of isolation (Cornelius-White, 2007; Koller, LePouesard, & Rummens, 2018; Kunter et al., 2013; Margalit, 2010).

Patterson's poem presents these conclusions from the first-person perspective of a student who is being ignored and unappreciated by her teacher. The speaker in this poem challenges teachers to examine the affective impact of their discourse and manner of interaction in the classroom (see also Bostic, 2014;

Fenstermacher, 2001; Kraker, 2000). This poem narrates the struggle of not being heard, seen, or understood by one's teacher, the very person who is supposed to provide the student with support and encouragement:

You have already decided that I can't hear you  
You have decided that I can't understand  
But I can

Presenting this experience through the aesthetic medium of poetry heightens the intensity of this frustration. In doing so, this poem reminds us of the impact that both teachers' actions (and inactions) can have on students and that when teachers prioritize their own agenda above students' sense of self-worth, resentment may be bubbling beneath the surface.

By giving us insight into what our students might be experiencing, this poem has the potential "to reveal [to teachers] what [previously] had not been noticed" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 102). In this way, this poem has inherent instructional potential in the context of teacher education and teacher development. Specifically, by illuminating the hidden quality of a particular student's experience, this poem may compel teachers to reflect on the extent to which they are emotionally supporting each student in their classroom. Although (only) an artistic representation, this poem supports us in our efforts to know and hear our students.

**"Man Can Never Know the Rain" by Taylor Mali**

Man can never know the rain  
even if he swears  
he can understand the thunder.

That is not the same as knowing water,  
where it comes from, where it runs,  
or what it takes with it when it goes,

when one stream flows into another,  
then a river, a sea and the ocean,  
which never even needs to whisper

*Let yourself come into me*

Men will never know the rain  
or how to make it come when it is called—  
it is only ever chance when clouds appear

to answer to the dancers and the dance.  
A man can only ride out the rain.  
Or cast his moon-face to the sky,

let himself be washed in it. Close his eyes  
and pray, *Please come wash over me  
without washing me away.*  
(Mali, 2014, p. 17)

Carl Sandburg (1978) suggested that, “What can be explained is not poetry” (p. 27). Likewise, Mali’s poem compels us to challenge our epistemological assumptions about teaching: What does it mean to know teaching? Can teaching ever be understood? If we aspire to explain teaching, are we depriving ourselves of experiencing teaching’s poetic dimension? Perhaps, as Mali’s poem suggests, one can never know teaching, just as one can never know the rain.

Despite their ardent efforts, generations of educational psychologists and educational reformers have been unable to engineer learning (Biesta, 2007; Fendler, 2012; Gottlieb, 2012). Even when teachers employ best practices with fidelity, educative moments may or may not manifest themselves in the classroom. Akin to our inability to summon the rain, we do not fully know “how to make [learning] come when it is called.” Instead, there always exists some measure of uncertainty (Dudley-Marling, 1997) and risk (Biesta, 2014) during a pedagogical act.

Mali’s poem suggests that in order to experience the wonder of our world, we need only open ourselves to wonder. In the context of education, *understanding* teaching is not a prerequisite to *experiencing* it. Being open to the present moment is necessary and sufficient (Macdonald & Shirley, 2009; Srinivasan, 2014).

Mali’s poem encourages us to be willing “to answer” the call “when clouds appear” and to “let [ourselves] be washed in” the magic of meaningful moments. Of course, teaching is also an incredibly complex and challenging act, where cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion are always possibilities. Thus, Mali also gifts us with a useful prayer: to pray that teaching washes over us without washing us away.

## The Implications (and Risks) of Knowing Teaching Poetically

Poetry can elevate even seemingly mundane observations. Ordinary features of the classroom (such as students’ postures or sunlight through a window) may be classified as extraneous when curriculum is positioned as the premier goal of teaching; but, through poetry, we are reminded to appreciate the significance of everyday moments. The “sun falling on its knees on all the greenness” is just as (if not more) meaningful than the “twenty-one-sentence paragraph on page forty-five.” We believe that engagement with poetry can move scholars and practitioners closer towards integrating their intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic understandings of what it means to be a teacher.

If poetry represents a unique (if not vital) way of knowing teaching, important implications follow. For example, rather than asking teachers to broaden their professional knowledge exclusively through the studying of content knowledge (e.g., Van Driel & Berry, 2012) or by practicing specific pedagogical skills (e.g., Supovitz & Turner, 2000), efforts in teacher education and teacher development might ask teachers to sharpen their aesthetic perception of the classroom by reflecting on the classroom poetically. Indeed, research has found that novice and experienced teachers alike benefit from the reading and writing of poetry (Certo, Apol, Wibbens, & Hawkins, 2012; Davis, 2014; Rosaen, 2003). Exploring teaching in arts-based ways can help teachers come to know what effective and tactful



(as well as ineffective and insensitive) teaching feels like from the perspective of both teachers and students (Eisner, 2004, 2006).

However, insisting that personal, emotional, and aesthetic insights can serve as knowledge, can be risky within contexts that insist that teaching should be measurable (Brown & Weber, 2016) and rooted in evidence-based practices (Ball & Forzani, 2009). As Behar (2008) writes,

Poetry...[is] the larger desire to speak from a deeper part of the self...[it] is the thing that we...thirst for but feel we can't, or rather shouldn't, admit we desire... To long for poetry is to cast doubt on our commitment to maintaining the sobriety and respectability...of the university system. To long for poetry...is to be immature, self-centered. To long for poetry is to risk losing it all. (p. 60)

In other words, despite the poet's "desire to speak from a deeper part of the self," some policymakers and educational leaders may have different expectations as it pertains to being a successful teacher and educational researcher. Teachers need to help students to pass standardized tests (Thibodeaux, Labat, Lee, & Labat, 2015; Valli & Buese, 2007), and faculty members need to publish generalizable, empirical research (Creps, 2018; Redman-MacLaren, 2015). Sometimes, teaching quality and scholarly significance is assessed according to measurable impact, rather than affective resonance.

To explore this tension further, we close with a poem written by one of the authors of this manuscript:

The child who refuses to complete the task,  
Lying his head down in silent protest.  
The disobedient and disrespectful type  
Who doesn't understand the rules of life.

Then there is the student who understands the game,  
What needs to be done and finished today.  
The logical and reasonable student type  
The one who understands the rules of life.

The two children presented in this poem represent our dualities: expert and novice; teacher and student; scholar and practitioner; academic and poet. Of course, these dualities are not mutually exclusive dichotomies; rather, they are reciprocal, dialogical dimensions of our professional identity. We, too, "understand the game." We know "what needs to be done and finished today." We recognize that our responsibilities as educators sometimes require more than being "immature, [and] self-centered." Yet, simultaneously, if cultivating spaces of inclusive and equitable education necessitates knowing teaching in multiple ways, then it is also our responsibility, as educators, to listen to our own poetic voice and to the poetic voices of our colleagues and students. As Eisner (2002) writes, the hallmark of the aesthetic experience is "the ability to surrender to the qualities of [what] one beholds" (p. 88). Poetry encourages us to allow ourselves to surrender to what we see, hear, and feel. When we tap into our poetic understanding of teaching, we pray for wonder and for the courage to accept this wonder as knowledge.

As we venture into our poetic imaginations, we risk losing our grip on predictability. We make ourselves vulnerable to encountering the world in new ways. We now leave it in the hands of our readers to decide whether or not this is a risk that they themselves are willing to take. We can account for ourselves: Knowing teaching poetically is vital, because, for us, “What’s at stake in the work [of knowing teaching poetically] is never just an intellectual exercise but [the exploration of] knowledge that is essential, knowledge that [we] couldn’t live without” (Behar, 2008, p. 69).

## References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence syntheses*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: 7 research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Anderson, B. (2014). *Encountering affect: Capacities, apparatuses, conditions*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, D., & Forzani, F. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge of teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5), 497–511. doi:10.1177/0022487109348479
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (1997). Arts-based educational research. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Complementary methods in research in education* (pp. 95–109). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Behar, R. (2008). Between poetry and anthropology: Searching for languages of home. In Cahnmann-Taylor & R. Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice* (pp. 55–71). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Belanger, S. L. (1998). Knowing through art. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 166–168). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Bengtson, E., & Connors, S. P. (2014). Puppets and puppeteers: External mandates and the instructional practice of two first-year teachers. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 9(2), 128–152.
- Biesta, G. (2007). Why "what works" won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Biesta, G. (2014). *The beautiful risk of education*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Bochner, A. (2000). Criteria against ourselves. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, 278–291.
- Bostic, T. B. (2014). Teacher empathy and its relationship to the standardized test scores of diverse secondary English students. *Journal of Research in Education*, 24(1), 3–16.
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Getting in touch with the world: Meaning and presence in social science. In M. H. Jacobsen, M. S. Drake, K. Keohane, & A. Petersen (Eds.), *Imaginative methodologies in the social science: Creativity, poetics and rhetoric in social research* (pp. 133–154). Farnham: Ashgate.

- Brown, C. P., & Weber, N. B. (2016). Struggling to overcome the state's prescription for practice: A study of a sample of early educators' professional development and action research projects in a high-stakes teaching context. *Journal of Teacher Education, 67*(3), 183–202.
- Certo, J. L., Apol, L., Wibbens, E., & Hawkins, L. K. (2012). Living the poet's life: Using an aesthetic approach to poetry to enhance preservice teachers' poetry experiences and dispositions. *English Education, 44*(2), 102–146.
- Cook, B. G., Tankersley, M., Cook, L., & Landrum, T. J. (2000). Teachers attitudes toward their included students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 67*(1), 115–135.
- Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(1), 113–143.
- Creps, K. B. (2018). Get published, now: An introduction to qualitative education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. doi:1077800418767205.
- Davis, D. E. (2014). Using the “right poem” to raise sociocultural consciousness. *The Educational Forum, 78*(4), 421–431.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Capricorn Books.
- Dudley-Marling, C. (1997). *Living with uncertainty: The messy reality of classroom practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Eisner, E. W. (2003). Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism: An arts-based approach to educational evaluation. In T. Kellaghan & D. L. Stufflebeam (Eds.), *International handbook of educational evaluation* (pp. 153–166). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Eisner, E. W. (2004). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 5*(4), 1–13.
- Eisner, E. W. (2006). Does arts-based research have a future? *Studies in Art Education, 48*(1), 9–18.
- Eisner, E. W. (2017). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Faulkner, S. L. (2005). How do you know a good poem? Poetic representation and the case for criteria. Symposium conducted at the First International Conference of Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.
- Fendler, L. (2012). The magic of psychology in teacher education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 46*(3), 332–351.
- Fenstermacher, G. (2001). On the concept of manner and its visibility in teaching practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 33*(6), 639–653.
- Garcia, J. A., & Lewis, T. E. (2014). Getting a grip on the classroom: From psychological to phenomenological curriculum development in teacher education programs. *Curriculum Inquiry, 44*(2), 141–168.

- Gold, K. (2013). A space for stories: Revisiting relational poetry as inquiry on everyday practice. *Qualitative Social Work*, 12, 849–857.
- Gottlieb, D. (2012). Beyond a rule-following model of skillful practice in teacher development. *Educational Theory*, 62(5), 501–516.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Kaysi, F., Bavli, B., & Gurol, A. (2017). Educational connoisseurship and criticism: Evaluation of a cooperation model between university and the sector on vocational education. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(6), 25–35.
- Kelehear, Z. (2008). Instructional leadership, connoisseurship and critique: Using an arts-based approach to extend conversations about teaching. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 11(3), 239–256.
- Kliewer, C., & Biklen, D. (2001). School's not really a place for reading: A research synthesis of the literate lives of students with severe disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons With Severe Handicaps (JASH)*, 26(1), 1–12.
- Koller, D., Le Pouesard, M., & Rummens, J. A. (2018). Defining social inclusion for children with disabilities: A critical literature review. *Children & Society*, 32(1), 1–13.
- Kraker, M. (2000). Classroom discourse: Teaching, learning, and learning disabilities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(3), 295–313.
- Kunter, M., Klusmann, U., Baumert, J., Richter, D., Voss, T., & Hachfeld, A. (2013). Professional competence of teachers: Effects on instructional quality and student development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 805–820.
- Küpers, W. (2002). Phenomenology of aesthetic organising: Ways towards aesthetically responsive organizations. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 5(1), 21–46.
- Latta, M. M., & Field, J. C. (2005). The flight from experience to representation: Seeing relational complexity in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 649–660.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Lemov, D. (2010). *Teach like a champion: 49 techniques that put students on the path to college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Macdonald, E., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The mindful teacher*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Mali, T. (2014). *Bouquet of red flags*. Austin, TX: Write Bloody Publishing.
- Margalit, M. (2010). *Lonely children and adolescents: Self-perceptions, social exclusion, and hope*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- McNeilly, P., Macdonald, G., & Kelly, B. (2015). The participation of disabled children and young people: A social justice perspective. *Child Care in Practice*, 21(3), 266–286.

- Milosz, C. (Ed.). (1996). *A book of luminous things: An international anthology of poetry*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Muijs, D., & Reynolds, D. (2018). *Effective teaching: Evidence and practice* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Naraian, S. (2008). Institutional stories and self-stories: Investigating peer interpretations of significant disability. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(5–6), 525–542.
- Patterson, K. (2017). I can hear you. Retrieved from [https://www.poetrysoup.com/poem/i\\_can\\_hear\\_you\\_892459](https://www.poetrysoup.com/poem/i_can_hear_you_892459)
- Prendergast, M. (2009). "Poem is what?" Poetic inquiry in qualitative social science research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(4), 541–568.
- Redman-MacLaren, M. (2015). Becoming a researcher: An auto-ethnographic account of a doctoral researcher re-presented in poetry. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 28(3), 207–214.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Evaluating ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, 253–255.
- Richardson, M. (1998). Poetics in the field and on the page. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4, 451–462.
- Rosaen, C. L. (2003). Preparing teachers for diverse classrooms: Creating public and private spaces to explore culture through poetry writing. *Teachers College Record*, 105(8), 1437–1485.
- Sandburg, C. (1978). *Early moon*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.
- Sinclair, N. (2009). Aesthetics as a liberating force in mathematics education? *ZDM*, 41(1–2), 45–60.
- Srinivasan, M. (2014). *Teach, breathe, learn: Mindfulness in and out of the classroom*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Supovitz, J. A., & Turner, H. M. (2000). The effects of professional development on science teaching practices and classroom culture. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 37(9), 963–980.
- Thibodeaux, A. K., Labat, M. B., Lee, D. E., & Labat, C. A. (2015). The effects of leadership and high-stakes testing on teacher retention. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 19(1), 227–249.
- Timberlake, M. T., Thomas, A. B., & Barrett, B. (2017). The allure of simplicity: Scripted curricula and equity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 46–52.
- Uhrmacher, P. B., Moroye, C. M., & Conrad, B. (2016). Aesthetic, spiritual, and flow experiences: Contrasts and educational implications. *Education and Culture*, 32(1), 131–151.
- Uhrmacher, P. B., Moroye, C. M., & Flinders, D. J. (2017). *Using educational criticism and connoisseurship for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(3), 519–558.

van Driel, J. H., & Berry, A. (2012). Teacher professional development focusing on pedagogical content knowledge. *Educational Researcher*, 41(1), 26–28.

van Manen, M. (2007). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), 11–30.

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

van Manen, M., & Li, S. (2002). The pathic principle of pedagogical language. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18, 215–224.

Zolynas, A. (2011). On "love in the classroom". *Serving House Journal*, 3, 1–2.  
doi:<http://www.servinghousejournal.com/ZolynasTalksLove.aspx#ZolynasCommentary>.



**Aaron Zimmerman** is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at Texas Tech University. He studies experiences of becoming a teacher and experiences of becoming a teacher educator. He currently teaches courses introducing students to scholarship in teacher education and to methods of educational research. He received his PhD in Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education from Michigan State University.



**Linnie Greenlees** is an Assistant Professor of Practice and the Curriculum Anchor for special education in the Department of Teacher Education at Texas Tech University. Dr. Greenlees is a passionate advocate for students with diverse learning needs and a strong proponent for equitable and inclusive education. Her research focuses on inclusive school reform, collaborative teacher education, situated learning, and teacher identity as a predictor of attrition. Dr. Greenlees is currently designing undergraduate teacher education coursework with an emphasis on specialized instruction and differentiation for diverse learners across the content areas.



**Elizabeth Isidro** is an Assistant Professor in Literacy Studies at the Department of Special Education and Literacy Studies in Western Michigan University. Aside from her faculty role, she serves as the Director of the McGinnis Reading Center and Clinic, also housed in the same university. Among her research interests are applications of reader response theory in teaching as well as arts-based methodologies as alternative forms of research.



**Stacey Sneed** is a third-year PhD student and Helen DeVitt Jones Fellow in Curriculum and Instruction at the College of Education at Texas Tech University. Prior to attending Texas Tech University, she worked for 10 years as a middle school science teacher. Her research focus is on preservice teachers' use of inquiry-based teaching and science education.