

Crab babies and other encounters: rediscovering the pedagogy of presence, of timelessness, of creating space worthwhile within the early childhood classroom.

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Abstract

Through stories situated in place, this paper is a revealing account of my journey as an early childhood educator that continues to be an unraveling of sorts, a disentangling from the dominant discourses that have shaped pedagogical practice. In accepting Sameshima's (2008) invitation to transform and develop an "embodied aesthetic wholeness" (p.30), rich and complex layers are illuminated, blind spots disrupted and possibilities emerge, in relation to place, and practice. Layers within my own pedagogical practice dynamically moving between the tension of what I know, or had known and what I continue to attempt to un-know in order to create room for discovery. Throughout this never-ending story, I draw upon the work of Jardine, Foucault, and Pelo for points of inspiration and reflection.

Keywords: *pedagogy of place, reconceptualizing early childhood, early childhood practice, receptivity, openness, early learning, reflective practice, reflexive practice*



Introduction

Imagine an early childhood or kindergarten classroom in which teachers and children are together with time, time to spend in long drawn out moments of curiosity, in intimate moments of encounters, exploring together, discovering beauty in relationships with space, with objects, with nature, with each other. It is a “generative space of possibilities, a space wherein tensioned ambiguity newness emerges” (Aoki, as cited by Pratt, 2008, p.113). It is a space that nurtures the exchange of ideas, an appreciation of differences, multiple perspectives, multiple ways of knowing and being, and a space where a new curriculum narrative emerges, no longer “static, cold and compartmentalized” (Sameshima, 2008, p.31). The role of the educator within this space is multifaceted and complex, one in which the teacher is willing to be repositioned from knower to active participant, listener, nurturer, questioner, player, negotiator, adventurer, planner. There is a visible sense of relatedness as children and teachers are discovering place together, revealing layers of possibilities and what may at times seem impossible, but always curiously explored. As an early childhood educator and teacher educator, this is the classroom that I now imagine, one in which “permits teachers to live more generously with children in their care” (Jardine et al, 2008, p. 13), but over the course of my early childhood career, it is not one that I have been most familiar with.

In *Letters to a New Teacher* (2008), Pauline Sameshima creates an invitation, an invitation that I have accepted, to deepen transformative teaching and learning practices within my own work with young children and with student educators. To accomplish this, Sameshima suggests that teachers need to develop an “embodied aesthetic wholeness” (p.30), “reconnecting curriculum with self by connecting mind and body” (p.31), and creating a holistic teaching practice comprised of “fluid, coloured transparent layers dynamically moving under and over one another. Light (context) illuminates certain layers at particular times and at other times, the richness is created by the fusion of layered colours” (p. 30). Transformative teaching and learning is also a reconceptualization of who the teacher is—a learner and researcher within the classroom in the teaching process. Sameshima (2008) suggests that in order to achieve transformative practice, we must “increase receptivity and openness to learning, foster skills of relationality, and model wholeness-in-process in explicit reflexive texts” (p.30). She proposes that these reflexive texts, as narrative inquiry, is a profound form of professional development that provokes teachers to challenge dominant or conformist teacher identities (Sameshima, 2007) and engage more deeply with curriculum and teacher identity. Further, she draws upon the work of Irwin (2003), Pinar and Grummet (1976) in her teaching praxis, positioning curriculum

derived from the Latin word *currere*, meaning to run, not as static but rather as moving and dynamic (Sameshima, 2008). In accepting this invitation to develop an *embodied aesthetic awareness* within my practice, I needed to allow myself, as an educator, to be repositioned from knower to active participant, to locate the self in context and in relation to children and student teachers. She describes embodied wholeness as “weaving the daily into reflexive understandings of continuous heartfelt living, learning and teaching” (p. 32). A more reflexive way of being teacher/learner/researcher is thus supported by more “artful, tactile and multi-sensory epistemologies” (p. 32). What might this look like within my own work as teacher educator and early childhood educator?

Early in this pedagogical journey, I read *Pedagogy left in Peace*, (Jardine, 2012) and was captivated by the question posed by Jardine “What is it that makes classroom experiences worthwhile?” (p.173). Further, “what makes some experiences worthy of repose, worthy of returning, worthy of tarrying and remembering, of taking time, of whiling away our lives in their presence?” (p. 174). These questions of *worthwhile* and the notion of time required to *while* has completely turned my practice on its head, and has ignited a desire in me to deeply think about my practice as an educator. Jardine suggests that “when we experience something worthwhile, we experience something being asked of us... In asking after worthwhileness, we are asked to find our measure in such things that awaken us and our interest. We are asked to learn and, in learning, to become something more than we had been before such encounters” (p. 176). As an educator, I have been awakened to a deep sense of curiosity and desire to reflect on my teaching practices with student teachers, but also to think about what worthwhileness might look like within an early childhood classroom. These are questions that I cannot answer briefly, but rather require a commitment to a deeper engagement in reflexive writing, to while with ideas, to discover the unexpected in an encounter in place of fragmented, measurable moments (Jardine, 2012), and requires a different kind of presence within the classrooms.

Through stories and reflexive writing, I question what it might mean to tease apart the multiple layers of experience, knowledge, of being in the world, each that hold particular points of view shaped by particular discourses, to reveal alternative spaces, alternative interpretations, alternative truths embedded within place. I will explore my own pedagogical journey as layers that intersect or transform within my practice. In the first layer of “increasing receptivity and openness to learning” (Sameshima, 2008), I will explore the many influences that have shaped my teaching practice, including how these original beliefs have been disrupted and have caused me to rethink pedagogical encounters, relationships, and provoked a deep desire to create environments that integrate self as a learner in the teaching process. In the second and third layers, “foster skills of relationality,” I explore relationality within the context of both the human and non-human world. It is



here that I am drawn to ecological pedagogy, building relationships with people, but more importantly, nurturing relationships between children and the landscapes in which they co-exist. Layer four explores what lay ahead in terms of transformative practice and ways in which I might embody “wholeness-in-process.” My own reflexive texts have become stories of encounters in which I have lingered with ideas, and appreciated the situated knowledge that have been created in relationships, place, and time. It has become an active process of negotiating and re-negotiating my understandings as an early childhood educator and ECCE instructor.

Layer One: Increase receptivity and openness to learning

“Criss-Cross Apple-Sauce”... a mindless tool of control?

Several years ago I was observing in a kindergarten classroom where one of my early childhood student-teachers had been placed to complete a five-week practicum. During the lunch break the student-teacher and I had the opportunity to sit down with the classroom kindergarten teacher and recount and reflect upon the morning session’s encounters. In our discussions I commented on my observations, and opened a dialogue on shared-control. This after having earlier observed the kindergarten teacher pulling a child, who was lying on the carpet at circle-time, by his hand and putting him into presumably ‘the time-out chair’. In this observation the student-teacher was engaging the group of children with a story and a few songs. I had encouraged her to create opportunities in which she might have shared-control with the children, invite the children to be leaders and followers at different times throughout the day, to take the time to learn from them and to learn from the experiences that they share. In this particular situation she had invited the children to sit where they could see her and to sit in a way that was comfortable to them. Naturally a few of the children viewed this as an opportunity to get really comfortable and stretched out on the carpeted area. I recall my student-teacher nervously looking at me, as though to seek my approval that this was okay. I nodded in encouragement and she continued with the story. We had earlier discussed that children should be able to decide for themselves how they wish to sit, and that if a child’s choice is problematic for other children, then this was an opportunity to problem-solve with the children, but not to problem-solve for them. A few minutes into the story one boy began to roll around and bump into the other children around him, causing the kindergarten teacher to quickly step in and, well, we know the rest of that story.

In our reflections and deliberations together during the lunch break, I became aware of a growing sense of tension and unease in the kindergarten teacher's expression and body. Eventually she burst out: "If you had just asked them to sit criss-cross apple-sauce, they would have known how to sit. If you give an inch, they take a mile." She paused, seemingly to collect herself and then commented: "Shared-control might work in an early childhood classroom, but it could never work here." And therein lies the problem, this classroom had become a space inhabited by lessons on classroom management rather than filled with rich and engaging encounters in which educator and child were invited to learn together, a space in which the teacher is willing to disrupt the power relations of knower/learner and embrace possibility. It had become a classroom of routines and a day filled with activities designed to fulfill the prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) and objectives of the kindergarten classroom, a place of compartmentalized curriculum provided by a "disembodied teacher" (Sameshima, 2008, p. 31), no longer a learner in her pedagogical practice. This classroom is not unlike what I myself have experienced and observed within my own practice and in observing students in countless other classrooms. There seems to be a tenuous, fragile relationship with time, and a lack of resistance to the urge to rush children through a curriculum rather than to truly experience it. In addition to time, I am troubled by the way in which curriculum is conceptualized, as disconnected and numb to the unique contextual characteristics of the environment. Curriculum that is conceptualized as the deliverance of outcomes versus a space for deeply engaged, experienced wonderings and wanderings. Curriculum that arguably, does not allow children to while in multiple interpretations, direct their learning, or honour their individuality and difference. It has caused an imbalance in the dance of leading and being led, and has dissolved educators' ability to while, to discover the unexpected in an encounter in place of fragmented, measurable moments (Jardine, 2012). We discussed what it would mean to be able to co-construct together a curriculum based upon children's interests where the teacher had the freedom and time to "happen upon something unanticipated" (p. 185), where there were suspended moments of curiosity, wonder, intrigue, questioning, and exploration? This question remained unanswered, seemingly impossible to imagine at that time.

Yet not impossible in practice. Twenty-two years ago I opened a children's centre with two classrooms, offering a variety of full-time and part-time programs for children 18 months through grade seven. In the summer months we ran an outdoor adventure camp, Camp Walkabout. Initially starting with about a dozen families, the centre eventually expanded to three classrooms and upwards of three hundred families accessing programs. When it first opened I attempted to hire like-minded teachers, trained in particular views about child development and knowledge construction. The philosophy of the programs privileged child-centredness and Froebel's belief in play-based curriculum, where learning



occurs within the child and emerges from their play, their questions, and their relationships. At that time I also viewed developmental psychological theories as an opportunity to develop an expertise and an understanding about children, childhood, development and the kinds of early experiences that *should be* provided for *optimal* growth and well-being, and designed my programs around these discourses. As early childhood educators, we were positioned to advise our communities of practice on all matters pertaining to early childhood, growth and development, modeling *best practices* espoused through guiding documents, such as *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, birth to Eight* (Bredakamp, 1987). My work with families and educators reflected particular ways of knowing and thinking about childhood and children, unaware at the time of the taken-for-granted assumptions that were being reproduced and reified through my work.

Grounded in developmental psychology, my centre's philosophy was supported by scientific truths about the 'whole-child,' predominantly influenced by Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Our team of teachers approached curriculum planning in ways that were developmentally appropriate and positioned children as learners, and teachers as knowers, and the measure of a child's understanding was based upon our judgment and assumptions of what they had learned and should know. We didn't question the ways in which my centre's philosophy and our pedagogical practices perpetuated the ideology of the universal child, the "Western child" (Cannella, 1997, p. 33), a child representative of the euro-centric values and beliefs that formed it.

Fast-forward five years, and upon invitation I began to work with the Chief of a local First Nation community to construct, develop and support childcare programs on-reserve. As I became more familiar with the community, the Elders, the children and families, I came to the daunting realization that my construction of early childhood, one that I was quite comfortable with, didn't seem representative of the nuances, beliefs and values of the culture I was encountering. Who was this Western child that I had come to know so well? In my own understanding of childhood, I had unknowingly participated in the colonizing act of the "silencing of human voices" (Cannella, 1997, p. 3) that were not my own, and the "ordering of subjects in relation to one another" (Foucault, 1979, p. 159 as cited by Ball, 2013, p. 49). And so—another colourful layer is illuminated (Sameshima, 2008).

Introduced to Foucault about ten years ago through Glenda MacNaughton's work, *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies* (2005), I was intrigued by the invitation to problematize and interrupt child development text. Through my experiences working in

several remote First Nation's communities, it was strangely comforting to be permitted to challenge dominant perspectives that shaped what I had learned about early childhood, but not necessarily what I had experienced in my work. Foucault suggests that:

Critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged and unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest (Foucault, as cited by Ball, 2013, p.85).

I was, and continue to be, provoked to reveal the underlying cultural values, beliefs and biases that privilege particular ways of knowing and in doing so, risk marginalizing others. It has become so integral to me to be mindful of the discourses, or regimes of truth, constructed and produced within early childhood development that shape and govern how we think, feel, understand childhood, and practice as educators. For me, Foucault incites a sense of activism, engaging in a critique and questioning of implied truths, to defy the discipline that "classifies the component thus identified according to definite objectives" (Foucault, as cited by Ball, 2013, p.51). It requires honouring practices that prop up social justice and equity rather than those that compartmentalize children based upon predetermined truths. As educators we must critique our own particular ways of knowing, the theories that have informed our practice, and acknowledge the ways in which they are reflective of particular values, beliefs, and understandings that may not reflect the children and families with whom we are working.

In the moment with my student and the kindergarten teacher, as we discussed an unfamiliar way of thinking about children, curriculum, and the spaces we inhabit together, I recognized her fear, her resistance. For me it has been, and continues to be, an unraveling of sorts from dominant discourses that have produced universal truths about young children and unknowingly created cultural elitism supported by binary language in which children either belong within or are re-cast as the Other. For Foucault, (as cited by Ball, p.149), "the source of human freedom is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious or immobile." It provokes a reconceptualization of early childhood, but creates a tension between what I knew and what I have come to and continue to attempt to un-know or challenge. The tension exists in the spaces in which I find myself governed by a particular set of practices, such as standards of care and developmental measures, and the burgeoning internal resistance to maintaining or sustaining these practices. It is not easy to challenge pedagogy, to listen to the silenced voices, and create new spaces that demand "mindful, deliberate improvisation" (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2008, p. 16) and invite children's whole selves into the classroom. This is the tensioned space that I had invited this kindergarten teacher to enter. At that moment I understood her fear, her reluctance, her pushing back, her resistance because I knew these well, they were as comfortable to me as



my favourite pair of flannel pajamas. However, in time I hope that her resistance is replaced by curiosity.

In *A Curious Plan*, Patricia Clifford and Sharon Friesen (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2008) share the beautiful and moving story of a boy in their grade one/two classroom, David, who had spent his early life living among the Maasai and had only recently moved to their school. They describe David as struggling with finding a sense of belonging and connection within the classroom despite their best efforts. They believed that they were creating a space in which all children were encouraged to be contributing members of their learning community, but found that this was an invitation not yet taken up by David. Clifford and Friesen (2008) describe a moment in which this changed for them, a moment that led to their own “mindful, deliberate improvisation” (p. 16) within their curriculum work. Following David’s sharing of a book about the Maasai, the teachers invited David’s mother to join the class to speak more about their experiences. “As she spoke, David stood quietly at her shoulder, gently stroking her long hair. He seemed to relax into the memories of that safe, familiar place, trusting the intimacy of his mother’s voice and body to secure the connection between here and there” (p. 15). A pedagogical opening was created with the teachers’ ability to see David and witness his deep sense of comfort in sharing what is most familiar and loved. This familiarity appeared to allow David to lean into the life of the classroom, rather than retreat from it. David’s sharing of his life among the Maasai was an invitation to “bring David into the full life of the classroom” (p. 15), and it was an invitation that they accepted.

In sharing their story, Clifford and Friesen (2008) demonstrated not only how they create invitations to children to be contributing members of the learning environment, but also how they, as teachers, accept the children’s invitations into their worlds and create a space in which the children’s voices and lived experiences are allowed to shape curriculum decision-making (p.16). It is another reminder to me as an educator to challenge what is familiar, to challenge assumptions about teaching and learning so that I might create a space that is less known and responds to the diverse milieu of students’ lived worlds. Teaching is an art, an act of speculation, contemplation, and openness (Aoki, as cited by Pratt, 2008). While we may be intentional in planning curriculum, educators need to appreciate “curriculum-as-lived” (p.117). Sameshima (2008) suggests that the hard reflexive work required to develop an embodied aesthetic wholeness (Sameshima, 2008) is necessary in order to resist becoming “the disembodied teacher... the mindless conduit of transference” (p.31). Instead, we must actively choose to “reconnect curriculum with self by connecting mind and body” (p. 31) and be willing to be a learner in the teaching process.

Layer Two: Foster Skills of Relationality

Crab babies and Relationships

Having invited another family to join ours for a weekend getaway, our cabin was a hub of activity and we were all anxious to get outside exploring. We were walking together down a coastal path, winding downwards through the lush green forest, ferns in the undergrowth, and towering evergreens above. Where there was the occasional clearing that allowed more sunlight through, the ferns gave way to young shoots of stinging nettles, their prickly presence alerting us to be mindful of where we stepped and the need for caution as the children's hands that swung at their sides became ever-close to the nettles stinging leaves. In the midst of our walk and our chatter, Charlie had become quiet and pensive. The break in our chatter caused me to turn to him and notice his face sullen, his eyes moistened with tears, and a quivering of his chin. He had stopped walking, the power of his emotions appeared to have overwhelmed his capacity to move, and he turned to me: "Crabby was special to me, he was purple and small." I was puzzled, trying to place what he had just shared with me within the context of the lush forest in which we were standing. I was curious about his process as he was trying to navigate his way through an experience here in this moment of an encounter that had happened hours earlier in the day. He was referring to a crab that he had found the day before and placed in his bucket. Charlie continued his story, explaining that one of the older boys with us had picked up the crab and tossed it back in the ocean, "without asking me, he just did it!" he cried. As we resumed walking, our pace fell behind the rest of our adventuring group, tears rolled down his cheeks and the skin of his face had reddened in blotchy patches, like it does when he cries a lot. He was clearly working hard to quell his emotion, but a little sob escaped as he said: "Crabby was special to me, we had a relationship." Stopping, I knelt down, faced him, and wiped the tears from his cheeks: "Charlie, I'm sorry that you lost Crabby. Would a hug help you with your sadness?" He nodded and I pulled him close to me as he let out several more sobs and buried his face in my hair.

Davies writes, "listening is about being open to being affected. It is about being open to difference...in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment in between oneself and another. ...[it] is not being bound by what you already know" (2014, p.1). After several minutes Charlie pulled away and we began walking again in silence, whiling in this space, this encounter—what was being asked of me (Jardine, 2012)? In this moment in the forest, I was a bit perplexed as I recounted in my mind the adventures of the day before. Charlie



and his friend, Ella, had spent much of the day exploring the shoreline catching crabs. Charlie had shown Ella how to determine a male crab from a female crab by examining the shell markings on their underbelly. Together Charlie and Ella had decided that they wanted to make crab babies and so they had collected a boy and a girl crab, which they had named ‘Crabby’ and ‘Sarah.’ The two children had been very concerned about the crab’s well-being, and had collected mussels and seaweed for nourishment and refreshed the seawater every few hours over the course of the weekend. As Charlie and I walked together along the forest path, I dwelled on what I thought I knew—that those two crabs were still living in a bucket on the deck of the cabin at that very moment.

After quite a bit of time passed, I asked, “I thought that you had Crabby and Sarah in your bucket right now as part of your crab babies project?” Charlie turned to me, “Yes, we do, but before this crab I had another smaller crab who I named Crabby. The Crabby that is in the bucket now is my second Crabby.” “Oh, I see,” I said. We walk in silence for a few more minutes. He seemed to be quite pensive and emotion seemed to flood him intermittently as perhaps he was thinking through different thoughts of ‘Crabby.’ Through his sniffles he said to me: “Maybe you could help me find another tiny purple crab?” “Perhaps,” I respond. After a few more minutes he seemed to have worked through his emotions, and reconnects with this space. He looked up at me, smiled and then looked past me to this lush, wet forest, rich with colour and sounds of raindrops. He sighed and skipped ahead to catch up with the rest of the group. With time, Charlie was able to work through what made him stuck, and with time, listening, and compassion, I was able to understand his perspective, and appreciate the importance to him of this particular problem.

However, at this point, I am also provoked to reflect on our (educators) response to children’s emotionality, behaviour and the relationships that we form. As his mother, I see Charlie as passionate, and thoughtful, but also overwhelmed at times by how strongly he feels. I think of him as assertive and particular, knowing exactly what he wants or needs to do before he can move forward. At this point I also wonder how educators have at times interpreted his passion, his strong emotions, his particularness as something that needed to be contained. I think of educators who saw his five-year-old forgetfulness to return to the classroom as disobedience that necessitated a trip to the principle’s office, rather than seeing a relational child who simply wanted to greet all of the children entering in and out of the bathroom. A child wanting to be social, but also a child who needed visual reminders of what’s next. I think of his need for his socks to be positioned just right on his feet before he is able to put his shoes on as simply what is comfortable to him, but is interpreted as stubborn, or an inability to follow through with instructions. As his mother, I see a child

who is passionate, who is particular, who is sensitive to sensory input, who needs to understand the beginning, middle and end of something, and be the one to finish something that he has started, which, in his mind, was the task of setting ‘Crabby’ free as his alone.

I see a child who is compassionate and feels deeply and powerfully, who is full of expression, curiosity, and movement, and who deeply needs to feel in relationship with others. Educators have described him as cautious, but also one who opens up when given the relational space to do so. I also see the child whom other educators have described as challenging, whose characteristics seemingly are a deficit within their classrooms. A child who needed to be controlled, contained, trained to follow through within routines, to sit when asked to be seated on the carpet with the group rather than being able to choose to sit alone so that he doesn’t feel other bodies touching his own. A child whose very self was being criticized for simply being, and a child who was made to feel bad about who he was to the point of not wanting to participate in school, a place that he had once so looked forward to. Sadness is all that he felt, that we all felt, and anger for a classroom that was so deeply entrenched in binaries of what is good and bad behaviour, what is right or wrong, what is developmentally appropriate or inappropriate, the teacher positioned as knower, the student as learner, the teacher as understander, the student as understandee (Pratt, 2008). How did this happen to a five-year-old boy? How did his unique ways become a restlessness that needed to be remediated? As an educator I understand these blind spots, having experienced them myself. What has become visible is the way in which conceptualizations of curriculum and learning create very different spaces for relationships to exist and be nurtured. If we are to move back to the places that are “patient and forgiving and rich and rigorous enough” (Jardine et al, 2008, p.xxi), places where possibilities are opened up and extended for children, we must “foster our skills of relationality in ourselves (our living with our teaching), between our lives and our students, and within our students as well” (Sameshima, 2008, p. 36). In my own practice as early childhood educator and teacher educator, I need to create a dialogue and opportunity for educators to actively critique and explore their own teacher identity, to find ways to increase receptivity and welcome openness to learning. Through reflexive work and understanding self, perhaps create a bridge between self and the other, or find an opening to pedagogical practices, perspectives and philosophies different from their own. Trungpa (as cited by Jardine et al, 2012, p. 75) writes,

If we provide enough room for restlessness so that it might function within the space, then the energy ceases to be restless because it can trust itself fundamentally. Meditation is giving a huge, luscious meadow to a restless cow. The cow might be restless for a while in its huge meadow, but at some stage, because there is no much space, the restless becomes irrelevant.



Van Manen (2002) refers to this relationality as “pedagogical thoughtfulness [that] is sustained by a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding to a particular child or children” (p. 10) in a particular setting. For these children trying to learn the desired regulation expected of their teacher, how do we move from a place of containment and deficits to one that supports both educator and child, creating this “luscious meadow” in which to grow and learn? Another colourful layer is illuminated.

Layer Three: Foster Skills of Relationality—to the non-human world

Woodland Tales

I will show you the trail
and this is what it will lead you to:

A thousand friendships that will offer
honey in little thorny cups,
the secrets of the underbrush,
the health of sunlight,
suppleness of body,
the unafraidness of the night,
the goodness of rain,
the story of the trail,
the knowledge of wetlands,
the aloofness of knowing.

(Seton, 1940)

During a walk in the wooded trails in Brackendale, the boys (my sons) and I are curiously investigating the myriad of mushrooms that have popped up following the fall rains. This is one of my favourite places to walk, the clear cool air floods our lungs, rich with the textured smells of cedar, fir and hemlock. The forest floor is covered thick with moss, a vibrant green that is soft and spongy beneath our feet. Beneath the canopy, the space is unusually open, with very little brush due to the huge stands of trees that largely block out the light. On this particular day, the colours of the mushrooms are extraordinary: red caps, white caps, yellow caps, spotted and bumpy caps, and then we discovered the most beautiful mushroom we had ever seen, tall elegant stands of azure blue. How interesting, how uniquely divine! Our walk is filled with conversation as the boys discuss

between them what they are seeing and occasionally venture off the topic of nature to discuss recent escapades at school or other things worthy of discussion. Walking behind them, I listen to their myriad of questions, including, “who might live under these mushrooms?” Jack noticed the cobwebs suspended among branches of many of the trees and shared with us that fairies don’t like spiders because their wings get caught in their webs. And then there were moments of silence, perhaps while the boys reflected on fairies’ wings and cobwebs. Suddenly I am startled by a quick inhale as Jack stops in his tracks and gasps. I look around expecting to find a bear or a cougar in the area, I am ready to defend my brood. Instead he points up to the trees in front of us and says, “oh my gosh mum, look at how beautiful that is!” Beams of sunlight are breaking through the thick foliage of the tree tops, and shining down like spotlights on the lush, emerald green moss that is hanging from the branches. The beams of light are catching the water droplets that are suspended from the moss, causing them to shine like little twinkling lights. It was truly stunning. In this experience I am reminded of Ann Pelo’s book, *The Goodness of Rain* (2013), in which she writes: “walking into knowledge. Walking into home. This walking is an expression of curiosity about and reverence for the spirit and story of a particular place. It invites attentiveness to one’s inward landscape as well as to the landscape traversed. Setting out, a walker carries little but curiosity and desire. Returning, a walker carries a breathing awareness of the land” (p. 64). Jack has developed an awareness of the land and an attentiveness to the places he inhabits.

It is in these moments that I have begun to think of relationality as the appreciation of relatedness with others and their lived experiences, but also the importance of relationality to place. As an educator how will I invite children and student teachers to connect with nature and the non-human world? I must be more cognizant of localized curricula, both in acknowledging students’ and children’s own ways of knowing, curricula that pays attention to their own lived experiences and circumstances, but also pays attention to localized ecology. In our walks through these woods the landscape comes alive, abundant with colour. The sounds and the smells of earth and conifers imprint alongside of memories, it is here that currere is embodied and contextualized. Snyder writes:

This mapping lays the foundation for an ecological identity, in which a place and its ecology are inscribed into the mind. Knowing one place intimately makes possible knowledge of other places: we become adept at paying attention, we are attuned to the marvelous and beautiful” (as cited by Pelo, 2013, p.68.)

Developing ecological identities in children must be intentional and purposeful if we are to create sustainable cultural interactions with nature and create long-term change in the culture of our society.



In Jack's story of the sunlit drops he invited me into a relationship with the forest, anchored by his bond, caring, and appreciation for what we referred to as Mother Nature. It was a moment in which he was "drawn out" of himself, connected with Jardine's (2012) idea of an aesthetic experience (p. 101), characterized by the beauty of the glistening drops that took his breath away. In that moment I recognized that perhaps he is developing an ecological identity, and I connected with Pelo's (2013) call—rather than being inclined to run out of the rain, I hope he will run into it, turn his face upwards to listen, to feel, to taste, to see and to breath. Another colourful layer is illuminated.

Layer Four: Modeling Wholeness-in-Process

Sameshima (2008) suggests that embodied wholeness is "weaving the daily into reflexive understandings of continuous heartfelt living, learning and teaching" (p. 32). For me, embodied wholeness means continuing this journey of forming and transforming the layers within my pedagogical philosophy and practice in context. It requires a continued immersion as a learner in my teaching practice and reflexive in tracing the pathways that have shaped my teacher identity—engaging in a living pedagogic inquiry (Sameshima, 2007). It is also about being open to the fear that I might feel in entering unfamiliar spaces, or the ability to reimagine and create what once was unimaginable. It will continue to be about finding ways to create "dynamic interactive learning spaces" (Sameshima, 2007) within early childhood classrooms and with student-teachers in ways that allow me to share my practice and experiences with them, but also create space to be a learner, receptive to what others have to teach me. There cannot be a conclusion to this process, it is about being intentional and dynamic, about being an active participant in the life of the classroom, it is about embodying particular ways of being at this point in my pedagogical journey, but also about being open to the possibility that things could be different. Another colourful layer to illuminate.

Concluding Thoughts

In accepting Sameshima's (2008) invitation to transform and develop a curriculum of "embodied aesthetic awareness" (p.29), rich and complex layers have been illuminated, blind spots disrupted, and possibilities have begun to emerge in relation to place and practice. Layers within my own pedagogical practice will continue to dynamically move between the tension of what I know, or had known, and what I continue to attempt to reshape in order to create room for discovery. In this reconceptualization, I need to continually reflect upon the dominant ways of being or thinking that have become entrenched within educational practice, and has provoked resistance or blindspots to such possibility. I am not naïve to assume that this process is easy, in fact, on the contrary. The process to reshape and perhaps even abandon traditional conceptions of teacher and student, as knower and learner, in order to make room for a more generative space is hard and intentional work. Further I could never imagine that I am able to accomplish all of this within the confines of this paper, nor should I if I am truly committed to allowing myself to while, to live in the midst of encounters and compose and recompose interpretations (Jardine, 2012) of these moments. The challenge is to engage in a continuous pedagogical exploration of living embodied wholeness, a dynamic interplay between educator and student, a learning process to: "become something more than we had been before such encounters" (Jardine, 2012, p. 176), and in doing so: "modeling wholeness-in-process" (Sameshima, 2008). But the classroom that I imagine, rich with drawn out encounters, encounters that are, as described by Jardine (2008/2012) worthwhile, and deeply connected to place and to relationships, is a classroom worth working towards.



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