

# CANADIAN CHILDREN

JOURNAL OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

SPRING 2014 / PRINTEMPS 2014

Vol. 39 No. 2

The Canadian Association  
for Young Children



[www.cayc.ca](http://www.cayc.ca)

L'Association Canadienne  
Pour Les Jeunes Enfants

## THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

### WHAT IS THE CAYC?

The Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC) grew out of the Council for Childhood Education and was officially recognized in 1974 by the granting of a Federal Charter. It is the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children, birth through age nine, at home, in preschool settings and at school. Members of the multidisciplinary association include parents, teachers, caregivers, administrators, students and all those wishing to share ideas and participate in activities related to the education and welfare of young children.

### MISSION STATEMENT

CAYC exists to provide a Canadian voice on critical issues related to the quality of life of all young children and their families.

### THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

1. To influence the direction and quality of policies and programs that affect the development and well-being of young children in Canada.
2. To provide a forum for the members of Canada's early childhood community to support one another in providing developmentally appropriate programs for young children.
3. To promote and provide opportunities for professional development for those charged with the care and education of young children.
4. To promote opportunities for effective liaison and collaboration with all those responsible for young children.
5. To recognize outstanding contributions to the well-being of young children.

### IMPLEMENTING THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

#### 1. The National Conference:

The National Conference is a highlight of the CAYC. The program includes lectures by internationally renowned authorities on children, workshops, discussion groups, displays, demonstrations, school visits and tours.

#### 2. Provincial and Regional Events:

The organization of members at the local and provincial level is encouraged to plan events to deal with the issues and concerns pertaining to young children. These events may take the form of lectures, seminars or a local conference.

#### 3. The Journal:

An outstanding multidisciplinary journal is published twice yearly. Articles by nationally and internationally known experts in early childhood education and child rearing are presented in the Journal of the CAYC. Inside CAYC provides information on Association activities.

### SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

Membership fees are payable on application and renewable annually on an evergreen basis. To be considered a voting member, fees must be paid no later than 60 days prior to the Annual General Meeting.

CAYC members receive two issues of Canadian Children as well as favourable rates for national and regional conferences.

Regular \$55.00, 2 Year Regular \$100.00, association/institution \$120.00, student/senior \$30.00, international \$135.00 (CA).

#### CAYC

356 B Prospect Bay Road  
Prospect Bay, Nova Scotia B3T 1Z7  
membership@cayc.ca

## ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LES JEUNES ENFANTS

### QU'EST CE QUE L'ACJE

L'Association Canadienne pour les Jeunes Enfants, issue du *Council for Childhood Education*, a reçu sa charte fédérale en 1974. Elle demeure la seule association nationale vouée exclusivement au bien-être des enfants, de la naissance jusqu'à l'âge de neuf ans, dans leur foyer, à la garderie et à l'école primaire. L'ACJE est composée de parents, d'enseignants, de professionnels de la petite enfance, d'administrateurs et d'étudiants, ainsi que de tous ceux et celles qui sont intéressés à partager leurs idées en participant à des activités liées au bien-être et à l'éducation des jeunes enfants.

### SA MISSION

L'ACJE s'est donné comme mandat de faire entendre une voix canadienne sur les questions essentielles ayant trait à la qualité de vie de tous les jeunes enfants et de leur famille.

### SES OBJECTIFS

1. Jouer un rôle sur le plan des orientations et sur la qualité des politiques et des programmes touchant au développement et au bien-être des jeunes enfants canadiens.
2. Créer un forum pour les membres de la communauté canadienne oeuvrant dans le domaine de la petite enfance afin de susciter une collaboration active dans l'élaboration de programmes appropriés au développement des jeunes enfants.
3. Encourager et offrir des possibilités de perfectionnement professionnel au personnel responsable du bien-être et de l'éducation des jeunes enfants.
4. Promouvoir des occasions pour une meilleure coordination et collaboration entre tous les responsables des jeunes enfants.
5. Récompenser et souligner les contributions exceptionnelles faites en faveur des jeunes enfants.

### EXÉCUTION DES OBJECTIFS DE L'ACJE

#### 1. Le congrès national:

Il constitue le grand événement de l'ACJE. Des sommités de renommée internationale en matière de petite enfance y prononcent des conférences et on y participe à des ateliers, des débats, des expositions, des démonstrations, et à des visites guidées d'écoles.

#### 2. Les événements provinciaux et locaux:

L'ACJE encourage ses membres à organiser des conférences, des séminaires ou des congrès au niveau local et régional afin de débattre des problèmes relatifs aux jeunes enfants.

#### 3. La revue :

Publication bisannuelle et multidisciplinaire de premier ordre, la revue regroupe des articles traitant de questions d'éducation et de formation des jeunes enfants. On y retrouve également des articles écrits par des experts de renommée nationale et internationale. La rubrique Inside CAYC enseigne les lecteurs sur les activités de l'Association.

### ABONNEMENT ET COTISATION DES MEMBRES

Les cotisations doivent être réglées au moment de l'adhésion et celle-ci doit être renouvelée chaque année. Pour se prévaloir de son droit de vote, tout membre doit acquitter sa cotisation au moins 60 jours avant l'Assemblée Générale annuelle.

Les membres de l'ACJE reçoivent la revue, et bénéficient de tarifs spéciaux pour participer au congrès national et aux événements régionaux.

Tarif des cotisations annuelles: général; 55 \$, général 2 année 100 \$, étudiants/ainé: 30 \$, associations : 120 \$, international : 135 \$ (CA)

#### ACJE

356 B Prospect Bay Road  
Prospect Bay, Nova Scotia B3T 1Z7  
membership@cayc.ca

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### Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia

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© 1996: The Canadian Association for Young Children ISSN: 0833-7519  
Graphics & Printing by The Printing House, Vancouver, BC

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Cover Photo by: Sylvia Kind

Canadian Children is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children of preschool and elementary age in Canada. The journal is published twice yearly and contains articles, book reviews and announcements of professional conferences.

Canadian Children is a multidisciplinary journal concerned with child development, child studies and early childhood education. Authors from across Canada, and elsewhere, are invited to submit articles and book reviews which reflect the variety and extent of both research and practice in early childhood education and child well-being.

#### CONTENT:

Submissions should appeal to an audience that includes parents, professionals in the field of childhood education and child services, as well as teachers and researchers. Most issues are multi-theme in nature and the editor will attempt to balance articles that are research related with articles of a practical nature relating to programming, curriculum, classroom practice or child well-being.

#### FORM, LENGTH, AND STYLE:

- Articles may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Edition).
- Articles should be sent as an e-mail attachment to the email address below.
- All submissions should be accompanied by a copy of the signed permission form available at the website ([cayc.ca](http://cayc.ca))
- Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs prior to e-mailing the manuscript. Signed permissions must be included in the submission.
- Please include a brief biographical sketch (4-5 sentences) including the author(s) full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information.
- An abstract should be included at the start of the manuscript, and should not exceed 100 words.
- In order to enable blind review, manuscripts must be anonymized. No author information should be included in the manuscript.
- All author information (including full name, mailing address and biographical information) must be included in a separate document.
- It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

#### ACCEPTANCE AND PUBLICATION:

The editors will acknowledge receipt and will review all solicited and unsolicited manuscripts received. The final publication decision rests with the editors, and will be communicated within three months.

**DEADLINES:** Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis.

Canadian Children est la revue de l'Association canadienne pour jeunes enfants (ACJE), la seule association vouée exclusivement au bien-être des enfants de niveau préscolaire et primaire au Canada. Cette revue publiée deux fois l'an regroupe des articles, des comptes rendus de livres et des avis de conférences professionnelles.

Canadian Children est une revue multidisciplinaire axée sur le développement de l'enfant, les études de l'enfant et l'éducation à l'enfance. Les auteurs du Canada et d'ailleurs sont invités à soumettre des articles et des comptes rendus de livres mettant en évidence la variété et l'étendue de la recherche et de la pratique dans le domaine de l'éducation à la petite enfance et du bien-être de l'enfant.

#### CONTENU:

Les articles doivent s'adresser à un public composé de professionnels des domaines de l'éducation à l'enfance et des services à l'enfance, de parents, d'enseignants et de chercheurs. La plupart des numéros traitent d'une multitude de thèmes et le rédacteur en chef tentera d'y inclure tant des articles portant sur la recherche que des articles portant sur des aspects pratiques de l'éducation, comme la gestion et la mise en œuvre de programmes d'études, de méthodes d'enseignement en salle de classe et de techniques utilisées pour assurer le bien-être des enfants.

#### FORME, LONGUEUR ET STYLE:

- Les articles peuvent être de longueur variée et doivent être rédigés dans un style accessible à tous les lecteurs. La présentation doit être conforme aux normes du Publication Manual (6e édition) de l'American Psychological Association.
- Les articles devront être joints à un courrier électronique et envoyés à l'adresse de courriel indiquée ci-dessous.
- Toutes les soumissions devront être accompagnées d'une copie signée du formulaire d'autorisation disponible sur notre site Web ([www.cayc.ca](http://www.cayc.ca)).
- Les auteurs devront obtenir une autorisation de publier pour l'utilisation de photographies avant de nous faire parvenir le manuscrit par courriel. Les autorisations signées doivent être incluses dans la soumission.
- Veuillez inclure une brève notice biographique (4 ou 5 phrases) comprenant le nom complet, le titre et l'affiliation professionnelle de l'auteur ou des auteurs, ainsi que tout autre renseignement pertinent.
- Un résumé de maximum 100 mots devra être inclus au début du manuscrit.
- Afin de permettre un examen aveugle des manuscrits, ceux-ci doivent être anonymes. Aucune information relative à l'auteur ne doit être présente dans le manuscrit.
- Tous les renseignements relatifs à l'auteur (y compris le nom complet, l'adresse postale et l'information biographique) doivent être inclus dans un document à part.
- Il est entendu que les auteurs ne soumettront leurs articles qu'à une seule revue à la fois.

#### ACCEPTATION ET PUBLICATION:

Les rédacteurs en chef accuseront réception et tiendront compte de tous les manuscrits reçus, qu'ils aient été sollicités ou non. La décision définitive de publier un article relève de la responsabilité des rédacteurs en chef, et elle sera communiquée à l'auteur dans un délai de trois mois.

**ÉCHÉANCE:** Les soumissions sont acceptées en tout temps.

*Please send all publication correspondence for consideration to:*

**Co-Editors, Laurie Kocher & Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw  
CANADIAN CHILDREN JOURNAL**

**[cdnchildren@gmail.com](mailto:cdnchildren@gmail.com)**

## EDITORS



Dr. Laurie Kocher



Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

As spring dawns here on the west coast of Canada, our attention turns to living more in the outdoors. It's been a wretched winter across most of the country, and many folks are experiencing cabin fever, that sense of being cooped up indoors.

In this issue of *Canadian Children*, many of the articles inspire us to be outside with children—and not only in the finer weather of spring and summer!

Our invitational article, written by Ann Pelo, invites us to cultivate an ecological identity in young children and in ourselves, framed by a sense of wonder. Enid Elliot and Toni Hoyland pick up this theme as they write of experiences with a nature kindergarten in Sooke, BC, and the partnership of a teacher and early childhood educator collaborating together. We also have reviews of several resources with varying perspectives of encounters with nature. Rebecca Sung, who had the opportunity to complete a practicum placement in Auchlone Nature Kindergarten in Scotland, reviews Claire Warden's book about forest schools. Randa Khattar brings us her review of Ann Pelo's book describing her experience of being outside with a child every single day for a year. Kim Ainsworth offers her thoughts on Affrica Taylor's book on reconfiguring the natures of childhood.

While this issue draws together an assortment of ideas about embracing the great outdoors with children, something so much a part of our Canadian identity, we also bring you two different takes on storytelling. Marni Binder shares her research that draws on Vivian Gussin Paley's storytelling curriculum, making children's storied lives visible. Jamie

Zepeda, also influenced by Paley's work on storytelling, describes how these practices build community.

In their contribution, Nicole Brennan and Jim Parsons consider symptoms and strategies for the diverse needs of those living with attention deficit issues. Kim Atkinson explores art practices in early years, challenging developmental perspectives of art through a lens of modern art approaches. And finally, Iris Berger challenges the prominent status that the discourse of self-regulation has acquired in the domain of formal learning.

You can see, from this wide range of offerings, that the early childhood community in North America is engaged in thinking widely across topics that are diverse and complex. We are thankful to the authors who share their ideas in these pages. We must also acknowledge the team of reviewers who provide rich and thoughtful feedback on each submission to this journal. Each and every article goes through several iterations before reaching the publication stage. Our thanks are also extended to Leslie Prpich, who is so skilled in the craft of technical editing.

Regular subscribers to *Canadian Children* will be pleased to know that we have just launched a third annual issue, to be published online each winter. Go to [www.cayc.ca](http://www.cayc.ca) to see the newly configured CAYC website. There you will find links to download articles from the online issues. Watch in the pages of this issue for a call for submissions for an upcoming special online issue with an arts focus, with guest editor Sylvia Kind.

Returning to thoughts of the wonder of nature, we are reminded of the words of poet Mary Oliver. In her book *Blue Iris* (2006), she writes:

*Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin-flowers. And the frisky ones—inkberry, lamb's quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones—rosemary, oregano. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.*

*Attention is the beginning of devotion.*

***Laurie Kocher and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw***



Owen and the Puddle  
Photo credit: Andrea Layzell

# A Sense of Wonder: Cultivating an Ecological Identity in Young Children—and in Ourselves

Ann Pelo

**Ann Pelo** is a teacher educator, program consultant, and author whose primary work focuses on Reggio-inspired education, social justice and ecological teaching and learning, and the art of mentoring. She worked as a teacher and teacher mentor for 16 years at Hilltop Children's Center, a full-day childcare program in Seattle, Washington. Ann is the author of five books: *The Goodness of Rain: Developing an Ecological Identity in Young Children* (2013), *Season by Season the Year Unfolds: A Guidebook for Developing an Intentional Culture in Early Childhood Programs* (2010), *Rethinking Early Childhood Education* (2008), *The Language of Art: Inquiry-based Studio Practices in Early Childhood Settings* (2007), and, with Fran Davidson, *That's Not Fair: A Teacher's Guide to Activism with Young Children* (2000). Email: annpelo@msn.com

Environmental philosopher David Orr reminds us that ecological identity is “driven by a sense of wonder, the sheer delight in being alive in a mysterious, beautiful world.” The development of a sense of wonder toward and connection to the Earth is the particular task of early childhood. Our work as educators is to support children's unfolding into place and the opening of their hearts to the Earth. During a year of daily outdoor explorations with a year-old child, I came to an understanding of cornerstone practices that cultivate a sense of wonder for and connection to place, and that give rise to ecological identity. This article examines those practices and locates them in the context of the necessity of ecological identity at this time of environmental calamity.

This article includes several excerpts from Ann Pelo's *The Goodness of Rain*, published by Exchange Press and available on their website: [www.childcareexchange.com](http://www.childcareexchange.com)

*On a bright September morning, 15-month-old Dylan and I walk to the children's garden in the park near Dylan's home. The sunflowers in the garden are in their full glory, a grove of beauty reaching over our heads. The sunflowers' thick, green stems are like saplings and the yellow undersides of their faces glow with the sun shining through them.*

*At the far end of the sunflower patch, we find a trail that spirals up a hill. The incline, and the path's gravel, make the climb up the hill an effort for Dylan, who has just begun to walk. But I want Dylan to be able to look down at the sunflowers that overarched us when we stood below them, so I encourage her up the path to the top.*

*The perspective down onto the rounds of the sunflowers is worth the climb. Their tall stems hidden by their bold faces, the flowers offer themselves like floating lanterns, emanating light in the sun's bright glow. We admire the sunflowers, Dylan and I, and then turn to take in the vista from our hilltop perch. A surprise reveals itself: a small apple orchard tucked against the hill below us, invisible*

*from the children's garden where we'd just been.*

*The orchard becomes our destination.*

*I carry Dylan down the spiral path to the orchard and set her at its edge. There are a half-dozen rows of squat trees, limbs splayed onto supporting wire to form low apple hedges. Heirloom trees, their evocative names have been inked onto metal tags on their trunks: Liberty, Prairie Spy, Macoun. The deep reds and blushing pinks catch Dylan's attention: “Appa!” she calls out in startled recognition: familiar fruit in an unfamiliar context. She tucks herself under a low-limbed tree whose boughs are heavy with satin-red apples, and I step back to watch.*

*The light, sweet breath of apples scents the air, and the warm autumn sun makes for easy lingering. Dylan reaches into the tree, flips a leaf, and laughs. Another leaf, another flip, more laughter. Her hand moves from leaf to branch, and she runs her fingers along the ridges and roughs of the bark. The branch leads her to an apple. She touches her fingertips to its red curve, then cups the apple in her hand, tightens her fingers around it, and, leaning close, bites into the apple as it hangs from the branch. Mouth full of juice and autumn's flesh, she grins at me. “Appa,” she says, a confirmation.*

*With a few more bites and their accompanying tugs, the apple drops into Dylan's lap. She picks it up, lifts it toward me. I take a bite, marvelling at the apple's sweet fragrance, and at its sharp, tart tang, and at Dylan's taste for it. I return the apple to Dylan. She takes a few more bites, then drops the apple, letting it lie among the windfalls under the tree.*

*The ancient story: an apple plucked by an innocent from a tree, awakening knowledge. But not a fall from grace, here in the apple orchard. Instead, a fall into grace. Into the knowledge of apple in its right context, not mounded in the grocery store or tucked into a basket on the kitchen counter or sliced into manageable, toddler-sized crescents for lunch. Apple where it was born, where it grew from bud to blossom to fruit. Apple on a rough-barked limb,*

*tucked among leaves that shimmer in the autumn sun. Falling into the grace of apple knowledge.*

### **Born Into Ecology**

I believe we are born ready to know apples.

Animals alongside other animals, we are born with a keen awareness of the buzzing, breezing, shining, misting, singing, and silent life that flows across this Earth. Attuned to shadow and light, to movement both predictable and unexpected, to the dip and rise of temperature, to the varying cries of earthbound and sky-chased creatures, we are born into the wide, wild Earth, and our first instinct is to know it.

This instinct too quickly becomes buried beneath the rip-rap of contemporary life: beneath plastic toys and alphabet drills, beneath homework and housework and blue-glowing screens, beneath numbing commutes and smart phones and long days at work. But the instinct to know the Earth as animals know their home grounds is essential to a full human life. It must be safeguarded as birthright in young children and retrieved, rekindled, and renewed in us adults.

We teach children to write and to read and to navigate mathematical systems so that they can access the world of ideas and questions and intellectual exchange. We teach children how to behave with other people so that they can grow joyful and nourishing relationships. We teach children history, so that they know where they come from. We teach them art so that they can imagine what might be. We teach them science so that they understand the intricate workings of the physical world. This teaching honours and strengthens children's innate social, intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic identities—identities that we value as a society. We don't leave their development to happenstance or luck. Just so, we must nurture children's intrinsic ecological identities with intentional and attentive action.

I came to this conviction through my year as baby Dylan's caregiver.

### **A Journey into Place**

After nearly two decades as an early childhood educator and mentor, I left the full-day childcare centre in Seattle where I'd long worked and spent a year as a caregiver to a year-old baby, the daughter of a dear friend. My commitment for that year was that Dylan and I would spend each day outside, no matter the weather—a commitment made to both of us. I hoped that Dylan would learn the place where she lived, would take it into her bones and blood so that it would become bound into her identity. And I hoped that I would relax my shoulders that hunched against the rain, and open my resistant heart to the damp, grey Pacific Northwest where I made my home. I hoped that our days outside

would cultivate in each of us an ecological identity that would anchor us in place.

Why such goals, such desires?

I knew what it was to love a place, and I knew what it was to live detached from place. I knew that living in love with a place trumped the flat-heartedness of disinterested occupancy.

I'm most joyfully at home in the red rock desert of the U.S. Southwest, which is all sky and rock, spacious and elemental. Before my year with Dylan, I travelled often to those desert canyons, and returned to the Pacific Northwest with a reluctant heart. Seattle's density of green and grey, the constancy of clouds, the closeness of the sky—none of it suited me the way the desert suited me. I kept the place where I lived at arm's length, biding my time there until I could travel again to the desert wilderness.

By the time I began my year with Dylan, I'd had enough of such aloofness. My choices were clear: move to the desert or open my heart to the Pacific Northwest. My year with Dylan was an experiment in choosing to make home in the place where I lived.

That experiment was informed by my study of place-based learning. I'd read hungrily about the forest kindergartens of Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, and I was intrigued—no, more than intrigued. I was compelled. Place-based learning communities expand beyond classroom walls to include the land and sky and water and their creatures, not as pretty backdrops to teaching and learning, but as the context for and content of teaching and learning. This orientation seemed to me both exactly right and startlingly unconventional, pushing the boundaries—literally—of education. How did teachers teach in place-based programs? What did they teach? And what did children learn, and how? I searched out stories and scholarly work to better understand the possibilities, and felt increasing resonance with what I learned about nature preschools and kindergartens.

I'd spent much of my childhood's free time outdoors. When not in school with its desks and bells, lines and raised hands and modulated voices, I was in my family's suburban backyard, or down the street in the wooded lot that housed the public utility's water tank. I knew the place where I lived like a fish knows water: the feel of the air through the flow of the seasons, the sky's moods, the summertime smell of pine trees and dirt, the wintertime crunch of snow. I was bathed in place. As I read about nature preschools and forest kindergartens, my initial dazzled consternation gave way to glad recognition of the necessary and wonderful relocation of children's days from inside school walls to the wide world.

My year with Dylan unfolded at the confluence of my readiness to realign myself with the Pacific Northwest and my eager curiosity about place-based learning. What would it be to spend each day outdoors, with a child? What would it be for Dylan to spend this

year in her life, from her first birthday to her second, outdoors every day?

I was unsure about how we should we shape our days. What daily practices would support each of us to strengthen our ecological identities?

I wondered whether I ought to teach or simply be with Dylan outside. I mulled over places we ought to visit and revisit. I sought to understand when talking was important and when a shared quiet was more eloquent. Through the year with Dylan, I found my way—we found our way together—into seven practices that nourish ecological identity.

### **Walk the land.**

Marc Parent writes wonderfully and compellingly about his efforts to make a home with his family in new terrain in his book, *Believing It All*. In it, he describes the practice of walking with his children in the same few places again and again:

*We do this walk several times a week. It's a way for us to load ourselves up with the feel of the landscape. The only difference between a place to live and holy land is the number of footsteps you've put into the ground.*

Time is intimacy.

When we visit a landscape again and again, visit and notice, consciously, what we find there, visit and talk about what we notice—when we visit a landscape again and again, we come to know its particularities: the changes in light and shadow, the life and death of the green things, the movement of the lively things, the way rain slicks across rock and slips into dirt.

Dylan and I visited a few places many, many times. The world narrowed to these few places—a beach, a meadow, a bike and walking trail, a dog park. In that narrowing, the world became more subtle and nuanced, more specific. And in that specificity, the world opened into its righteous vastness: a dozen types of birds, and the whole arcing sky and its clouds, insects that burrow and buzz, trees and bush and underbrush, flowers in blossom and in seed, wild grasses and reeds, fish and wave.

### **Practice silence.**

We are eager to pass on our stories and our knowledge and our questions, our values and convictions about the beyond-human world and our relationship with it. We tumble quickly into speech and, tumbling, we fall into instruction. Environmental education, natural history, directives for ecological behaviour: these have essential places in shaping and sustaining an ecological identity—but they ought not to be our first gesture in the presence of the astonishment that is this Earth.

In our encounters with the wondrous and delighting and confounding elements of the world beyond walls—with ladybugs and hummingbirds, with ants lining into a crack in the sidewalk heavy-burdened and sure of their course, with the precise arrangement of crows along a telephone wire, with a fern frond just unfurling—in such encounters, dazzlement and humility ought to be our first responses. Not explanation or instruction, not right at first. Delight beyond words. Whooping delight, silent marvel, tears, laughter. Silence enough to contain witness and wonder.

### **Learn the names.**

Psychologist and naturalist Elaine Brooks says that “giving a name to something is a way of knowing it.”

A bird is a bird is any bird, generic—a winged creature with feathers and a beak—until it becomes a nuthatch, this nuthatch, modest brown, perched upside-down on a limb in the tree outside your window, its body so small, so round, that you long to cup it in your hand, cradle it, hold it to your cheek, even as you laugh at its inverted posturing and quick, comic movements. This nuthatch brings the tree alive, brings your heart alive. But a “bird”—you glance at a bird and look away, uncurious. Or, captivated, you watch it, and, curious, now, you seek its name.

Elaine Brooks continues her thought: “People are unlikely to value what they cannot name.”

What do we want to value? Name it.

Richard Louv reports that a 2002 study found that the average eight-year-old in the United States was better able to identify characters from Pokemon than the native species in the communities where they lived. I wanted Dylan to value pine trees more than Picachu. So I learned the names, and I taught them to Dylan. Not right away, not in place of experience and simple, delighted wonderment. But eventually I offered the names of the trees and birds, the flowers and shells we encountered.

### **Embrace sensuality.**

Dylan had been alive for only 12 months when she and I began spending our days together. The places we visited were uncharted territory for her, all first encounters, experiences before words, before stories or folktale or myth, before family history, before memory. Dylan entered these places first with her body, every sense alert and curious.

Our senses take in the world so that we can learn the world; they provide data for perception. And what is perception? The understanding of the environment that we gain by our interpretations of sensory information, says the dictionary. Our

senses inform our knowing, not in a superficial way, but knowing as comprehending, which is to say, understanding the meaning and nature of a thing, understanding a thing as part of a larger whole.

Our embodied participation in the world makes possible an intimate relationship with the world, and knowledgeable residence in the world.

### Explore new perspectives.

A sweet story about shifting perspectives:

*A small silver chime hangs at the doorway to Dylan's house. Each day, when we leave the house and when we arrive home, I lift Dylan to the chime and she rings it. "Chime," I say to her. "Chime," she echoes.*

*This ritual anchors our coming and going through the fall and winter. Then comes spring. Catkins lengthen on the birch and alder trees that we pass in the neighbourhood.*

*One day, catkins grown long, I lift Dylan into an alder tree so she can touch the tree's tassels. Dylan flips the catkins like she flips the chimes at the threshold of her home, and says, "Chimes?" Startled and delighted, I answer, "Catkins."*

*"Catkins," Dylan repeats. She keeps playing with the catkins, flipping them and calling out their name, new on her tongue: "Catkins!"*

*After a few minutes, we head home. We walk up the stairs to the front door, like always. I lift Dylan to the chimes, like every day. She gives them a flip, and, laughing, exclaims, "Catkins!"*

Dylan was alert to details because so much that she encountered was new to her, and unfamiliar. She gathered the details of a thing in order to know it: What is this thing? Have I seen anything like it before?

I could glance at something and assume that I knew what it was because I'd seen it many times before: a chime was a chime; a catkin was a catkin; they occupied unrelated contexts. It was a startle when Dylan linked disparate things—and refreshing, and delighting, and enlivening.

The origins of the word "perspective" are rooted in medieval Latin: *perspectivus*, meaning "sight," "look through," "inspect." To see clearly, to see anew, to see. When we change perspective—when we step away from our habitual ways of seeing and understanding—we find new details in familiar landscapes, we discover connections in what had seemed unrelated, we recontextualize the long-known. We humble ourselves and allow mystery and the unexpected into our encounters.

### Create stories.

Dylan's first language was story. During our year together, she was just coming into spoken English, and she used her blossoming knowledge of speech to tell stories. Eloquent, one-word stories, at first: "Crow."

"Crow," she said, and, listening, I understood the story inside the word because I'd been there with her when it unfolded. The story went like this: "Once upon a time, just this morning, we heard a crow crying its crow-calls loud and harsh. It was on the telephone wire overhead, swaying with the movement of the line. We watched it until it launched itself into flight and, still crying out, threaded its way through the tree-tips and out of sight." Dylan's stories confirmed our experiences together, and, in that confirmation, reconnected us to those experiences and to each other.

Unlike instructional texts and informational pamphlets, stories about the beyond-human world braid together imagination, emotion, experience, knowledge, and ethics—all elements of an ecological identity. Stories engage our hearts as well as our minds. They invite our participation—as storyteller, as listener—in a place. Stories both consolidate and expand how we know a place and its creatures. They locate us within the ecology of a place.

### Make rituals.

With ritual's rhythm of repeated gestures, we align ourselves with what we value, who we want to be, and how we want to live. We call forward what is sacred. We celebrate the places that matter to us and the creatures who reside there and the experiences we have there. With ritual, we create expressions of hope and belief. Ritual affirms identity. Rituals of place affirm ecological identity.

No need for the grand or solemn. Simple gestures, made daily and consciously, say to the witnessing world, "We are making our lives with intention and awareness, and with no small joy."

Some of these practices are contradictory. Practice silence and teach the names? Come to know a few places intimately and seek out new perspectives? An overarching practice is implicit in all of these: Be present and attentive to the possibilities for engaging the world, and find our way with awareness and intention. Does this moment call for silence or for naming? Will a shift in perspective help us see the familiar more deeply, or will it dislodge us from the intimacy of knowing?

These practices are integrated ways of behaving in the world. None is sufficient in itself, each is useful but incomplete. When taken together, in all their contradictory and complementary qualities, they nourish and sustain ecological identity.

### Why Does an Ecological Identity Matter?

In this time of environmental calamity, we are called to learn the ways of humble and tender relationship with the Earth. Many of our current community conversations involve ways to align ourselves with practices that will mitigate the damage already done to the planet, and that will chart a new and necessary and more mindful course.

We drive our cars less, and eat locally. We teach children to recycle and to conserve water and to turn off the lights when they leave a room. And such good behaviour matters, as an ethic and as an expression of right relationship with the Earth.

But this behaviour won't save us. We hear from environmental scientists that such personal acts are insignificant when laid alongside the brutal impacts of pesticide-laden corporate agriculture and industrial development and governmental policies that favour the maximization of profit. Recycling won't save us.

What will save us, then?

Love.

Kathleen Dean Moore, ethical philosopher, writes this about loving a place:

*To love—a person and a place—means at least this: 1. To want to be near it, physically. 2. To want to know everything about it—its story, its moods, what it looks like by moonlight. 3. To rejoice in the fact of it. 4. To fear its loss, and grieve for its injuries. 5. To protect it—fiercely, mindlessly, futilely, and maybe tragically, but to be helpless to do otherwise. 6. To be transformed in its presence—lifted, lighter on your feet, transparent, open to everything beautiful and new. 7. To want to be joined with it, taken in by it, lost in it. 8. To want the best for it. 9. Desperately. 10. To love a person or a place is to take responsibility for its well-being.*

“Obligation grows from love,” she concludes. “Love isn't just a state of being, it's a way of acting in the world. Love isn't a sort of bliss, it's a kind of work. It is the natural shape of caring.”

One disturbing and defining aspect of the environmental calamity in which we are immersed is our acceptance of extinction. We have been coached to live with loss, to allow the beyond-human world to disintegrate around us while we carry on with our lives, saddened, perhaps, but not wild with the grief and outrage that would compel us into the streets and boardrooms and government chambers. There is surely no small measure of self-protection at play. In the face of the immensity of the devastation and death that surrounds us, we must wall off our hearts or rearrange the shape and texture of our lives in ways far beyond adding recycling bins

to our curbside array.

When we are awake to love, when we tune our hearts to what is dear to us, we “fear its loss, and grieve for its injuries” and we seek “to protect it—fiercely . . . desperately.” Love will not allow us to tolerate loss without ferocious resistance and urgent challenge. And ferocious resistance and urgent challenge are what are called for now, in the face of the catastrophe that is dissolving the Earth.

Biologist and natural history educator Robert Michael Pyle writes eloquently of “the extinction of experience” with wild places and wildlife, which is, he declares, as devastating for the natural world as the extinction of species:

*Direct, personal contact with other living things affects us in vital ways that vicarious experience can never replace. . . . A face-to-face encounter with a banana slug means much more than a Komodo dragon seen on television. . . . One of the greatest causes of the ecological crisis is the state of personal alienation from nature in which many people live. We lack a widespread sense of intimacy with the living world.*

Pyle goes on to ask, famously and poignantly, “What is the extinction of the condor to a child who has never known a wren?” His question propels us out the door and beyond the walls into the world of wrens and robins, banana slugs and beetles—out the door and into the world of experience, because experience matters. Experience holds the seeds of love. And love matters because it holds us accountable, it demands that we live with our hearts awake to delight and to grief, and so keeps us in integrity. The gestures of love are gestures of protection and care, ways of “acting in the world.”

Now, protective action is not the work of children. It's the work of adults living with their hearts awake and their attention on the defining crisis of our lifetime. The work of children is to fall into place, to learn the land and sky and water where they live, to know wrens, to become intimate with banana slugs.

David Orr, an environmental activist and professor of environmental studies in the U.S., reminds us that ecological identity is “driven by a sense of wonder, the sheer delight in being alive in a mysterious, beautiful world.” The development of a sense of wonder toward and connection to the Earth is the particular task of early childhood. Our work as educators is to support children's unfolding into place and the opening of their hearts to the Earth.

When we take up this work, when we step into place with children, we have the opportunity to reignite our hearts, to relocate ourselves in the mysterious, beautiful world, to resensitize ourselves to delight and wonder—and to grief and loss and anguish. We can

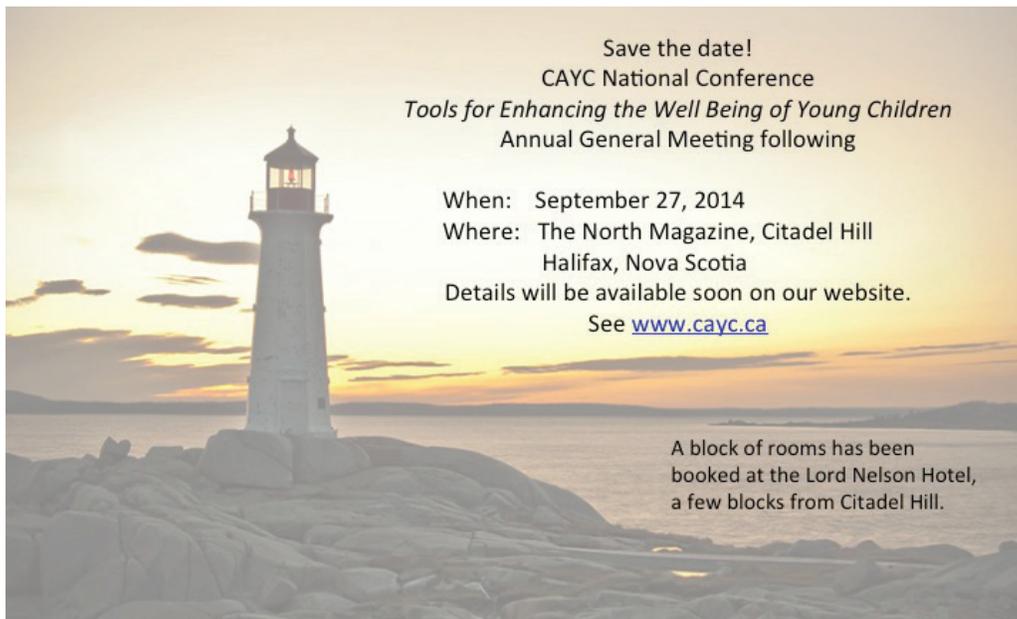
renew our participation in the Earth and return to our full integrity. And from this stance of integrity, we can take up the work of love ourselves, “acting in the world” on behalf of the world.

As children grow older, wonder and kinship and love will make the loss of place intolerable. Whether the activism they take up, then, and their efforts to remake community in ways that are accountable to the planet are able to shift the balance of crisis, or are futile, they will have available to them the full possibility of living with integrity, in faithful allegiance to the Earth, full-hearted witness to loss and, perhaps, against great odds, to redemption.

This is the gift we can offer children and ourselves: the gift of a human heart, and integrity in relationship. The gift of love for and committed participation in the Earth’s lively rhythms. We can offer children and cultivate in ourselves an ecological identity—born of deep residence in place—by walking the land and learning the names of who and what we encounter, by practicing silence and telling stories, by giving over our senses and embracing new ways of seeing. By making ritual. We can step with children into wonder and love, and the natural shape of caring.

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# The Storied Lives Children Play: Multimodal Approaches Using Storytelling

Marni Binder

**Marni Binder** is an associate professor in the School of Early Childhood Studies, in the MA program in Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University and in the York University and Ryerson University joint graduate program in Communications and Culture. Email: mbinder@ryerson.ca

This paper explores a qualitative research project that drew on the work of Vivian Gussin Paley's (1991) storytelling curriculum, where the following concepts were explored: children's narratives through stories told, acted, and visually represented; how children construct meaning in their world; and the empowerment of voice. The study focused on the processes and growth that a diverse junior and senior kindergarten class underwent over eight weeks. The study has important implications for pedagogy and offers an innovative approach to a storytelling curriculum that engages multimodal frameworks for early literacy learning. Presenting opportunities for children to voice their storied lives orally, in image and text, and nonverbally through acting out stories enables them to explore and connect their identity texts to self, others, and the world. By engaging in, with, and through story, children reveal the complexity of their meaning-making processes, interconnecting imaginative and real experiences. By opening up learning spaces for socially constructed experiences, children's storied lives are made visible.

young children is still lacking in practice (Blake & Giannangelo, 2012; Elkind, 2007; Paley, 2004; Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Carter, 2007; Wright, 2010). A storytelling curriculum can embody the development of these capacities through the meaningful lived experiences that emerge from the children (Cooper, 2009) and can provide teachers with a better understanding of how children view themselves and their worlds.

When I taught in the inner city many years ago, I explored Vivian Paley's (1986, 1991) version of a story curriculum in my grade 1 and 2 classrooms. Paley's (1991) original *story play* practice had children dictate invented stories to her, which she would write down. Later, Paley would read the dictated stories out loud and the class would act them out, "directed" by the child author.

After implementing story play as a weekly practice in my own classrooms, I observed that, over time, children took ownership of the stories by beginning to spontaneously draw and write on their own, as well as documenting who would play the characters. The storytelling curriculum opened meaningful multimodal spaces that disrupted the "silencing of voice" often observed in teacher-directed oral literacy activities, such as "sharing" or "circle" time and call and response. The metaphor of silencing reflects the restricted opportunities children have to express their innermost thoughts and ideas. Story play offered a pedagogical space for authentic and relational understanding in my early learning classrooms (Deans & Brown, 2008), provided greater insight into how children make meaning of their world, and has shaped and inspired my research (Binder, 2011b).

The qualitative research with kindergarten children I describe in this paper emerged out of my past experiences using story play in the classroom (Binder, 2011b). I situate story play within the discourse of multimodal and multiple literacies so as to broaden the theoretical underpinnings of how early literacy is perceived. In education, multimodal theory focuses on how integrating multiple sign systems or communicative "modes" can broaden children's meaning-making capacities (Albers & Sanders, 2010) and can offer learning and communicative opportunities for young children that are not restricted to print (Whitmore, 2007). Drawing on multimodal theories, the concept of multiple literacies provides a framework that challenges the traditional definition of literacy

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University, for providing the seed grant to do this research and to the School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University, for additional funding support. A special thank you to Stefanie Morra, my graduate assistant during this project.

*By the way, I have a name for us. We are anecdotists. The dictionary says this is someone who collects and tells little stories. Of course, our stories are all about young children, but I think the name fits.* (Paley, 2010, p. 17)

Telling stories is an essential part of the social and cultural fabric of societies worldwide (Binder, 2011b). As a cultural tool (Vygotsky, 1978), the practice of telling stories provides a socially constructed opportunity for children to creatively communicate about their lived experiences through the imaginary and the everyday. Research supports the importance of oral storytelling in early years classrooms, but the inclusion of play, imagination, and creativity in the language and literacy development of

(as linear reading and writing) by recognizing literacy as socially situated, diverse in practice, and expressive and calls attention to nontextual modes, such as visual arts, drama, and music (Flewitt, 2008; Masny, 2009; Narey, 2009; New London Group, 1996). It is the engagement of different modes and processes for meaning making, such as print, images, sound, gesture, and so on (Flewitt, 2008; New London Group, 1996) that “situates literacy practices in ways that give children choice in how they communicate and express meaning (Binder, 2011a, p. 369) and allows for “ways of becoming in the world” (Masny, 2009, p. 2). As teachers, we can broaden children’s capacities to make meaning in many ways by recognizing that human communication comprises these multiple modes or sign systems (Flewitt, 2008; Gee, 2004; Kress, 1997; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). Multimodality and multiple literacies can also respond to our increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic classrooms by calling for a much broader understanding of literacy rather than just focusing on traditional language-based approaches (Bearne, 2009; New London Group, 1996). To extend the multimodal nature of story play in my research, I added visual representation to Paley’s original practice by having children draw their dictated story of choice in addition to having them acted out. Weaving together the different sign systems, such as drawing, acting (gesture), and speech, in my research created the multimodal narrative spaces for the children, allowing them to demonstrate literacy understanding in multiple ways.

In this paper I focus on how children’s multimodal narratives through stories told, acted out, and drawn provided spaces for meaning making and how examining visual representations (drawing) of their stories offered a deeper understanding of their worlds. This study validates the significance of Paley’s story curriculum and demonstrates the significance of shifting literacy understanding through multimodal approaches. The significance of young children’s drawings, not just as a complement to language but also to communicate and express language (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Kress, 1997; Steele, 1998, 2008), supports this multimodal extension of the story play.

### Conceptual Framework

Hedges, Cullen, and Jordan (2011) maintain that everyday experiences and thoughts need to be shared and told. A storytelling curriculum can provide a multimodal space for this to occur. Paley (1991) interconnected storytelling and play to create the story curriculum. Whether the stories were imaginative, real, or a combination of both, by offering two modes of expression (telling stories/acting stories), children revealed the depth of their lived experiences and demonstrated narrative control (Cooper, 2005). A storytelling curriculum through story play opens up critical spaces for inquiry for children to navigate in, with, and through interactions with others (Papadopoulou & Birch, 2009). Dyson (2003) and Gallas (2003) support the multimodal significance of how story, writing, drawing, and drama interconnect. Geneshi and Dyson (2009) also support this in their research where they

advocate for storytelling and suggest that telling stories and playing them out can deepen our understanding of children. According to Paley, “young children disclose more of themselves as characters in a story than as participants in a discussion” (2007, p. 159). She provides an excellent example of this phenomenon in a letter she wrote to me in 2011:

*Yu-ching, in Taiwan, writes to tell me about her new class. Four-year-old Yu-yo does not want to go to school and cries every day. He insists his mother remain with him and he dictates this story for her to write down: “Two boys were taken to a dog place because they only ate snack. One boy did eat a vegetable but he doesn’t like to go to school. So the teachers said he could wait till December 9th to go to school.” Here is a child who clearly understands the usefulness of our storytelling activity. Perhaps even better than we do.*

Paley (1991, 2007, 2010) shifted the traditional storytelling paradigm to one in which the adult takes cues from the child, enabling more agency in the child’s learning and empowering the child’s voice. Not only can child-authored stories provide a deeper insight into the worlds of children (Cooper, 2005, 2009; Paley, 1991, 2007), they can provide a pedagogical model for enacting change in the teaching and learning process. This change model speaks to what Cummins calls “pedagogies of choice” (2009, p. 261), where teachers interact with, and activate, the children’s “funds of knowledge” (González et al., 2005, p. 89). Storytelling reveals a personal signature (Cummins, 2006; Gee, 2001) that children bring to the learning environment and can disrupt the “teacher as knower construct” (Harvey & Kentel, 2011, p. 143), empowering children’s voice through their storytelling discourse. When implemented as a regular practice, this emergent approach (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Fraser, 2006) also engages teachers in pedagogical documentation (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Wien, Guyevskey, & Berdoussis, 2011) where the teacher presents the children’s knowledge through the intersection of listening to and writing stories, observing the children as the stories are acted out, and, as in the research presented here, examining their narrative drawings.

In keeping with the ongoing shift in educational practice toward understanding and using the arts as multimodal forms of communication (Albers & Sanders, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Wright, 2010), I extended Paley’s use of stories told and acted out to include drawings of these stories. Young children often communicate with images before written text (Kress, 1997), and thinking of art as a form of language (Kind, 2010; Steele, 2008) adds another dimension of narrative understanding in children’s storied lives. In story play, it affords the space for children, not only to tell and share their stories publicly through acting them out (Nicolopoulou, de Sà, Ilgaz, & Brockenmeyer, 2010), but also to revisit their stories together through images, contributing to a multimodal

lens of understanding. In this way the stories, while not always autobiographical, become a collective understanding of the learning environment (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, 2010) through the ethos of community building.

**Research Design**

I used narrative inquiry/construction (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to position the concept of story as central to the research. Incorporating the arts in the research allowed for an emergent epistemological design (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, 2008; Leavy, 2009). The interconnection of these approaches contributed to the multimodal analysis of the children’s active engagement in telling, acting, and drawing their stories and provided the foundation for understanding narrative inquiry as “the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). Paley’s (1986, 2010) approach of using documentations and anecdotes of her work with young children provided the methodological framework.

Over the course of eight weeks, I worked with 14 junior kindergarten (JK) and 6 senior kindergarten (SK) children in a culturally and linguistically diverse early learning centre in Toronto. Each child told me two stories, which I documented through audio recording and writing. All the stories were then acted out with the whole class. The children became the actors in each story, while I (following Paley) read the dictated story. Each child chose one of their two stories to visually represent for a class book.

Before the children acted out their stories, I worked with the class on some drama techniques using body gestures and facial expressions. We worked on how to stand facing an audience and how to exaggerate our gestures to demonstrate meaning. For the first round of acting, we did a dry run before acting out “for real,” as one child called it. This rehearsal approach speaks to the importance of process, meaningful engagement, and slowing down time in the learning environment.

Engaging with each child twice during the research (about four weeks apart) allowed me to observe changes and emergent themes between the two sessions. It gave the children time to reflect on the story they had told previously, while moving forward with a new one. Having children contribute to a storybook with drawings to accompany their dictated stories provided another mode of analyzing and exploring the process. A multimodal approach afforded space to “visualize voice” (Soto, 2005). Data collection included two recorded story sessions and discussions for each child, observations during storytelling sessions and the acting process (two times), and observations made while the children were drawing. I augmented the story acting by taking photographs. I analyzed the oral and visual representations of the children that allowed for multimodal forms of representation, expression, and interpretation.

**Findings**

*Overview*

Initially, emergent themes such as everyday life and family were identified and were very much in keeping with my previous storytelling work (Binder, 2011b).

I also recognized many of the themes discussed by Paley (1991) such as friendship and retellings of known stories. Some themes differed by gender, especially stories related to pop culture, as discussed by Dyson (1997, 2003). For example, many stories told by the boys included Scooby Doo and Monster House, while many girls referred to fairy tales such as Disney’s Snow White. Some themes overlapped, for example, everyday experience, popular culture, and imaginary stories. The interconnection between imaginary and real in the children’s stories is consistent with research by Gallas (2003). The table below lists some of the themes that emerged.

Personal everyday experience	Imaginary stories	Blended stories of imaginary and real	Nature	Abandonment	Popular culture
Playing in the park	Dinosaurs	Making sense of real events through pretend stories	Caring for nature	Retellings of Cinderella, Snow White	Scooby Doo, Monster House, and Lightning McQueen
Being with family and friends	Fairy tale creatures, such as unicorns	Observations of real world through pretend stories	Observing nature	Retelling of <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i>	Snow White and Cinderella (Disney)
Playing with toys	Retelling of fairy tales		Nature as focus of story	Baby looked after by wolves	

Other observations were also significant. A caring interaction became apparent while children were working together during the acting. Teachers identified changes in the social interaction among several of the children, for example, helping others during the acting and not being judgmental. These actions reflect the community building that resulted from being actively involved in each other’s stories and points to the potential of a care ethic developing (Noddings, 2011).

Many of the drawings in the class book were literal representations of the chosen story, but some of the children extended the story or changed elements. For example, Darcy (age 4) told a story about himself skating indoors and decided when drawing his story to depict himself outside with snowflakes falling (see Figure 1). Nina (age 4 ½) drew her parents into the story as additional imaginary characters not originally represented in her dictated story (see Figure 2).

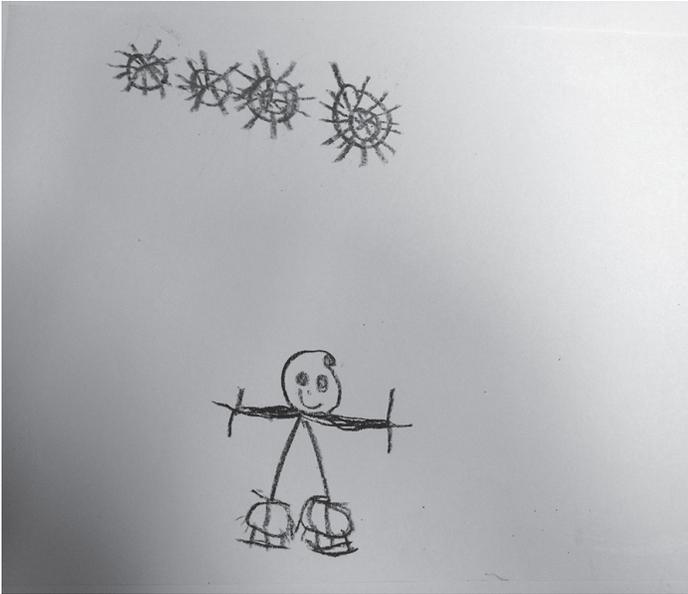


Figure 1: Inside/Outside Story

“I know how to skate. And I went skating on ice. It was inside ice. I wear different shoes. They look like whiskers. They are old. I skate by myself. The end.”

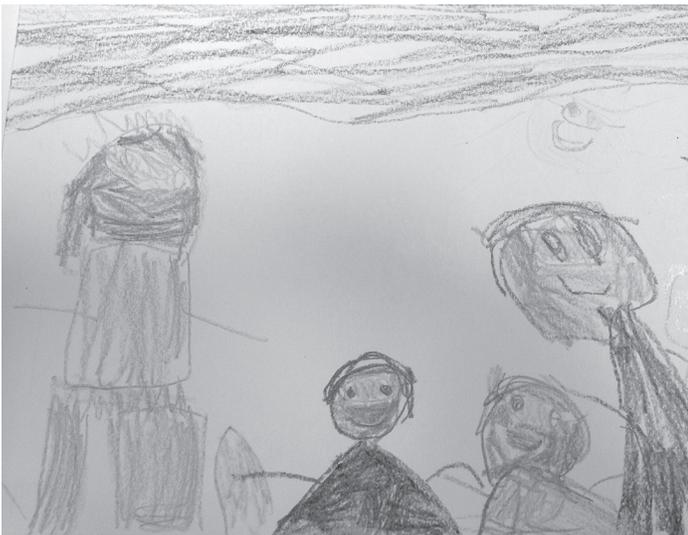


Figure 2: The Fancy Ball

“Once upon a time there was a girl named Nina. She tried to wear her dress but she couldn’t explain why her dress was so beautiful. She wanted to wear it so much. It had stars all over it and then she went outside to play with her tea set with Mary but Mary had a tea set all by herself.”

The first two stories I present below provide relevant exemplars of how the multimodal approaches and process supported the expression of voice through story spaces. Subsequent stories demonstrate how listening, watching, and paying attention

to children’s visual representations can also deepen our understanding of how children view themselves and their worlds, offering a mutually informative relationship between teacher and learner. Together the stories represent the effect of ongoing opportunities to tell stories that come from the inside and truly listening. When children share stories, it is a privilege to enter into their world and engage with them.

#### *Multimodal storytelling spaces*

The stories of Michael and Melanie below demonstrate the benefit of multimodal storytelling spaces for communicating and expressing lived experiences in the learning environment. The totality of the multimodal process and experience was key. The opportunity to choose when, where, and how they could express themselves was a critical component that contributed to strengthening the children’s connections to self, others, and their worlds. Though both children expressed that they either didn’t like drawing or felt they were not good at it, the multimodal nature of the activity offered many opportunities for them to communicate and create their stories, thus empowering their choices and voice. In addition, being invited to be part of the class storytelling book through their illustrations provided them the narrative space to express their dislikes as well as their preferences.

#### *Michael’s stories.*

Michael’s two stories reflected themes of caring for nature and blending the imaginary with the real. In talking with Michael (age 6) about his first story, it became apparent that he was attempting to make sense of a real-life situation. Michael’s stories revealed a grappling with life and death as well as an environmental consciousness and empathy. He was very confident in authoring his stories orally. In the case of the second story, he knew exactly what he wanted to tell. However, he did not want to act in his story plays. Instead, he carefully chose his actors and directed them so his play would be performed accurately. From observations and his choices, one could presume some discomfort with performative activities. While Michael’s drawing in Figure 3 illustrates his second story, his stories are presented below in sequence because it became evident that one followed the other.

#### *Story 1: The Tree*

***Once there was a tree and it was almost winter. And the tree didn’t want to grow in the summer. So it rained, it sunned, and it got windy. And it woke up and in the winter it didn’t want to go down. And then a human came and planted a friend for the tree. And the tree grew and grew and then it wanted water and a person came and he watered the tree. The end.***

Michael brought together a story about nature from an actual event in his life and what could happen in an imaginary land. Following the storytelling, he told me the city was going to cut down a tree on his property. He had watched them mark the sick tree. His story

suggested that he was trying to make sense of this event. Michael showed his empathy by wanting to keep the tree alive, and he created a fictional character to take care of the tree. He said: “I also dreamed about it getting chopped down. That’s how much I’ve been thinking about it.” He also talked about the tree being “sort of scared” and how he would be scared too: “I would—I would just be scared, I would—I wouldn’t wanna have them just cut my branches off. As like sometimes people say they’re cutting the tree’s hair off.” While this statement reflected an animistic quality, Michael also demonstrated his compassionate understanding of the tree being alive, while possibly beginning to recognize the tension between humans and control over nature. The storied resolution shows his insight into the interconnectedness of all living things.

### *Story 2: The Lawnmower and the Plant*

*Once there was a plant and there was a lawnmower that sometimes accidentally chops down a plant. So the plant was scared and didn’t want to be chopped down. So the lawnmower tried not to chop plants down. It chopped down by accident some of the plant’s friends. And so it never chopped down plants again. The end.*

In the second story, told four weeks later, Michael revealed his decision to tell a bit of a scary story. In his words, “sometimes stories like have a scary part in it, but then it turns out good in the end.” In this story, Michael tried to find a solution to a scary event so it didn’t happen again. While the first story held a dilemma, there was no resolution to the real story. His dictated story reflected what he wished to see happen. There was no sense of what happened to the tree. Resolution was much stronger in Michael’s second story. He also chose to conclude with a happy ending for the plant even though he inferred initially that the ending could differ. In the lawnmower story, his voice was very clear about how it all worked out.

Michael’s compassion for living things is evident and significant. He shows empathy and care in his feelings for the tree in the first story and the plant in the second. There is a strong personal connection to both tree and plant, and one can’t help but consider the interrelationship between Michael’s identity and understanding of the world around him. His sense of conviction about living things and not letting them die by human hands is powerful and emerges strongly through his storytelling voice. His detailed account of real-life experiences ties together through his transfer of one mode to another and also his use of modes simultaneously (talk and gesture).

When directing the lawnmower story in particular, Michael verbally described how he wanted the lawnmower to move. He was very attentive to the child selected to be the lawnmower and how he showed this in his gestures. While Michael did not

participate in the acting of either of his stories, he stood close beside me while I read, his eyes watching with intensity how his stories would unfold through the interpretations of others’ movements. It was through the mode of storytelling and drama that Michael made his thoughts visible.

Michael did not show the same strength of voice in his visual representations. Drawing did not appear to be an area where he felt in control or displayed authorship. He told me while we were sitting together that he really didn’t like drawing, but his drawing of the lawnmower story still revealed choices about his drawing preferences. He wanted his lawnmower story in the class book (see Figure 3). His drawing was done predominantly with a red crayon because he liked the colour red. The only other colour is a flash of green that he used for the grass. He also revealed that his lawnmower needed to be bigger than other objects/people drawn.



Figure 3: The Lawnmower Story

By actively listening to Michael and engaging him in conversation about his drawing, I was able to understand more about him and his view of himself. Having the mode of drawing as part of the storytelling activity revealed that Michael did not want to take risks in areas where he did not feel he had control or ownership. Although his drawing did not particularly add to the oral narrative or offer deeper insights into his story, the process of sitting with him while he was drawing and of listening to what he said contributed significantly to understanding Michael’s perceptions of self, his strengths, and comfort zones. The combination of his drawing and talk offered a glimpse into his life world. This reciprocity of learning is a key component of the teaching and learning process.

Michael’s overt strengths were in his ability to tell his story and to direct others, as evidenced by his being more vocal during the story-acting sessions and his expression of how he wanted the

acting to be done. He chose what he wished to actively participate in (e.g., directing but not acting). He articulated his choices through describing his images to me and expressing his feelings about the act of drawing itself.

### *Melanie's stories.*

#### *Story 1: Odashaka*

*Once upon a time there was a little baby who lived in an old river shack and the baby lived near two little streams of river. And the baby's name was Odashaka. An animal found the baby because sometimes wolves find babies and raise babies. The end.*

Melanie (age 4) offered a short but intriguing myth-like story that brought together a caring nature story through a more imaginative telling. One could infer that Melanie has knowledge of another story in which animals raise babies, and possibly some knowledge of animals, as she comments in her reasoning for the story: "wolves are friendly and they raise babies." One wonders if this explanation may have been a need to justify an imaginary story. The mythical quality shows Melanie's understanding of story structure and her bringing prior knowledge to her story: wolves take care of babies. Her theme of abandonment and resolution reflects a strong fairy tale quality and ends with all being well in the world.

I was intrigued by the name Odashaka. Melanie told me it was made up. It appeared that Melanie came to the session with this story in mind. When she sat down and was asked if she had a story, she began to tell her story clearly and confidently. This confidence and ability to articulate her ideas suggests previous opportunities and experiences with telling stories. Melanie clearly had planned ahead. This was her first story, and it demonstrated themes of abandonment, nature, and fantasy. Human and animal characters interacted directly with each other and, in this case, the human depended on the animal for survival.

Melanie explored and demonstrated her imaginative capacities. Her strength was in her oral storytelling and acting. She wanted not only to direct the acting, but also to be Odashaka. Her unique story lets us observe these two strong modes of communicating and expressing voice: oral language and gesturing. During the rehearsal, she positioned the other children exactly where she wanted them to stand. Melanie, even while acting herself, watched how the others acted out her story while I read. This direction shows the strength of her authorship. Her ability to transfer between the two modes of story telling and story acting reflect how she paid attention to details and kept the integrity of her story. Giving Melanie multimodal learning spaces to take ownership of her story revealed her thoughts and reflected her agentic capacities.

Melanie's second story, Snow White and Cinderella, told four weeks later, was a blend of the two fairy tale heroines meeting each other and dealing with issues of abandonment by wicked

stepmothers.

#### *Story 2: Snow White and Cinderella*

*When Snow White was little she lived with a nice mommy. When her mommy died, the hunter married another mommy, but it was the bad queen. Well, Snow White lived in the castle for a time until she came out at the other end of the forest. The hunter told her to go because the bad queen was jealous and mad. Animals found her in the forest. She was just imagining that there was creepy monsters in the forest, but they were little nice animals. They brought her to the dwarfs' house, but the queen could find her because she has a magic mirror. The magic mirror tells her everything.*

*Cinderella had a bad queen, too, and her mommy died, too, and she had a stepmom, two stepsisters. Cinderella knows Snow White because they lived in the same world. But Cinderella stays in the castle forever.*

This blending of the imaginary and real and reinterpreting of two fairy tales demonstrates Melanie's perception and understanding of common themes and differences. It illustrates how children retell stories, adding or taking away details through their retelling. Her interpretation reveals her attempt to understand "good" and "bad" in people and how issues of conflict can be resolved. Melanie took two well-known fairy tales and, through her retelling, made them her own by bringing the characters together. This strategy reflects the agentic nature of the choices she made throughout the storytelling. She also demonstrated an understanding of fairy tales when she described the two characters as living in the same world, which she separates from the real world.

Again, Melanie was extremely particular about how the story should be acted out. She directed her peers as well as acted in it. She was Snow White. Her confidence and focus were remarkable throughout the telling and acting. She positioned the children exactly where she wanted them to be and assisted one or two in how they should portray their actions. This example speaks to the importance of allowing children different modes of expression, such as gesture and talk, for developing a sense of self and a expressing a strong voice when interacting with their world.

Melanie chose to draw the baby and the three wolves for the class book. She just uses a green outline for all the figures (see Figure 4). While chatting during the drawing session, Melanie revealed that she didn't think she was a very good artist. She said, "I don't like to draw in kindergarten." When I asked her why, she said, "I draw sometimes but people don't give me a turn to draw." While she did not elaborate even when asked, her comment indicates a significant social dimension and offers insight into her perceptions of self. Interestingly, I was told she had engaged with painting and other visual arts the year before, during preschool. While her drawing could not be easily viewed as a story in itself, it contributed

to her engagement with the process and making choices, wanting to be a part of the class book by selecting a story and representing it. At the time of the research, Melanie had just turned four and was beginning to show more representation in her drawings. It could be offered that she was comparing her drawings to those of her peers, who perhaps showed more detail and form.

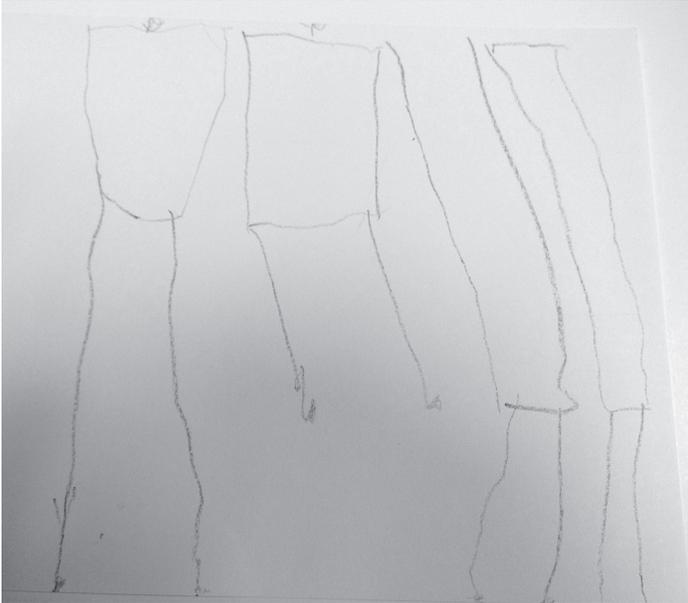


Figure 4: Odashaka Story

Melanie showed a strong presence throughout the project. She told her story and acted with confidence. She was adamant about me reading the story “just so,” correcting my mistakes when I read her story aloud. I actually recall that she said, during the second story acting, that I had made a mistake when reading. Providing such multimodal spaces for children enables them to take ownership of their experiences and begin to challenge their comfort zones. It empowers them to express choice and voice within their learning community in meaningful ways.

*Deepening teacher understanding through visual representations*  
Drawing stories provided another opportunity for the children to represent their narratives and make connections to the two previous modes of communicating: in this case, the oral stories (sound) and acting of the stories (gesture and movement). The following two stories illustrate how drawings go beyond the dictated text and add depth to our insight into children’s life worlds. In these two cases, the drawings could stand alone as visual narratives.

#### *Cathy’s stories.*

##### *Story 2: I Like Nature*

***Once upon a time there was a flower, but it was growing on a tree. Then the wind blew the flower onto the ground and then***

***it landed in a mole hole. And then the mole saw the flower plugging the hole. And he dug some more to another hole. And then the flower grew and then the mole hole was just in a person’s garden. And the person saw the flower sprout and watered it and he saw the bud and sunned it.***

I selected Cathy’s second story to discuss here because it was the one she chose to be represented for the class book. It blends nature, imaginary, and empathy. It also reveals her understanding of story structure. Cathy (age 5) made strong connections between her interest in nature and her knowledge of a specific animal: the mole. Cathy spoke English as a second language. While initially very quiet, she began to display more confidence throughout the process. She took risks and acted in her own play. She was observed interacting more with other children and speaking more in small and large group situations during the regular classroom activities.

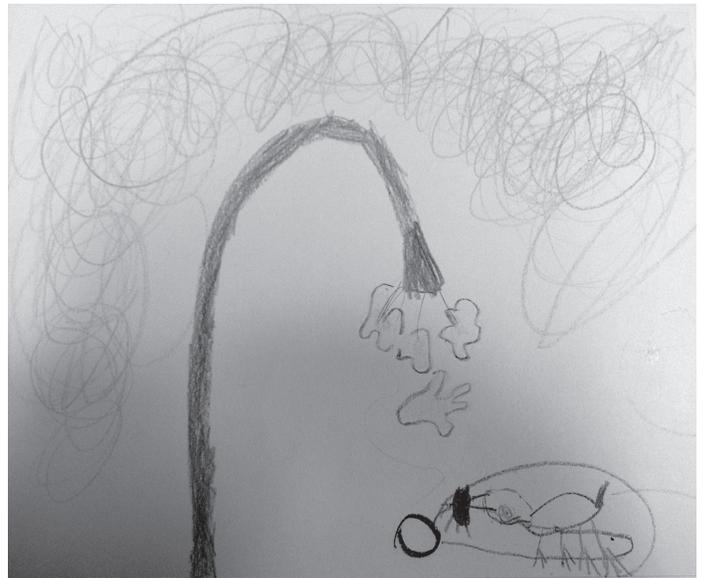


Figure 5: The Flower and the Mole

In our conversation before the storytelling dictation, Cathy stated: “I like nature because it’s beautiful. And I picked flowers up when they land on the ground.” This statement led to a short discussion about what nature is and what she liked about it. Her story reveals her understanding of what nature means to her. For Cathy, nature was what was around her outside. It included animals and plants. Her drawing (see Figure 5) mirrors her verbal ideas with interesting detail: the flower that grows out of the tree is bent toward the hole; a flower petal gently falls to the ground where one assumes it falls close to the mole hole. Multiple swirling lines above depict the movement of the wind. We have an x-ray view into the mole hole and see the mole digging. Cathy chose not to include the person watering the flower. This drawing may speak to what she has observed personally. When they draw, children often represent elements that are most meaningful to them.

Cathy's drawing not only complements her story, it offers additional insight into how she understands the elements of weather and an animal habitat. There is a connection represented between her understanding of nature and her own learning. One could infer that Cathy had encountered a mole before in a previous story and was bringing her prior knowledge into her story. While text and image complement each other, the image Cathy creates can stand on its own as well. The viewer would be able to "read" the story from the drawing. Her drawing reflects how engaging with multiple modes enable children to communicate through a nontraditional literacy mode and allows for a deeper understanding than just the dictated text could offer.

#### *Dina's story.*

#### *Snow White.*

*Snow White is kind and gentle. The witch wants to give Snow White an apple. The witch wants to be more beautiful than her. Snow White ate the apple and she sleep on her bed. The witch turned to scary. And the elf gave her lots of flowers. And the prince kiss her and she waked up. The End.*



Figure 6: Snow White

Dina (age 5) used humour to encourage understanding when she showed a prince thinking about love in her Snow White picture (see Figure 6). He appears to be leaping after her. Dina drew little cartoon idea bubbles with hearts inside coming out of each side of his head. This device reveals possible previous experiences with comics or cartoons. Dina sat beside me giggling as she was drawing the picture. Her picture reflects her interpretation of one particular scene in the story, while her dictated story was more of a summary with little snippets.

Dina's sophisticated use of idea bubbles in the picture demonstrates

her understanding and connection of text to images and extending beyond the original story. Her telling of Snow White resembles the Disney version, which was a favourite of many of the girls in the class, and reveals the ubiquitousness of Disney in childhood culture. Dina puts a personal interpretation into her drawing. She makes use of text and symbols by putting in the cloud-like cartoon bubbles with hearts in them. The prince is thinking about "love" as he gazes upon Snow White, and Dina makes his thoughts public to the viewer. Snow White is in the foreground smiling as we watch the prince leaping after her. Dina has taken ownership of her story and focuses in detail on a particular aspect of what she wishes to show.

We gain insight into Dina's world as we learn through how she represents the prince that she possibly "thinks about thinking." Sitting with Dina, I discovered her delightful sense of humour, which she revealed while drawing. I found myself giggling with her throughout the drawing session. She even giggled when acting out her story with others. Her delight in showing the relationship between Snow White and the prince was evident. Though Dina reflected a popular story, she extended her understanding of the elements of this story through her drawing detail. Her detailed additions gave me further insight into her understanding, not only of an imaginary story, but also of her interpretation of relationships between people.

#### **Conclusion**

The results of this storytelling project offer insights into the necessity of creating multimodal spaces for children's storied lives. Stories told and acted can create a classroom community where narratives are shared publicly in an environment that encourages risk taking and support. Drawing stories offers children another space in which to communicate their thoughts and interpret them. A convergence of fact and fiction often reveals the complexities of children's lived worlds and their interpretative lenses. We learned from Michael and Melanie that their voices became stronger and more visible through the multiple modes of stories told and acted out. Also important were the choices they made in representing their stories and being afforded the space to communicate their discomfort with using this particular mode of representation to tell a story (Soto, 2005). The intersection of drawing and talking with an adult beside them added a relational layer that provides deeper insights into how the children thought and communicated about their experiences in the world (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011).

Nancy and Dina showed the significance of how drawing their stories adds to our understanding of how they view themselves and their worlds. Also of note is how their drawings can stand alone as narrative pieces. This observation supports the idea of art as a form of language (Binder & Kotsopoulos, 2011; Kind, 2010, Steele, 2008). One is able to read the images, the grammar of line and form (Bamford, 2003). In this way, insight into the

world of the child is extended through reading the sign systems of the images. This phenomenon was observed with other children as well.

The process of orally telling a story, acting or moving in and with the story, and then drawing the story supports multiple ways to communicate and bring narratives together. The interplay of the three modes (with the addition of ideas in one, reinterpreted in others) reflects the intention of the child through the interrelation of different forms of text (Dyson, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012).

While Michael and Melanie expressed their personal feelings about not liking drawing because they were not good at it, they were pleased to contribute to the class book and to be part of the class community activity. While this involvement may not have immediately taken away their feelings of discomfort about drawing, building on the strength of their authorship and abilities to direct their personal stories offered a space where they could perhaps over time experience more comfort with the mode of drawing and add it to their repertoire. As Ahn and Filipenko (2007) suggest, narrative “is a dynamic meeting space between the children’s inner lives (emotions and thoughts) and their external world” (p. 287). This idea would extend to visual narratives as well.

Nicolopoulou, de Sa, Ilgaz, and Brockenmeyer (2010) discuss the power of children acting out their stories with others and the implications of reconceptualizing a storytelling community. Engaging in a storytelling curriculum allows children to make their thoughts public—orally, dramatically, and in this particular case, through their drawings. The classroom culture of learning is strengthened through children moving in and out of each other’s play spaces while interacting with each other’s multimodal narrative stories. While the stories share many commonalities in terms of themes, they are unique in that the children experience the individual signature of their peers’ stories through the acting and drawings. The distinctive nuance of the context (told, acted, and drawn) reinforces and deepens insights and strengthens the interconnections among all participants in the learning environment.

Multiple modes of communication and expression afford us entry into children’s lived worlds. They can transform the learning experience into one where adult and children become co-learners together. The story curriculum through story play offers ways to (re)create learning in the classroom through curiosity and wonder. Through this approach, we are reminded of the possibilities of new lived experiences these story spaces can bring to the everyday lived worlds of children.

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# Stories in the Classroom: Building Community Using Storytelling and Storyacting

Jamie Zepeda

**Jamie Zepeda** completed her master's degree in early childhood education at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research, an autobiographical narrative inquiry, focuses on Vivian Paley's philosophies of using a storytelling curriculum to enhance classroom community and relationships between the teacher and students. Jamie has taught in various elementary school settings. Her passion resides with her three little girls and the kindergarten children she teaches and is inspired by. Email: [jzepeda@gscs.sk.ca](mailto:jzepeda@gscs.sk.ca)

In this article I describe how, over the past school year, I have witnessed a diverse, culturally mixed group of kindergarten children, who were strangers to one another, join hands and voices as they tackled particular challenges together. I attribute this togetherness to our daily experimentation with storytelling and storyacting (Paley, 1981, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2010). As if pieces in a puzzle, many storytelling and storyacting moments helped the students to cooperatively “click” by enhancing their relationships with one another and strengthening the sense of community in the classroom environment. I see reciprocity in the relationships as the students listen to each other's needs and ideas and, in the process, have their own voices heard. The outcome of this reciprocity has been a noticeable feeling of community and kinship in the classroom arising out of a sense of empathy, understanding, friendship, and acceptance and resulting in greater self-confidence and a sense of security for the children as individual members within the community.

“That's weird!” “You can't play with us!” and “Do you even like her?” were phrases I heard much too often in the early years classrooms in which I have worked. They are words that seem to bring out the insecurities in all of us, words that are meant to hurt and exclude one another. I have found that explaining to the children how hurtful these words are or punishing the exclusionary behaviour have not been effective strategies to help students comprehend the hurt they have caused. Over time, I have explored other ideas to attempt to create strong classroom communities, and Vivian Paley's storytelling and storyacting curriculum has offered one intervention that seems to have had positive effects.

With Paley's storytelling and storyacting curriculum (1981, 1984, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2010), my kindergarten students have learned to walk in each other's footsteps and understand each other's differing perspectives (Coles, 1989; Paley, 1999). A daily process that includes the students dictating their own story as I write it down, our new curriculum has helped children find their own voice, building levels of confidence and self-worth (Gordon, 2005). Their stories provide the students with a sense of belonging within the class and “contribute to both [their]

knowing and [their] being known” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). When these stories are acted out later in the day, the students seem to see themselves and the actors or peers in a new light, helping them create new meanings or understandings of one another. Egan (1999) shared that these stories can be a great tool for “catching and fixing meaning” (p. 16) in understanding the roles we play and the settings we occupy.

As the children share their feelings, values, and concerns with one another through these stories, possibilities are created for the children to authentically communicate and relate to one another. The children become attuned to the needs and feelings of others, thus developing their sense of empathy and fostering a common ground on which to build stable and supportive friendships. Through the sharing and dramatization of their stories, the students come together and we all take ownership to “enlist each other's help in building our lives and communities” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44). I have collected a number of our original classroom scenarios and explored them to identify how Paley's storytelling and storyacting curriculum has enabled a community to develop in our classroom. I have chosen to share just three of these stories to illustrate how the children have developed a cohesive classroom community by listening to each other's needs and being empathetic in understanding them.

## The Beginning of an Us

The recess commotion has begun and the children are excitedly putting on their summer jackets, making plans for where and with whom they will play. The tears begin to fall from sweet Rielle's big brown eyes as she clings to my side in panic for what's to come. She is new to our country, with a limited English vocabulary, so finding and making friends at recess is a frightening task for her. In the two weeks since school began, I have paired her with a few recess buddies and asked the others to play with her, but somehow she knows that those are her “assigned” friends and the connection is not truly genuine.

Her daily tears upset us all. After many failed attempts to help her socialize with the others, something finally clicked: a story, created solely for Rielle by me, Rielle, and her classmates—by our community. As a group, we addressed the making of this story

during our daily storyacting session right after morning recess.

“Boys and girls, I would like to write a story today about a little girl who doesn’t like to go out for recess. Do you think you could help me with this?”

“Yeah!” they excitedly shout, not appearing to recognize the correlation with Rielle.

“Okay, how about we start it with . . . *One sunny day, there was a sweet little girl, and she did not like to go outside for recess.*” I say it slowly, but write it quickly on my paper as the children patiently listen.

“Why do you think she didn’t want to go outside?” I pretend to survey the crowd, but my question has an intentional direction. “Rielle?”

Her gaze shifts uncomfortably from the ground to me, showing her uncertainty with her surroundings and the activity.

She quietly mumbles, “No friends.”

“Aw, that would be sad to go outside for recess with no friends. Do you think she should have some friends in the story, kids?” They are quick to agree. “How can we write it in our story that she has friends to play with?”

“You could say, *So . . . at recess time the next day, she went out with her new friends,*” replies Taliya. It’s as simple as that.

“Where do they play?” I ask.

“They play tag, then they go on the slide,” says Andrew. “Where else do they play, Rielle?”

“They play slide,” she shares, showing a bit more confidence in her response.

“Okay. We’ve got a good story now. Let me read it to you. *One sunny day, there was a sweet little girl, and she did not like to go outside for recess because she had no friends to play with. So, at recess time the next day, she went out with her new friends and they played tag and then went on the slide.* How should we end the story?”

“They had fun,” Ahman adds.

“Good ending. Now, we need someone to be the little girl in the story. Rielle, would you like to do that?”

“Yep,” she quickly jumps up and walks to the middle of the carpet.

“So, who are her friends then?”

Bouncing onto their knees, waving their hands in the air, a number of students express their desire to be in the story. “I will be her friend!” they all volunteer.

Five students proudly take on the role of Rielle’s friends and they act out the story to an attentive audience. It is hard to miss the beaming smile that has spread across Rielle’s face as she and her new friends pretend to go down a slide and chase each other in slow motion on the small carpet. The giggles are contagious and the whole class delights in our first class story. As the next recess approaches, Rielle’s friends from the story are quick to ask her to play monster tag outside, and they happily skip down the hallway holding hands.

### Empathy and Understanding

Our first story created together as a group was, in Lillian Tully’s words, “the beginning of an us” (cited in Paley, 2001, p. 12). The children saw the similarities in the story to that which they saw happening in the classroom on a daily basis. They expressed empathy and concern in finding friends for the little girl in the story, more so than when they saw her crying in real life. Why is this so? Bateson (1994) said that “our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories” (p. 11). Olson (1995) added that by constructing these stories we are trying to make sense of our world. For Rielle, this community discussion was not embarrassing in that her struggles were made public. Instead, it was affirming. Her difficulties were acknowledged and supported by her peers. She was no longer invisible (Paley, 1990), or the girl who went unnoticed (Paley, 2001).

By creating a story out of Rielle’s silent plea for a friend, the children took on a new emotional perspective (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner, & Rammingner, 2008) and began to make sense of where she was coming from and why she was feeling the way she was. She was no longer the girl who always cries at recess, but the girl who is sad because she has no friends to play with. Even as adults, when we understand someone’s story, or their circumstances, we are more empathetic to their experiences. In Rielle’s case, the children did not seem to connect the story directly to her, but they made the connection in that they had seen this situation played out before. By writing the story down and discussing it as a group, the children learned to “live the experience with [her]” (Tully, cited in Paley, 2001, p. 32). They are now better prepared to emotionally and socially respond the next time the situation presents itself.

For Rielle, she saw herself differently after we acted out the story. Taking on the role of the girl who has friends to play with was like trying on a new pair of shoes. It took a little while to break them in and get used to the new feeling, but once she tried them on and saw how great they looked and felt, it became hard to go back to the old ones. Those new shoes gave her a sense of empowerment and newfound confidence in herself. When her new friends from the story asked her to play, she knew they meant it, and that she

herself was the girl they wanted to play with, because she had already played this scenario out. More than anything, this helped Rielle prove “the necessity of [her] existence” (Paley, 2010). Paley’s friend Yu-Ching wrote that, “by proving they are necessary and useful in a story, [the children] demonstrate that they have a reason to exist, to be here with others” (p. 25). This story, as simple as it was, helped Rielle find her place within the group and to feel that sense of belonging she so desperately needed.

With this dramatization of Rielle’s story, the students are given opportunities to relate and connect to one another. Mary Gordon (2005) suggests that this ability to interact with peers and efficiently communicate one’s feelings helps to nurture the growth of children’s social and emotional competence. Possessing the skills to socialize in a positive way with others comes naturally to some children and is a struggle for others, but research supports that developing positive social relationships is a strong factor in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978), positive self-worth, healthy social relationships, and academic success (Buisse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2003; Riley et al., 2008; Nissen & Hawkins, 2010). By creating a story together, Rielle was able to identify what it was that made her sad and, with the help of her peers, create a solution. Rielle’s feelings were validated and she was inspired by realizing that her voice was heard by the group. She had friends. She was no longer alone. The group heard her voice and reached out as a supportive community does.

### The Need to be Heard

Briana also needed to feel that connection to the group. Though she knew most of the children already and seemed comfortable enough with her surroundings, she was often seen playing alone, occasionally looking up from what she was doing to see if anyone wanted to join her. Maddy’s story created the perfect opening.

“That’s how the bats got hurted—they got fire on their backs, but the firefighters came and putted it out,” Maddy gingerly states. It is her turn to tell a story and this individual learning time will most likely be the highlight of her day. She knows that after recess we will act out her story on the carpet, and she’s already surveying the list of actors she will pick to take part in her story. Silently playing in the corner with the bats sits Briana, whose ears perk up as soon as she hears about her favourite toy to play with. With a quick pace she sidles up beside Maddy and watches as I write and say each word out loud.

“Hey, Maddy, do you think you could put a ninja bunny in your story?” asks Briana. “Wanna know why? ‘Cuz they’re really cool and they hop really fast and one time I watched on TV and the ninja bunny got ran over. It was sad.”

“Oh,” Maddy sympathetically replies, half expecting a happier ending to Briana’s mini story. She thinks about it for a mere two seconds and then quickly agrees: “Okay. Then a ninja bunny

comes and they dance in the flying water. And a puppy, too.” They both laughed and giggled together for the remainder of the day.

### Friendship and Acceptance

The ninja bunny had been a central character in Briana’s stories and the theme of him dying had been a frequent topic of interest. Perhaps it was an idea she needed to explore or a topic she didn’t quite understand; therefore, she brought it out in her stories and her play (Cooper, 2009). I have witnessed this dynamic repeatedly over the last year with my students. Whether it’s about a girl who cut her hair or another who’s afraid of monsters in the closet, the children seem to find a safe haven in their stories. It is through telling them and acting them out that things start to make sense or become okay. Paley (1990) wrote that it is through their fantasy play that children explore “nothing less than Truth and Life” (p. 17). Cooper added that by paying close attention to the children’s stories, we will find that “some are based on truth, some on fiction, but all are based on need” (p. 67). Just as adults vent or express concerns to a friend, a young child explores the topics or ideas that are puzzling to him or her with an attentive and receptive audience. Such exploration is therapeutic and helps children to relate to and understand one another. This individual time recognizes the need to be heard, acknowledged, and understood by the greater community.

When it was time to act out the story, Briana, not surprisingly, volunteered for and was designated the role of the ninja bunny. Paley (1999) suggested that “to give someone a role to play—a lost baby, the suffering mother, the virtuous sibling—is akin to offering new life to a wandering soul” (p. 43). When Briana was given a role to play in the story, she felt necessary to the group (Paley, 2010). Her social status as a friend was elevated because her ideas and her presence were accepted. She was able to connect her own ideas to the ideas of another (Paley, 1991). As children borrow and play with each other’s ideas through their stories and imaginative play, their ideas are supported and explored by their peers and their confidence soars.

Through the creation of the story, Maddy was given an opportunity to develop altruistic values, or prosocial behaviour driven by the desire to help others without the motivation of a personal reward (Riley et al., 2008). Maddy empathetically sensed Briana’s need to include the ninja bunny in the story. She listened carefully to Briana’s story and suggestions and, even though there was no correlation between the bears, the firefighters, and the traumatic happenings of the lone ninja bunny, Maddy changed her story to include the thoughts of a friend. Briana delighted in the acceptance of her idea and the two continued playing and creating new scenarios for the remainder of their playtime. Riley et al. (2008) conclude that, by engaging in problem solving, negotiation, and compromise, children learn to appreciate and understand each other’s thoughts and feelings, creating an opportunity to show one another kindness and “consider perspectives other than their own”

(Floyd & Cooper, 2008). By co-authoring their story and being receptive to each other's needs and ideas, Briana and Maddy created a bond of friendship and understanding.

### Finding His Voice

It is only a few days later when I witness Jacob and Braxton showing that same kindness to a friend. Kyle was hesitant to take part in group activities, and it was only through play that he truly came alive. Until now, the students had always volunteered willingly to tell their story, but Kyle was the lone ranger in that he refused to take part in telling or acting the stories.

"Mommy, help! I no fly! Help, Mommy! Help!" cries the baby voice of Kyle as he carefully places his toy dinosaur in their desired spots. "I falling, Mommy! Catch me! Catch me now!" he squeals as the baby dinosaur tumbles to the ground.

The unusually high-pitched voice catches my attention. Having been rejected by Kyle before, I tread carefully, asking him if I can write his story down.

He thinks about it a moment and quietly nods his head. It's a short story, and after we read it over together, I hesitantly ask him if he'd like to be a character in his story. I am not surprised to hear a firm "NO!" but we are both pleasantly surprised to hear "I will" coming from the snack table. Jacob had been listening, and almost sensed the looming anxiety that would overcome Kyle.

"Do you want Jacob to be in your story?" I ask.

He agrees. Success! "J-a-c-o-b," I sound out as we triumphantly write down the first character in Kyle's first ever story with us.

"Can I be in your story, too?" Braxton asks. He, too, was listening and was eager to be a part of the action.

This is a first for Kyle. Not only has he created a story, but he has friends who want to be in it! He is glowing. "Okay, you can be the baby dinosaur and I'll be the daddy dinosaur." Though there is not a part for a daddy dinosaur yet, we manage to fit a daddy dinosaur in.

As the time approaches to act out the story, my excitement and nervousness for Kyle seem to be shared by a few of the children. Standing up and acting in the stories has been well rehearsed by the class, but it is no secret that Kyle has always been reluctant and has never participated. He seems to lack the confidence to try anything new, such as writing his name or colouring a picture. Acting in front of his peers would seem especially intimidating. Fortunately, Jacob and Braxton recognize this and calm Kyle's nerves by making sure to sit beside him when they gather around the carpet. As the time approaches to turn themselves into dinosaurs, Jacob does not take his eyes off of Kyle. He continually gives him

looks of encouragement and reassurance that he is doing well. As the class appreciatively applauds, Kyle grabs his new friends' hands and proudly takes a bow (or four). The boys then head back to their seats on the carpet, holding hands—a display of affection very rare for these three boys.

### Self-Confidence and Security

From the experience described above, it is apparent to me now that children often hear things differently than we do (Paley, 2004). Though I was still pushing for Kyle to join us, Jacob instinctively recognized Kyle's apprehension in inventing and sharing his story by himself. Like a supportive community would do, the boys reached out to Kyle when he was struggling and "willingly fill[ed] in the empty spaces" (Paley, 2001, p. 22). Kyle knew they were there to offer support in areas where he needed it. Having Jacob and Braxton stand with him on stage and validate that his ideas were worth sharing made the stage and classroom less threatening to him. Kyle began to feel he had something to say that was worthy to the group and that the community genuinely wanted to hear it. It was not enough for Kyle to have the teacher's support. He needed it from his peers as well, from his friends. Paley (1999) said that "these stories . . . depend on the kindness of children. When joined by a companion, loneliness vanishes, allowing goddesses [or goodness] to step forward and play a part in their story" (p. 95). This goodness not only helped Kyle, but it also gave Braxton and Jacob the confidence to develop those altruistic values and take on new roles as positive leaders in the class. This was a role Braxton was in desperate search of, because he, too, needed some positive affirmations.

Storytelling was not the only subject Kyle was reluctant to participate in. I believe that was because he was very fearful of making a mistake. Asking Kyle to pick up a pencil or crayon and draw a picture would most likely have resulted in an adamant refusal or a downpour of tears. He was not familiar with these objects, or the setting, and they presented a challenge he was not ready to take. Developing the courage to transform himself on stage in front of all his peers made drawing a picture of himself not so difficult anymore. Vygotsky (1978) said that children's play creates a zone of proximal development where they act older than their age and more advanced in their abilities. For Kyle, "it [was] as though he were a head taller than himself" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). As his classmates and friends expressed their belief in him, he started to believe more in himself. He saw himself in a new way, and with time he might say:

*I am someone with ideas; I am someone who turns ideas into actions, and actions into new ideas; and furthermore, this is what I am intended to do. I am intended to have my own ideas. That's why I play the way I do; to show myself what my ideas are, and how necessary I am to the community. (Paley, 2008)*

Through his playing with the bats, transcribing the dialogue into a story, and then dramatizing it with the support of his friends, Kyle began to find a sense of security in how he saw himself and how he interacted with the group. The boys empathized with Kyle in their shared understanding, which created “channels of connection and belonging” (Gordon, 2005, p. 33).

### Our Common Story, Our Community

Too often the sole responsibility for creating a friendly, welcoming atmosphere in the classroom that builds and sustains healthy friendships and promotes the development of a positive self-worth is left entirely to the teacher. While I agree that teachers are the “critical factor” (Hestenes & Carroll, 2000) in how a child’s schooling will unfold, it is unrealistic to think we can reach each child in the way we hope to by ourselves. Listening to their stories and the interactions that take place in making and dramatizing them, I have come to see just how competent and capable the children are in fulfilling those roles and catering to the needs of others. We have become a community that works together with a shared vision in creating a supportive learning community for all. The children see themselves as important characters as we weave ourselves into one common story (Paley, 2001, p. 23).

A favourite quote of mine by Paley (1999) concludes that, in the eyes of a child, “if I am smiled at and dramatized, then I am loved, I am safe, I am not invisible” (p. 88). Much of what we do as educators is centred on this very belief. We want our students to feel good about themselves, to know that what they say has value, and, above all, that we are listening. Storytelling and storyacting have given us all in our kindergarten class a chance to authentically communicate our needs, feelings, and insecurities in ways that we feel we will be heard and respected. If an issue needs to be addressed, I know I can present it to the community and they will all help to resolve the matter. We have become dependent on one another, and “the closeness of [these] connections [are] ultimately the strength of [our] community” (Gordon, 2005, p. 40).

The stories I have shared in this article are not unique in that these themes and opportunities to develop empathy, self-confidence, and friendships continually evolve and present themselves in new ways through the children’s stories. The uniqueness lies in the children’s ability to learn to be socially and emotionally competent, to develop the desire to help others, and to feel good about themselves in the process of storytelling and storyacting. They learn these social concepts in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own understandings of the world, be it with a girl who cries at recess, a ninja bunny, or a baby dinosaur. These are their ideas, and we view them to be important enough to be shared with the class so that we can learn together through them.

In addition to the commonalities discovered between Paley’s successful use of storytelling and storyacting and the behaviour of my students in this kindergarten setting, I am conscious that my own

teaching stance is changing in terms of classroom management. Instead of looking for ways to explain a concept to students, or to punish them toward new behaviour, I am conscious of the power of models in supporting students’ approximations toward positive community interactions and the value of creative drama in creating in-depth understanding. I now see that curriculum is of tremendous importance in designing a classroom environment that fosters the growth of a child’s social and emotional development just as much as the academic development. It has become clear to me that when children’s needs are being met and their concerns have been recognized, they can more easily locate their place within the group, which helps them to feel a sense of security and trust, thus making the environment more conducive to the academic portions of the kindergarten program. This knowledge causes me to ponder what other changes we might make as we move into classrooms of the future with curriculum that is less prescriptive in terms of topics and themes, but more supportive in terms of strategies and techniques.

By listening to and engaging in the children’s stories, we begin to see the similarities among us, the unique attributes we all possess, and we realize that “we all share the same lifeboat” (Gordon, 2005, p. xvii). As we manoeuvre our vessels down these sometimes wavy routes, the children have come to know that they want to be on the lifeboat together, as a community, as we explore and investigate the new directions ahead.

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INFANT/TODDLER

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# Canadian Authors and Canadian Kids: Reading, Writing, and Meaningful Talk

David Ward

**David Ward** is a graduate of the University of British Columbia and an assistant professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He also writes novels and picture books for children. Email: davidward@lclark.edu

This article explores the author's conversations with children about books while on an author tour across Canada. Children's love of stories, their insights, and connectivity to stories are shared in the context of meaningful dialogue. Narrative transportation, a theory developed by communication scholars, is described to help demonstrate the importance in children's lives of stories and talking about stories.

Children love a good story. The delight, the sudden bursts of laughter or the silent, intense stares at the words during an independent reading time are evidence of the engagement between children and stories. Writing a good tale can also be a source of pleasure for children. Describing a family story or using their imaginations to invent a new world can be a wonderful experience for young writers. Children delight in talking about stories, too. As a children's author, I have heard the question "May I read you my story" countless times over. The relationship between reading, writing, and talking about stories was made powerfully apparent to me recently while on author tours across Canada.

Each year, children surprise me with their abilities as young readers and writers. I am also astounded by the impact, the potency, and the value that flows through the transactions between reader, text, and writer. In this article, I explore the intersection of reading, writing, and talk in the context of face-to-face meetings between young and experienced writers.

In every city, as I made my way to author events, on playgrounds, in restaurants, in cars, I saw children using digital devices rather than paper books. It is not the focus of this paper to investigate the merits of digital versus traditional print reading. However, the images of technology in children's hands gave me pause. The question rose in my mind, *Are children abandoning books for games?* It was quickly followed by another, larger, looming question: *What value are children giving to reading and writing in an age when digital technology is so accessible?* The young readers and writers I met while travelling through Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia provided some startling answers to my looming question.

## Setting: Author Presentations

The presentations I conducted at schools or conferences on this

recent tour were with children between the ages of 6 and 12, or grades K and 7. They were interactive sessions with whole classes rather than with small focus groups. I used a PowerPoint with images; artifacts for kids to hold; partner, small-group, and whole-group discussions; volunteers; reading; writing; and lots of conversational exchange with the children. Generally, I asked teachers ahead of time to invite children to bring a sample of their own writing and a favourite book. The size of group varied from place to place, ranging from as small as 20 participants to as large as 500. Presentation spaces included libraries, classrooms, gymnasiums, multipurpose rooms, community theatres, and even dining halls.

Some schools were phenomenally well organized for the event and had student greeters at the door, a banner, announcements over the PA system, and support staff who knew my purpose before I entered the office. Each community faced its own challenges. At one school in Calgary, the entire student population had to move into a temporary district building because their own was in danger of collapsing due to floods. The principal and two teachers madly scrambled to get an old projector up and running for my presentation. None of their regular technology was available. Their tenacity, care for their students, and willingness to help make the event successful were amazing. The children were resilient and demonstrated the same enthusiasm for reading and writing as those in any other school on the visit even though many of them were displaced from their homes.

No two presentations were exactly alike. Sometimes I presented alone. At some sessions, one or two other authors presented as well. At one venue, I had the opportunity of presenting with Governor General's award winner Glen Huser. The event was a part of WordFest and the stage was in a museum with four or five schools attending. Students enthusiastically thrust hands up in the air when we asked them questions about their own reading and writing. At one point a child asked us, "What is your favourite book that you've ever read?" Glen was pensive and hesitated—though we had both fielded the question hundreds of times before. I was curious to see how he would answer. His reply was almost a confession: "There are so many—so many books that have impacted me. I find it hard to say only one." It was a poignant moment. There were nods around the room. It struck me in the instant that all of us writers, young and old, could have made

the same confession as Glen. Each of us had a detailed reading history—titles and authors that have shaped our writing and reading. Books impact our lives.

### Reading Histories

Master storyteller Jane Yolen (1994) once stated that “stories lean on stories” (p. 647). In other words, the stories we write or read are supported by the stories we have heard or read or even written ourselves in the past. There is a momentum to stories, a progression that adds one to another. In another instance, Yolen (1994) referred to herself as an “empress of thieves”—someone who takes elements of stories written by others and weaves them for her own purposes into her story. The stories we have read in the past help shape us into the readers and writers we are today. Like Yolen, each of us, young and old, are literacy thieves, taking the language, the images, the concepts formed through our reading histories. We consciously or unconsciously use our stolen “goods,” the artifacts from other books, to construct our own stories.

The children I met while on tour were exuberant about the books and stories currently active in their reading histories. When I showed the cover of *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) on the screen, there was a collective shout from students. Children mimicked shooting a bow like the main character, they clapped and cheered. At the sight of Hogwarts (Alnwick Castle, England) there was a quiet “ahhhhh” of wonder. Fingers pointed, questions were raised. When Hugo Cabret (Selznick, 2007) appeared, the students broke into a chant of “Hugo! Hugo!” Clearly these books (and subsequent movies) have made an impact on students’ motivation and engagement with stories.

Both during and after the presentations, students made comments about their own writing in relation to the books they had seen on the screen. “I’m writing a book about these kids who are captured by the government,” said one boy. “They have to live away from their families and learn how to fight and train.” After a pause, the boy smiled and added, “I guess it’s kind of like *The Hunger Games*. But in my story...” and he launched into his own version of Collins’s now-famous series.

In city after city, I met children who have written stories about Harry Potter (Rowling, 2001) or *Twilight* (2005), or who have adapted the ending to *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005). The stories we read provide motivation for the stories we write. Growing up, it was *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 1949–1954) that most clearly motivated me to write and to read. I remember stepping into Narnia through imagination as a 9-year-old boy, seeing the creatures, the people, the landscape at any given moment between the start and end of the series. For me, Narnia was quite available. I could transport there in an instant, sometimes doing so late at night while trying to fall asleep. In my mind, the world of Narnia breathed. I could see it, hear it, feel it. Transporting into the world

of a story is part of the reading experience.

At a different session, a young girl came up to me along with a couple of other children and proceeded to tell me the real-life story of her sister’s adventures aboard a cruise ship. Partway along the voyage, they were caught in a terrible storm and were shipwrecked. The girl’s rendition of the story was quite riveting, and it was obvious that she had spent a good deal of time discussing her sister’s emotions and reactions to the adventure at home. Her depictions included comments such as “She was so scared!” and “There was no one . . . no one to help them. They were alone. And afraid.” In my mind’s eye, I pictured a lifeboat with four characters inside, one being the sister. A broad-shouldered sailor bravely heaved on an oar. . . .

Beside me was a young boy, grade 4 or so, who also listened to the shipwreck tale with rapt attention. When the girl was finished, the boy said to her, “That couldn’t have been a typhoon. It must have been a hurricane.” The girl stared at him as if he were quite mad. The boy then proceeded to explain the difference between hurricanes and typhoons. “So,” he concluded, “it must have been a hurricane.” The girl did not speak a word to him. She ignored him completely. Then she smiled awkwardly at me and left with the boy trailing after her, still spouting hurricanes.

What was intriguing about this particular interaction was the emphasis that each participant placed on the story. The girl’s attention was all about the emotions of the story, her sister’s plight, and the grievous pain of being alone at sea. The girl described her sister beautifully: there she was on the water, her face drawn, eyes puffy, afraid. The descriptions were marvellous. I was caught up with the other passengers and their stories. The boy beside me, however, was watching a different movie in his head. He was excited by the waves, by the wind, and the tremendous force strong enough to break apart a cruise ship.

All of us in that story-huddle were participants in the girl’s story. Each of us interacted with the story in our own way and visualized the scenes. As participants, we were transported into the girl’s story world and we fashioned our own interpretations of every scene. As I reflected on the “hurricane” interaction on my way home, I was reminded of what some communications scholars have referred to as *narrative transportation*—a way of describing how deeply readers enter a story world.

### Narrative Transportation

Transportation theory on its own is not restricted to texts. Scholars have applied it to many forms of media, including film, television, or digital communication devices. Narrative transportation, however, as developed by Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004), is a conceptual lens for describing how deeply and attentively a reader enters a text and engages the written word. In several recent studies (Gerrig & Egidi, 2010; Green & Brock, 2004; Jensen,

Imboden, & Ivic, 2011), researchers found that some young readers enter or transport into texts more deeply than others. Some children described themselves as being *in the story* or being able to see the story world very clearly. In Green and Brock's (2002) study, participants were asked to respond to statements such as the following:

- While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.
- I could picture myself in the scene of events described in the narrative.
- I was emotionally involved in the narrative. (p. 704)

As Green and Brock (2002) point out, "readers may not only enter a narrative world, they may also become highly involved with the people they find there" (p. 702). In narrative transportation theory, individuals who transport deeply into the story world engage with the characters and events that occur in that world. In several studies, scholars found that young readers described a sense of being present in the story and of seeing themselves as one of the characters (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Jensen, Imboden, & Ivic, 2011; Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011).

Narrative transportation theory holds attributes that are also characteristic of reader response theory, a conceptual lens with which many teachers are more familiar. For years, educators have taught children to explore the transaction between the text and the self, relating to personal experience, or visualizing what the story looks like in their heads, all of which are reader response strategies. Writing a journal entry from a main character's perspective or an alternate ending to a story are other examples of reader response activities. A reader response perspective views readers as creative, imaginative co-creators of a text (Rosenblatt, 1978). Like narrative transportation, a reader response perspective envisions readers as active participants in the story world. Based on the hundreds of visits I have made across Canada over the last few years, it appears to me that reader response still undergirds reading and writing strategies used in schools across the country. So I'm not surprised that the children I met were able to express their interactions with books and characters. I am more surprised at how deeply children expressed their interactions with the stories they read and write.

From my own writing experience, transporting into a story is critical. I need to see the setting, feel the wind or rain or sun, and hear the natural world of that place in order to write in ways that will lure the reader to walk with me in that story world. I visualize each character intricately, often finding photos on the web or drawing them so that they fit the mental image of the person in the story. The characters often start off in my mind with one or two essential attributes—a boy, for example, with a powerful, curious nature but little world experience. As the writing proceeds, the boy's character deepens, often unintentionally, intuitively, as the character and I discover together who he is in the world. My

attachment to the character also grows. When you spend time with people and experience amazing adventures, the result can be a healthy respect and attachment.

Whether or not it is true I do not know, but I heard via word of mouth that J.K. Rowling cried when Dumbledore died. If it is true, then I understand completely. Writers and readers transport deeply into stories. They get to know characters personally, internally. They become so familiar with story environments that a reread of a dearly loved book is as familiar as revisiting an old haunt in the neighbourhood or entering one's own room. What writers and readers are not always privileged to do, however, is to talk about those transactions with each other.

The interactions can be rather amazing, as I discovered on my visit to Canadian schools. For, in a single moment in time, all of us travellers, those who have visited a story world either as reader or writer, are gathered in one place. Each of us knows the characters in varying depths depending on our connectivity to this person or that person within a book. We have experienced the trauma of climax as a character dies, or the joy of redemption, revenge, or reuniting. We share the adventure, the adrenaline rushes of being chased, the terror of not knowing what lurks behind the door. Yet, for all of our shared experience, we have all shaped the story in our own way. We all transact with literature differently and according to our own experiences and personalities.

For example, the image I have of what my main character looks like in any given novel is often quite different to what the reader sees in her mind. One way I know this for certain is that children will tell me about my characters at conferences or workshops. Sometimes they bring drawings and show them to me. It is intriguing to discover that they have changed a character's hair colour, eye colour, or even skin colour! The character they have imagined in their minds is not who I see in mine. Talking about the story world can bring to light some of the most fascinating intricacies of the reading/writing experience.

#### *Talk*

Children's author Aiden Chambers (1991) explored the mystery of the triad of readers, writers, and text in his book *Reading Talk*. He said that in

*no other form of verbal communication, in no other art than that we call literature, is the communicator as much in command of the medium as when composing a book; in no other is the recipient as much in control of the medium as a reader is when reading a book; in no other is the mind of the recipient in such direct and intimate touch with the mind of the communicator; in no other is there as much left for the recipient to do in the making of the experience as there is for a reader; in no other is it as possible to achieve such a density, such subtlety, such inexhaustible ambiguity, such multiplicity of meanings as in a book. (p. 164)*

Chambers' quote captures for me the advantageous, powerful nature of reading and writing. The communicator, the author, enjoys the power of creation, making something from nothing through the words on the page. The recipient, the reader, builds off of the foundation laid by the communicator and constructs her own understanding. I love Chambers' depiction of the reader's mind being brought so closely to the writer's mind. Curiously, it is only when the writer and reader talk about the story together that the gems of understanding or the beautiful images in the mind can be shared. As DeMaria (1997) claimed, "the act of reading leaves no traces" (p. xii). And yet, when the writer and reader talk together about the text, some of the traces of reading are found.

Every time I meet young readers and talk about reading and writing, I witness living examples of Chambers' (above) quote. A boy came up to me after one of my presentations and wanted to talk about *Fire in the Sky* (2013), my latest novel, about a Canadian WWI flying ace.

"I like how the planes were swooping, like crazy, all over," he said. "I was right there in the clouds."

I pointed to an image of a biplane dogfight still on the screen as students filed out. "So scary and wild at the same time," I agreed.

The boy twisted his body and mimicked being a pilot in the plane. I made the sound of machine gun chatter. For the briefest moment we were there together in the text, imagining a dogfight scene and sharing the experience. I wonder if he saw what I saw in my mind? Were the planes painted bright red or military green with the insignias showing on the undersides of the wings?

Another student walked up and switched the topic to a different book. "Why did the mother die?" she asked, referring to a scene from a fantasy novel.

"I wanted to show how bad it was for the kids not to have a mother," I answered. "The kids grew up not knowing what a mother was or did. So when they did find a mother and she was dead, it was really, really hard. It made the mother that much more important."

The girl thought for a moment, her eyes shooting up to the ceiling. Then she shrugged. "She shouldn't have died," she pronounced. "She should have lived. I didn't like that."

"I can see why you feel that way," I answered. "It was hard to write that scene."

The girl shrugged and left. Clearly that part of the story was not to her liking. I wondered what she would do with it. Would she change the story in her mind to make a better ending? I related to her feelings. I didn't want Dumbledore to die. I was angry at J.K.

Rowling for a year. I waited for a resurrection in the final book. It didn't happen. Somehow, it leant to the authenticity of the book. And how could a magical story mean so much that I would be bothered for a year about a character who doesn't really exist? Like the girl who spoke to me about the mother's death, I had entered a story world deeply, related to the characters and loved them, lived with them, and cherished the experience. My transportation into the story made the reading experience a significant one—one that impacted my emotions and even my thinking.

In both instances, with both the boy and girl above, the conversation brought us directly into the story—to specific moments in a story. In a split second I was back in the text, seeing again the planes swooping in the heat of battle, or seeing the mother lying cold on the floor and the slave children gathered round her. In both conversations, I felt that the readers were right there with me, seeing what I was seeing and yet with their own nuances, and with their own personalities, directing or challenging the text. The reality of the text, the vivid images, the experience of witnessing and participating in the story undergirded our conversations. What was remarkable to me was that it took only a sentence or two of talk for us to reexperience, to reenter the story world. Talking about texts is sharing the lived experience of the story world.

In another book, Chambers (1985) said the following about writers and readers and talk:

*Responsible writers and responsible readers . . . talk of how a book absorbs them, of how they can lose themselves in it, of how it takes them over, lives in them, changes them (however minutely each time), how it adds to their experience, knowledge, development, personality.* (p. 162)

I witnessed and participated in hundreds of book talks with kids along the tour. The children's language, their descriptions of their own reading and writing, emulated Chambers' words. "I just love that book!" one child said, referring to *The Hunger Games*. "I-just-love-that-book." The expression on her face—the longing, the appreciation, the connection—was palpable. I was reminded of how one 11-year-old girl, years ago, referred to C.S. Lewis's Narnian chronicles in a letter she sent Lewis. She said that the books created in her "indefinable stirrings and longings" (Dorsett & Mead, 1985).

The children I met talked about how the books they have read have impacted them. They talked about how they couldn't put books down, sometimes reading way into the night. They described how books have inspired them to write their own stories.

When speaking with children seriously about a book, as in the instances above, children proved to me over and over again how deeply they enter the story as readers. Equally, when children read to me from their own stories I was amazed at how profoundly they saw their own story world.

On several occasions along the trip, students described scenes from their own stories that made me smile, caused my brows to furrow with concern or rise with surprise.

“It’s about a girl who dies at a young age,” one girl said after sharing. Her story was too close to reality to be anything but a window into her world. Her description of how the parents and siblings were dealing with the pain was lifelike. Her words made me see the hospital from the lens of a child’s camera. Not pretty. Just truthful. The validity of the story was in her facial expressions and her voice as well. She owned the story. It was personal, important, and of great value to her. There was no question that her story consumed her writing life.

“That’s a really tough topic,” I said. “It’s good to write about the tough parts of life.”

She nodded.

“I think it’s great that you are writing about it,” I added.

She smiled appreciatively and hugged the story to her chest.

As with many classrooms, the conversation quickly bounced to another topic, this time to a story about a family of farting grapes, as I recall, from one of the boys. The juxtaposition of the two stories was dizzying. The boy was thrilled with his main character and had drawn and coloured a number of pages in the form of a graphic novel. He had a following of other boys in the class who were not only excited about the topic but who had also read the adventure and eagerly awaited more. The boys surrounding the author of the farting grapes tale were anxious for me to listen to and read his story. They were proud of him.

With all the stories the children shared with me along the trip, I made a point of telling them what images their words painted in my head. I would say things such as, “I can picture the family of grapes sitting at the table about to eat dinner, forks in hand, when one them . . . well, you know . . . farts.”

I shared what I saw in my mind’s eye because, like Chambers, I believe that talking about our stories is essential. Discussing what captures us about another’s story helps make that scene all the more powerful when the writer realizes that others have been impacted by her words.

I shared with the kids from a new manuscript that is not yet published regarding a dystopian world where the main characters are apprenticing engineers. Every time I read new writing, I sweat a little. I am always uncertain of how it will be received. Will students laugh at the right places? Will they hush at the serious moment? At the end of the reading, the children made all sorts of suggestions for how the book could end or what might happen in

a particular scene. Some of the ideas were brilliant. They made suggestions for what the main characters could invent and how the inventions could be used. I said to more than a few students in different provinces, “May I use that idea? That is excellent!” Writers affirming writers helps build our enthusiasm to write more.

I came home from the tour excited to write. I pushed straight on into book two of the dystopian series without book one having yet been published. The students’ excitement and encouragement made me want to write more. Further, they had infused me with ideas. Like Yolen’s empress of thieves, their shared images added to my own repertoire for future writing endeavours. It is my sincere hope that my interactions with them infused a degree of excitement to write their own stories.

When I returned home, I received a package in the mail from one of the schools. It was full of letters and pictures children had drawn from our time together. One boy wrote:

*Thank you! For your visit and inspiration. You have inspired me with Fire in the Sky to add more to my book. My book is called Wesley’s Journal. It’s about a treasure hunter who’s family is also treasure hunters and he has it in his blood.*

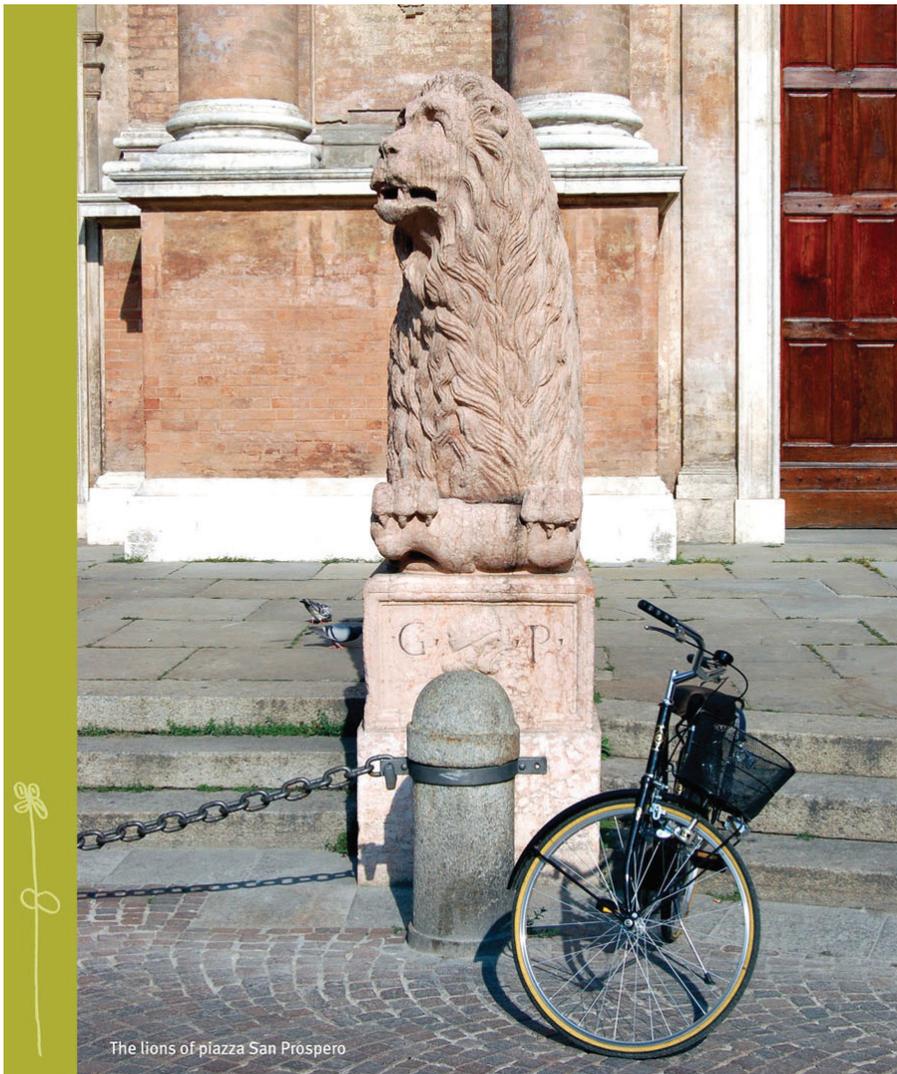
I don’t remember speaking with the boy. But I appreciate his words. Sharing my story encouraged him to write more of his own. Additionally, his comment that the treasure hunter has treasure hunting “in his blood” made me think that the young writer is close to his story, absorbed in it, and will be transporting deeply into that world for some time to come.

So, to answer my question, what value are children giving to reading and writing in an age when digital technology is so accessible? The readers and writers I met across Canada gave me hope. They loved stories. They clasped books and their own manuscripts closely to their chests as if holding precious items. They were proud of the writers among them. They expressed their enthusiasm for reading and for writing. They demonstrated a wide spectrum of reading histories. They infused me with a desire to write more.

There is definitely more digital technology available to kids than when I was a child. But the passion for a good story written, read, and shared is still alive among Canadian children. It is my hope that, as we step into the future, forums for children to write, to read, and then to talk about their stories will always be given a place of honour in schools and homes. For when writers and readers talk, the love and passion for the story world deepens and the next generation of writers becomes better equipped to mentor the next.

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# Everything in My Hand: Reflecting on Meanings and Processes of Art in Early Childhood Settings

Kim Atkinson

**Kim Atkinson** is an early childhood educator and a pedagogical facilitator with the University of Victoria's Unit for Early Years Research and Development. She also co-coordinates, with Danielle Davis, the Images of Learning Project ([www.imagesoflearningproject.com](http://www.imagesoflearningproject.com)), an exhibit, blog, and series of presentations that highlights the work of ECEs and the competencies of children. Email: [klatkins@uvic.ca](mailto:klatkins@uvic.ca)

This paper explores art practices in early childhood education and care. Drawing on the author's work as an early childhood educator and as a pedagogical facilitator working with educators and children, this paper challenges developmental perspectives of art as leading to particular learning outcomes. By presenting concepts of modern art and artists and using these as a lens through which to view children's art, the author suggests new approaches in thinking about children, materials, and art processes.

Art is an integral part of early childhood settings. We understand art as part of a "good" curriculum. Terms such as self-expression, problem solving, experimenting with colour, line, and shape, using tools, and taking risks are used in relation to what children "learn" from art experiences. Primary colours are offered so children will learn about colour mixing, and we expect children to represent what they know from experience, to be creative, and to have opportunities to explore materials of different textures, shapes, and sizes. Fine motor skills are part of an art experience as we offer different kinds of tools to manipulate (text paraphrased from a sign in a local childcare centre). Art is about what we think children should be learning.

But should art be about learning? Is art simply a means to a developmental goal related to skills? Are we truly opening spaces for creativity? What is the meaning of art?

I have been lucky to work with an *atelierista*, an artist and academic who works alongside educators and children in early years settings bringing new perspectives to art practice. We have spent long hours over many cups of tea discussing, reflecting on ideas of art, early childhood, and the meanings and values we hold. She offers concepts of art as inquiry, as a struggle to know a material or a process, to develop understandings. She speaks of how the materials, environment, light, sound, children, and adults all come together in different interactions and encounters. We talk of artists who work with a particular material for years, learning everything there is to know about it, testing limits, pushing boundaries.

As we talk, I think of the many children I have known who use materials in unexpected ways, the children who paint their arms

every day at the easel, the children who pour paint directly onto their paper, the ones who tear the paper and stack it in layers, the ones who seem to make messes . . . is it art?

Consider this:



Fig. 1 A table set with four small palettes of paint, four small brushes, and a variety of small squares of paper.



Fig. 2 A giant paper taped to the floor with shallow trays filled with paint placed around the perimeter

As we look at the resulting paintings, do we judge one form to be “better” than the other? Do we place more value on the neat, tidy representational picture than on the blobby, wet, swirly picture? In the first instance, the art making is collaborative; in the second, it is individual. Does art making need to have a product for each individual child? Is a collaborative work still art? How do the questions we ask frame how children think about their art? “What are you drawing?” “What is it?” These questions assume that the art is intended to be something. Sometimes this might be the case; however, sometimes the art might invite us to imagine our own meanings in response to the art piece. Vanessa Clark (2011) considers a different way of responding to children’s art:

*What if, instead of focusing on the products of children’s artistic activity, we looked at art making as a process (Tarr, 1990)? We might notice how the child pushes the paintbrush into the paint and how the paint speaks back by globbing onto the bristles. We might notice children exploring by using their bodies as a canvas, feeling how the paint and bristles move over their skin. The collisions of different materials, such as paint, paintbrush, clay, fabric, and stone with the child’s body activate different potential explorations and movements. (p.24)*

When we look to the artwork of artists, some genres involve performance pieces, such as action poetry, happenings, and fluxus where both artists and audience participate. These art forms have no product unless photos were taken during the performance. This absence of product raises the question, Does art making need to have a product? And further, does the product need to look a certain way to be valued? What informs our thinking as to what is valuable art?

Disagreements of what counts as art often take place within discussions of fine art and contemporary art. These discussions revolve around our values, and they have no definite answers. We can value representation through art, but we also have multiple values. Representation is not the only way to see art. However, in ECE we typically view children’s art through a developmental lens, looking, for example, at scribbling as a precursor to “real” art that is representational. How does this lens limit what we see? What might we see if we considered children’s art as an expressive language (Kind, 2010)? What are we missing when we only consider what the end product looks like?

In my collaboration with the atelierista (similar to an art studio teacher) we looked at the work of contemporary artists. We looked at the works of artists who cover many pages with a single charcoal mark, and artists who create assemblages from seemingly incongruous items. I went to galleries and saw art made of shoes and other common materials. These artists see materials differently than I do; they think with materials, they connect ideas and meanings to processes of art and art making in

creative, beautiful, unusual, disturbing, and wacky ways. And so do children.

Environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy is widely known for his environmental art using grasses, stones, ice, and many other materials. His work is impermanent, altered by time and the elements. He works with materials over many seasons, learning more each time he encounters them. He explains:

*Repetition is very important. I return to the same places many, many times over. Each time I am shown a different aspect of it. I can learn an awful lot by that. The dead elm tree I work on is one of many elms in this very small woodland, most of which have died through the Dutch elm disease. There is one tree that fell into a stream and then into a bog on the other side, so it revived and has become very, very vigorous. Because of the place it’s in, that tree is where [the leaves turn] the most intense yellow. Each year I work with that yellow of that leaf. (The Scotsman, 2011, para. 2)*

We have all observed children who are drawn to particular materials: the toddler who moves straight to the paint every day, the 3-year-old who always carries a handful of sticks, the 5-year-old who covers pages and pages of paper with drawings. Just as Andy Goldsworthy continues to work with the yellow of the leaf, perhaps these children are learning all they can from their chosen material.

In early years settings, offering different materials to children is seen as leading to cognitive and social development. Through the use of clay or paint, children are thought to develop higher thinking skills, develop analytical skills by expressing opinions on what they like, and learn spatial acuity (The Task Force on Children’s Learning and the Arts: Birth to Age Eight & Goldhawk, 1998).

Viewing children and art through this developmental lens does not invite us to think about children encountering, acting with, and reacting to materials. It does not acknowledge that materials have a force, a presence, that they contribute to the meaning of the experience.

Consider this:

A table is set with paper, small bowls of paint, brushes and small cups of water. Four girls approach the table and begin mixing water and paint and applying it to the paper. Kaylin takes some paper towel from a nearby shelf, folds it, and dips it into the water. She squeezes the excess water out, unfolds it, and places it on her paper. She applies black paint to the wet paper towel, folds it again, and dips it into the water. She repeats this process over and over.



Fig. 3 A table is set with paper, small bowls of paint, brushes and small cups of water.

When I set up the table with paint and water and paper, I did not anticipate the addition of paper towels. Kaylin, however, had a relationship with paper towels. Every day when she washed her hands, she dipped paper towels into the handwashing tub, squeezing, floating, pressing the towel onto the adjacent wall to watch the bubbles and water stream down. So adding paper towels to paint was part of her process of making meaning, of dialogue, of creation. Kaylin may agree with Andy Goldsworthy when he states: "It's not enough for me to just look at something. I don't want to be a spectator, I want to be a participant. I don't understand something until I've worked with it and actually made something out of it" (The Scotsman, 2011, para. 2).

Georgia is a quiet girl, and because I only visit her class once a week, we have not said much to one another. On this day we were outside. I had my camera, and I was inviting children to take photos. Georgia was picking some flowers and I asked if she would like to take a photo of them. She shook her head, no, but held out her hand, wordlessly inviting me to take a picture of the flowers she held. I took the photo and showed her. Georgia then put some

grass in her hand and held it out for me. Again I took a photo. She picked up a rock and I photographed it. Georgia continued to find materials and I continued to photograph them in her hand until we had 59 photos. As we scrolled through the photos together, Georgia nodded, looked at me and said, "Everything in my hand."

The medium of the camera "invoked a particular way of thinking" (Kind, 2010, p.124), inviting engagement with the natural materials Georgia found in the yard. The materials, the camera, Georgia, and I connected, opening possibilities for new thinking, for seeing materials in unexpected ways, for engaging with one another. Georgia and I, the materials, and the camera were entwined. Meaning was made within the entwinement, and it would not have been possible if any of the threads of entwinement had been absent.



Fig 4. "Everything in my hand."

When we think of art as an encounter, as a language of expression and inquiry, and of materials as inviting particular engagements, where do we go? How does this kind of thinking inform practice?

Perhaps it means presenting materials in ways that invite exploration, where there is not a prescribed "way." Perhaps it

means stopping and observing, noticing how the consistency of the paint pulls at a paintbrush, discovering the sound of a fist slapping against clay, the stickiness of glue on fingers.

Perhaps it means offering one colour of paint and paying attention to the exploration that emerges. Perhaps it means offering that one colour for an entire week to see how the exploration deepens.

Or perhaps it means presenting collage materials in new ways, arranging a table with only white materials, or only round materials. Maybe it means putting the materials in small bowls, or arranging them directly on the table, or inviting arrangements with no glue.

Maybe it means thinking of “encounters” rather than “activities.” Perhaps it means talking less and observing more. We might find that we see differently, create openings for the unexpected, make spaces for possibilities of expression and processes. We may find we are led to new questions and new ways of thinking about children and art.

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In collaboration with *Reggio Children*, there will be a Canadian Study Week in Reggio Emilia in the Spring of 2015.

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# Teaching Children with ADHD

Nicole Brennan and Jim Parsons

**Nicole Brennan** teaches at St. Stephen School in Calgary in a specialized setting for children with unique learning and behavioural needs.

**Jim Parsons** has been a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta for 37 years.

This article describes some symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), discusses classroom implications, and suggests practical strategies teachers can use to meet the needs of this diverse population.

To an adult, schools can be impressive places. For example, trekking down an elementary school hallway, it is hard not to appreciate the creativity and colour found in children's artwork. Teachers' classrooms are frequently decorated by theme posters highlighting the units children are studying in class. Posters with math concepts and punctuation symbols commonly hang in junior high classrooms, and many high school social studies classrooms display maps from around the world or the sayings of the significant "heroes" of history.

All this is well and good, right? Well, perhaps not for everyone. Sadly, such stimuli are distractors for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children with ADHD possess many wonderful qualities: they're energetic, spontaneous, and curious. But they also behave in ways that frustrate teachers: they interrupt, poke, and bother other children, and they are often inattentive. Finding ways to meet the needs of these unique children can be difficult. In this paper, we describe some of the symptoms of ADHD and discuss their classroom implications. We then suggest a number of practical strategies teachers can employ to meet the needs of this diverse population.

## What is ADHD?

Researchers estimate that between 4 and 12% of children in North America are affected by ADHD (Alberta Education, 2006). The vast majority of teachers in Alberta can expect to teach at least one child with ADHD at some time in their careers. ADHD is considered the most prevalent neurobehavioural condition affecting school-aged children (Furman, 2005). It is broadly characterized by poor concentration, disorganization, forgetfulness, impulsivity, impatience, and restlessness (Chaban, 2010). Children with ADHD frequently experience difficulties in the classroom due to their inability to manage their behaviour. In addition to attention problems, children with ADHD regularly experience academic difficulties and often have problems socializing with their peers (Reid & Johnson, 2012).

## Classroom Implications

Addressing the needs of children with ADHD can challenge teachers, particularly when they are expected to meet the needs of other children at the same time (Cooper & Ideus, 1996). In addition to finding ways to engage these active children, teachers must discover strategies to manage their sometimes sporadic behaviour. With class sizes running upwards of 30 children, the idea that teachers should meet each child's needs becomes daunting. Add the fact that each child with ADHD is unique and teaching becomes downright impossible.

Failing to address the needs of children with ADHD can result in other complications. For example, teachers could experience difficulty developing positive relationships with parents (Cooper & Ideus, 1996). Practical experience suggests that many parents feel blamed for their children's behaviour. If these parents come to school angry, the teacher becomes an adversary. It goes without saying that poor relationships between teachers and parents will negatively impact children.

## Strategies for Educators

Research in the area of ADHD centres around three strategic themes: (1) classroom environment, (2) classroom management, and (3) managing self-regulation.

Classroom environment refers to the physical space within the classroom. Consciously arranging the classroom to meet the needs of children with ADHD can help teachers to significantly reduce distractions and increase opportunities for engagement (Reid & Johnson, 2012). The easiest thing teachers can do to reduce potential distractions is to reduce clutter. Teachers must be conscious of how classroom spaces impact children with ADHD. A desk covered with papers and coffee cups could distract children who experience difficulty remaining focused.

Teachers should continue to celebrate their students' creativity by hanging examples of student work on the walls. Such displays create positive stimuli for many children. However, teachers should consider where to place such items and carefully choose how much student work to display (Dowdy, Patton, Smith, & Polloway, 1997). If teachers avoid displaying artwork in the front of the room, they can reduce a potential distraction for children with ADHD (Dowdy et al., 1997).

In addition to reducing clutter, teachers can offer lively children different seating options. Teachers should place energetic children in spaces where they can move freely. Adding a standing desk somewhere in the classroom can be an effective strategy for many children (Reid & Johnson, 2012). Placing inattentive children at the front of the classroom often promotes engagement. Providing alternative workspaces is also beneficial, particularly for children who are easily distracted or who tend to distract others. These alternative workspaces should not be used as punitive measures, but rather as ways to enhance learning. Allowing children to choose alternative spaces also contributes to self-regulation.

Practical experience suggests that some children take advantage of options like the ones suggested above when they are first introduced, but this phase usually passes quickly. If children continue to take advantage, teachers can alter their methods by changing activities or having children earn reward “break” time. Classroom management techniques contribute to creating a safe and predictable environment for children with ADHD (Alberta Education, 2006). When classroom rules are introduced to children who are attention deficit, expectations must be stated clearly and concisely. Teachers should repeat the rules regularly, particularly at the beginning of the school year and following any long breaks. Consequences for breaking classroom rules should be predictable and consistent so children can anticipate the outcome of their actions.

When rules are broken, teachers must reiterate expectations to children. Teachers must also positively correct classroom behaviour. Children with ADHD are no different than other children in this regard. Regularly affirming expected behaviour is always preferable to constantly citing infractions because affirmation contributes to self-regulation. Additionally, teachers who use negative tones often reinforce poor behaviour (Cooper & Ideus, 1996).

Predictable routines comfort children with ADHD. Children who know what is expected can more easily regulate their behaviour. Additionally, teachers who know there will be a change to the regular routine should communicate the change clearly to their students with ADHD. Children with ADHD frequently struggle with transitions. Awareness of unexpected changes helps these children become more able to adapt to change.

By far the most important strategy teachers can teach students with ADHD is self-regulation (Reid & Johnson, 2012). ADHD, by

its nature, must be self-regulated (Cherkes-Julkowski, Sharp, & Stolzenberg, 1997) before attention can occur. Teachers can help by being more aware of the behaviours of these children and by positively reinforcing what must be done (Cooper & Ideus, 1996). Children who bother other children or create distractions should be asked if they wish to move or take a break. Again, this question can be framed positively so children do not feel they are being sent out of the classroom. Rather, they must come to see that their learning needs require a space without distraction. When children connect their behaviour to self-regulation strategies, they become more aware of their needs. “I need a break” cards, standing desks, and alternative workspaces have been used with great success.

## Conclusion

ADHD is a unique disorder that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Some children struggle with attentiveness; others fight to manage their behaviour. During their careers, most teachers will teach a child with ADHD, if they haven’t already. Because these children have a variety of needs, it can be difficult for teachers to know where to begin. Teachers who invest time to learn more about these children and their needs can gain practical strategies they can use to help teach these often impulsive children. Teachers who take the time to learn and apply a few thoughtful strategies can both save themselves frustration and help children with ADHD manage school successfully.

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## Nature Kindergarten in Sooke: A Unique Collaboration

Toni Hoyland and Enid Elliot, with Lisa Lockerbie and Erin VanStone

**Toni Hoyland** has been an early childhood educator in the province of BC for over 40 years and has worked in many types of child care. For the past 19 years, she has been teaching early childhood education, first at Selkirk College in the Kootenays and more recently at Camosun College in Victoria, BC. Toni strongly believes that creating rich, responsive early experiences for young children is important to everyone's future. Email: hoylandt@camosun.bc.ca

**Enid Elliot**, PhD, is an early childhood educator who has been continually surprised, intrigued, and delighted by the children, families, and early childhood educators with whom she has worked, played, and loved. Having experienced the influence of natural settings on young children over the years, she was involved in creating the Sooke School District nature kindergarten, which opened in September 2012. She is currently on the faculty at Camosun College. Email: eelliot@uvic.ca

This article focuses on a nature kindergarten pilot project in Sooke, BC, about an hour outside of Victoria on Vancouver Island. Toni Hoyland and Enid Elliot highlight the partnership between the kindergarten teacher, Lisa Lockerbie, and the early childhood educator, Erin Van Stone, as they work together to weave emergent play-based approaches with academic literacy and numeracy opportunities. The program takes place in the forest of Royal Roads University adjacent to Sangster Elementary School.

*On a winter morning at Sangster Elementary School's nature kindergarten, the children arrive dressed for the cold, wet weather. Rain is pouring down. Long johns are under pants or skirts, rain pants are pulled over school clothes, and everything is topped off with rain jackets, toques, and mitts. The children and their teachers will be heading out into the forest as soon as everyone checks in. As the children gather and before heading outside, Lisa (the teacher in the nature kindergarten) and Erin (the early childhood educator who works in partnership with Lisa) remind the children of their rules—"be safe, be respectful, and have fun!" After the check-in, where children gather with the teacher and educator to discuss the day's plan, Erin takes 11 children out of the school building across the playground, out the gate at the edge of the playground field, and into the forest that surrounds Royal Roads University. A few minutes later, Lisa follows with the class's other 11 children, pushing a stroller full of clipboards, magnifying glasses, and collapsible buckets. The two groups walk the trail separately. While Erin and Lisa can usually see each other and connect by walky-talky, the children experience the trail in their smaller groups. This strategy allows Lisa and Erin the opportunity to relate to the children individually, as well as to the small group as a whole.*

*Each group walks down the hill. Some children lag behind, others drift off the trail to explore a stump or tree, and some walk beside Erin or Lisa. Each child finds his or her own pace. Some children may be playing ninjas while others are acting out being kittens or puppies or baby deer. Still others are picking up sticks or rocks. Each child is engaged with another child or with an aspect of the*

*trail. Erin and Lisa listen to the children, share information about trees or plants, and comment on changes they notice on the trail, such as a new fungus growing out of a log or a large branch that has come down in the middle of the path. The groups may stop along the way with the challenge to find "five of the same thing" or the shape of a letter in the nearby trees or rocks. They may be invited to create a story together or to chat about some aspect of the walk. Two girls form a lower case 't' with their bodies. Another child holds a picture of a letter as he lies on his backpack and talks to himself. Other children are less interested in finding or making letters and use nearby sticks to draw in the dirt.*

This is a sample of a morning at the nature kindergarten for Lisa Lockerbie and Erin Van Stone. The two work together out of Sangster Elementary School in Sooke, on Vancouver Island, about an hour outside of Victoria, BC. Every morning—rain, snow, or shine—22 children and Lisa and Erin leave Sangster Elementary and walk for 45 minutes to one of four sites they have found in the Royal Roads forest. To leave a smaller environmental footprint, the group changes their site on a regular basis.

This unique two-year nature kindergarten pilot project is generating a great deal of interest, both locally and from afar, with parents, educators, health experts, environmentalists, and researchers recognizing the multiple benefits to children of being outside in nature and engaging in a physically active, nature-based program in their first year in the school system. Research suggests that children are drawn to trees for their calming effects (Lester & Maudsley, 2007). Interviewed about their preferred spots in their playgrounds, preschool children indicated their appreciation of the natural areas over the human-made structures. Further observations noted that children were drawn to the trees, bushes, and green areas of their play spaces (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989, 2002) have found that children can gather their attention and focus more easily when they have time in nature; they report that parents they have worked with observe that activities in green settings seem to lessen their children's symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Taylor, Kuo, and Sullivan (2001) and Taylor and Kuo

(2009) found that a walk in the park helped children with ADHD concentrate better. These authors suggest that a “dose of nature” may help manage ADHD as well as prescribed pharmaceuticals.

### Partnership

The nature kindergarten has hired a BC-qualified teacher and early childhood educator to work together as a team to plan and implement the program based on the *BC Kindergarten Curriculum*. This unique arrangement values the expertise that each of these educators brings to the partnership.

Each brings interest and experience in being outside with young children. Lisa had taught in a nature-based summer program for young children in England and a primary classroom in northern BC. Although she had this background, Lisa wasn't sure how the children would demonstrate their attainment of the *BC Kindergarten Curriculum's* prescribed learning outcomes as they engaged in the natural environment of the forest. She knew she wanted the children to learn what they needed to succeed in grade 1, but in the beginning she was unsure whether they would accomplish the stated outcomes. Her teacher training education gave her a strong sense of what the BC curriculum expects, including many ideas and skills for literacy and numeracy and an understanding of the “schooling” culture.

Erin was aware that, as an early childhood educator, she was coming from outside of the school system. Initially, she worried that she wouldn't be able to allow the children's learning to unfold from their interests and curiosities in an emergent manner, which had been part of her early childhood education training. To understand the goals of a kindergarten program, Erin has read and become familiar with the *BC Kindergarten Curriculum* document and the outcomes expected for children.

We recently had an opportunity to meet with Erin and Lisa and talk with them about how the program had evolved over the course of the first year. We were curious about what they could tell us about their partnership. It was near the end of the first year and they were able to look back over the year and reflect on their practice and the children's experiences.

It was clear from the beginning of the interview that Lisa and Erin have a great deal of passion and excitement about the program and the children. From their first meeting, each felt a sense of partnership. They were easily able to share ideas and discuss philosophy with each other. Erin said, “We would both throw out ideas and some were taken and some weren't. We talk about everything and bring up suggestions. We collaborate on everything. For example, I really wanted to delve deeper in project-based learning with each child having a role. Lisa wanted more information about it. We decided to try it out and evaluate it.” Both Lisa and Erin were discovering that project-based learning (Helm & Katz, 2001; Jones & Nimmo, 1994; Stacey,

2009) seemed to be a good approach in the natural environment of the forest.

Erin was more familiar with a responsive, play-based approach for supporting young children's learning, while Lisa brought her understanding of approaches to literacy and numeracy and her ability to traverse the school culture. By being outside, listening to the children, and understanding the opportunities the natural environment offers, Lisa and Erin have made the most of their skills and learned from each other. They weave their approaches together through listening to each other, discussing, and planning together.

Lisa says, “We always evaluate our process and if something doesn't work, we ask why not and what we could change?” For example, for the first two months they and the children were all together in one big group and they struggled with the complexity of relating to 22 busy children. Through discussion and trying different strategies, they arrived at their current practice—each takes half the group. Lisa and Erin share the teaching and learning dynamics in a relaxed, informal manner; it seems to flow between the two. They inspire each other and share the leadership. Lisa feels that “in this type of program you have to be creative, flexible, reflective, and really present.”

Lisa and Erin's collaboration is based on a relationship of respect and responsiveness. The success of the morning forest program rests equally on their shoulders. As colleagues, they have listened and learned to trust each other. Within this relationship of respect, Erin shares her knowledge of facilitating learning within an emergent, play-based process or approach while Lisa shares her knowledge of teaching academic skills. They both understand the potential of a child's question that emerges from the children's play, and they work together to build on individual and group explorations. Lisa has learned to appreciate the possibilities inherent in children's emergent play while Erin has learned ways to weave in literacy and numeracy activities connected to their play. In the afternoons, Lisa is on her own and the children participate in music, gym, and library activities or engage in activities with Lisa in the classroom.

Each woman carries a clear knowledge of the *BC Kindergarten Curriculum* learning outcomes in her mind while responding in the moment to the children as learning opportunities arise within play or their walk through the forest. While reading a story in a grassy clearing one morning, Lisa hears a Pileated Woodpecker nearby, and so do several children. Lisa stops reading to locate the woodpecker and help the children find it. This moment offers an opportunity for language development as Lisa describes how to find the woodpecker in the dead wood of the tree. All take a few minutes to locate the bird, listening quietly to the sounds of the bird drilling into the wood before resuming the story. It is a moment of magic as children and educators listen together.

To observe the children's emerging interests and curiosities, the educators listen carefully, ask provocative questions, and share pertinent information and resources, either in the moment or later. Both share their thoughts and observations of the children's emerging thinking skills. Over the year, they have captured what they observe, notice, and wonder about in their interactions with the children and the forest through pedagogical narrations, videos, and anecdotal observations. They also manage to grab a few minutes each morning to plan based on their thoughts and observations from the day before.

### Planning for Safety and Success

Currently there is great interest in creating programs with a nature component, but planning is important. Being outside in all types of weather demands attention to clothing and comfort and awareness of the potential risks of being outside in a natural environment. The key is to understand the particular place and environment and what could be possible risks before ever venturing out of the classroom. A risk management plan was developed for the Sooke nature kindergarten before it started. This plan was based on this program's location, focusing on the terrain and wildlife specific to the area and the steps necessary to deal with various situations. This document is dynamic and continually updated. Thinking ahead about potential risks and possible courses of action helps to provide Lisa and Erin with safety strategies.

Both Erin and Lisa hold wilderness first aid certificates and feel very strongly that the best way to insure safety is to create a community of concern and caring among the children. By encouraging children to look after themselves and each other, they help the children understand that staying safe depends on everyone. Part of the safety strategy is clarifying boundaries, helping the children develop rules, and practicing responses to possible dangers.

Cougars, bears, deer, owls, rabbits, and more live in the forest around Royal Roads University. Lisa and Erin recognize that they and 22 children are a noisy presence in the forest and most predators will avoid them. However, they spent significant time in September creating group cohesion and practicing for safety. They had steps to follow if they did encounter a cougar, a bear, or some other dangerous situation. Through games and role plays, the children practiced what to do if they saw a cougar. They practiced blowing their whistles, putting their hands over their heads to make themselves appear larger, and backing up towards the group who, having been alerted by the whistle, would be gathering. Once the group was together facing the cougar, they would sing Jingle Bells. Each child has a whistle on his or her jacket and is aware that you only blow the whistle if you are hurt, lost, or in danger. Over the year, children have not played with the whistle, recognizing its importance for safety. A parent shared with Lisa and Erin that other children outside of school had asked

his child to blow her whistle and she refused, demonstrating her awareness of the importance of the whistle as a safety tool.

Lisa and Erin worked with the children to give them practical strategies for coping with their possible fears. The children have a simple first aid course and learned that if something is bleeding, they should put pressure on the wound. Each child carries his or her own first aid kit of a few band aids, a space blanket, a granola bar, and tissues. There were psychological risks as well. The children knew about the cougars and the bears, and they knew there were potential risks as they ventured outdoors. All had a certain amount of fear about the forest, and they often pointed out the dark areas as perhaps hiding a cougar or bear den. Cougars were perhaps a convenient metaphor for some of the fears children may have had as they ventured deeper into the forest. Through play, children explored some of the uncertainties and possible tensions that come from knowing that space is shared with other unknown beings. While Lisa and Erin had strategies for the physical risks, they also wanted the children to feel safe to talk about what was on their minds. Life is filled with multiple dangers, and children can learn that they can face their fears within the group.

The forest not only has cougars and bears but other invitations for facing physical fears. Lisa and Erin wanted the children to feel confident about exploring and taking risks. They did not want them to be stopped by fear of slipping or falling. Children love to climb, and the forest has plenty of opportunities for climbing on fallen logs, trees, and rocks. Lisa and Erin had confidence that the children were capable of being safe in the forest and observed them monitoring their own risk taking and their feeling of being safe. For example, when there were a number of children standing together up on a stump, one child didn't feel safe and felt there should be a rule about how many children could be on the stump at one time. She climbed down. While no rule was made, the child recognized that she did not feel safe and acted on her feeling. Children were trusted to determine how high they were comfortable climbing. They also knew that the expectation was that they would have to get themselves down. To support children's growing abilities, Lisa or Erin were usually present to suggest how to get over a broken branch or where to put a foot on the way down.

While the children may worry about bears and cougars or how to get over a slippery, moss-covered log, Erin and Lisa have their own worries. "Losing a child is your worst fear," says Erin. She and Lisa developed a clear and simple rule to ensure the group stayed together: the children have to be able to see either Lisa or Erin. The children understand that if they aren't in sight, the teachers worry. Lisa and Erin also identify the boundaries for each site so the children know what is "out of bounds." Children don't want to get lost either. In the first month or so, they practice what to do if they see a cougar and they learn to be in sight of the group. They also learn to come when Lisa or Erin give a certain call.

## Birds

*A pedagogical narration from the Sooke nature kindergarten*

### Weeks 1 and 2: Noticing, Observing, and Questioning

The children have been listening for birds! We have mostly been hearing woodpeckers, crows, ravens, and perhaps a chickadee here and there. The children often pretend to be different birds on their walks, searching for different types of food.

One Friday at snack, a woodpecker joined us. It was pecking away up in a tree! We listened and watched as he jumped from tree to tree.

"I hear him," Elliott said.

"He is over there," Alex answered.

The children sat and listened as though the woodpecker were putting on a show. Many children then tried knocking on trees to make the same sound.

"He is looking for ants," Andrea thought.



Walking down one of our new trails, we heard a raven's call. We looked up and noticed two ravens talking and fighting in a tree. The children lay on their backs along the trail and watched and listened to the ravens. They worked hard to mimic the raven's call, and remembered Muriel's [Aboriginal support worker] stories about Raven.

"He is trying to trick us," Brady thought.



In addition to these interactions with birds, we and the children had recently found mice and examined a dead owl we found alongside the trail. We thought it would be a great time to dig deeper into birds. Creating a box full of many bird-related items, as a group we explored our knowledge, thoughts, and questions about birds.

Some thoughts:

- The woodpecker pecks holes in the tree. The bugs get stuck. Then he comes back and eats them. Erik
- Some birds eat bugs in the sand. Jackson
- When a bird drops its feathers, another bird picks them up and use them in their nest. Presley
- Big birds lay big eggs and little birds lay small eggs. Ben

For the rest of the morning, children were creating nests, finding nests in nature, and looking and listening for birds and signs of birds.

Some questions we had:

- Is a bumblebee a bird?
- What is the biggest bird?
- How do birds eat?
- How do birds fly?

Birds in a nest! "It is big enough for all of us, caw, caw."



### Building the Nature Kindergarten Community

One of the notable aspects of being in the forest together every day is the sense of cohesion and community that has developed. The children have many opportunities to connect with their peers as they walk down the trail, share theories about worms or dead owls, and play in the trees at the kindergarten's sites. They are together with the group all morning, sharing the experiences, and the children learn from the educators and from each other. Lisa says, "This is a learning community and every child feels part of it. When a child is absent and then returns, the children are all so excited to see them. The children appreciate each other for who they are."

The natural setting inspires the children by contributing to a sense of place and providing a space that is rich in sensations. The forest engages the learners by providing materials that are incorporated into the play. In this space they can be loud and full of energy or quiet and still.

Both Erin and Lisa are alert to the children's inquiries, investigations, and ideas. Listening to the children's theories and ideas, they plan ways to extend and deepen the children's thinking. When the children showed an interest in birds, Lisa and Erin provided a stimulus for a discussion about birds with the creation of a box that had a nest with an egg, some feathers, and a few pictures. This box generated a child-led discussion on birds. How you would define a bird? What had wings but wasn't a bird? From this discussion, the children created a big book on birds and what they knew about them. This book came into the forest with them on the stroller so they could continue to work on it.

The forest provides a rich environment for exploration. The children notice and wonder about slugs, birds, caterpillars, millipedes, mushrooms, moss, etc. The children are motivated to "read" the guidebooks that Lisa and Erin bring with them. Lisa and Erin know they must be flexible, using strategies and making suggestions based on what the children show interest in. Two children were walking in the forest, discussing their names, noting that both began and ended with the letter A. Ariana and Ava—a magic connection! The girls were encouraged to make the letters out of nature materials. Letters are made out of rocks or drawn in the dirt . . . part of the forest floor.

An Aboriginal support worker, Muriel Lagace, accompanied the class one day a week. Muriel shared stories and traditional knowledge of the place with Erin and Lisa and the children. Enriching the program, Muriel alerted Lisa, Erin, and the children to another perspective from which to engage in the forest. Coming upon a dead owl, she shared that an owl often signals a death and suggested that the children might think of letting go of a bad habit or a bad idea. After teaching the children how to say "thank you" in the language appropriate to the place by raising their hands,

Lisa and Erin would remind the children to raise their hands as they left their site each day.

Over the year the children watched the forest change. In the fall the ground was dry and the leaves began to make piles under the deciduous trees. As the year grew colder and the rains came, children watched as low areas of the forest became shallow ponds and mushrooms and fungi grew on logs. As spring evolved, children explored the newly budding leaves and compared them to the older ones. When asked if there was something similar about the new leaves, the children noticed that, even in different trees and plants, new leaves are light green and softer.

Children are encouraged to share information with each other about the things they are noticing, such as the slugs, an ant on a white trillium, or the little spots on the trillium starting to turn purple. While walking up the hill in the pouring rain, a child announces, "I have a boy worm and a girl worm." "How do you know?" the educator asks. "Because the girl worm is long and skinny." Lisa suggests they find a book in the library about worms, which they do, and the next week the boy announces, "Worms are half boy and half girl." There is a wealth of materials and experiences in the forest and the children have lots to explore and discover.

Ariana and Ericka found a bug and thought it was a caterpillar, but when they touched it, they noticed it wasn't furry, a sensation they associated with caterpillars. They were encouraged to notice the ways this creature was similar and different from a caterpillar. They noticed it was hard like a beetle, and Ariana wondered if it was a centipede. Lisa and Erin carry guidebooks for identifying insects, birds, and animals, and Ariana searched until she found the correct picture. With the help of the educators, she discovered the bug was a millipede.

A group of boys were walking down a hill with magnifying glasses and one boy started looking in a guidebook to identify something he was interested in. Before Lisa and Erin knew what was happening, the whole group of boys ran to the jogging stroller that carries supplementary gear (compasses and trowels and guidebooks) so they could each have their own book to use as they made their way down the hill. One of the facts stated in the guidebook was how big a bald eagle could be. Lisa and Erin wondered out loud how tall the children were compared to the eagle, and this led to the discovery that the eagle could be as tall as Ava. Everyone was excited to measure Ava's height.

After reading about predators and their prey, the children created a predator/prey game. They discussed how they would go out to find food, depending on whether they were prey or predator or both. Interested in squirrels, the children read about squirrel nests or dreys, and then created their own dreys out of twigs and moss and thought about how and where squirrels would store food for the winter. They were encouraged to collect as much food as they could for the coming winter. They then added it up individually

and then as a group for numeracy practice.

A few days a week children are engaged in a structured 20- to 25-minute activity. They are divided into groups based on their play interests and are tasked by Lisa and Erin with representing their learning. They decide as a group how they will do this. What they share is up to them, but they must plan together what they will share and how they will share it. When we talked with Erin and Lisa, a group was representing bears waking up hungry in the spring by putting on a play. Another group was writing a song about leaves in the spring, while yet another group was focusing on what robins do in spring. Each person in the class is expected to take a role in preparing their presentation. For example, one child might draw while another writes.

Lisa and Erin are developing ways they can think together and bring their experiences and educational backgrounds together. They are finding ways to share their perceptions of the children's interests and their reflections on each child's growth. They observe and document the children's play, listen for the children's concerns and questions, and struggle with extending and building on the children's interests. Their partnership has been dynamic, growing and changing in response to the situations and the children.

Going outside out of the classroom took away the traditional boundaries and expectations that a classroom provides. Erin and Lisa were presented with an opportunity and a challenge to engage with the children and the idea of kindergarten in a different manner.

Bringing two different experiences and professional backgrounds together provides a rich intersection of thought and ideas. With the children, they were experiencing the place in which they live and work. They were building relationships within a community of learners, which is situated within the forest community of worms, trees, soil, logs, and other living beings. Together, sharing their experiences and understandings of children, curriculum, and relationship, they have begun a journey.

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## Friends of Children Award Guidelines

The CAYC "Friends of Children Award" was established to give CAYC a way of recognizing outstanding contributions, by individuals or groups to the well-being of young children. If you wish to nominate an individual or group for this award, please use the criteria and procedure below.

### CRITERIA

The Friends of Children Award may be presented to an individual or group, regardless of age, who:

- Has a history of commitment to the CAYC mission statement and/or aims.
- Has shown an outstanding scholarly, advocacy, innovative or practical contribution to the well-being of young children.
- May or may not be of Canadian citizenship.
- May or may not hold CAYC membership although it is encouraged.

### PROCEDURE

- A nomination must be made by a member of the Board of Directors and be seconded by a member of the Board of Directors. Board members can, however, receive recommendations for nominations from individual CAYC members or from other organizations.
- Nominations will be brought forward at a Board of Directors or National Executive meeting by the board or executive member assigned responsibility for the award. This board or executive member will present and speak to the nomination.
- The nomination will be voted upon and passed by the Board of Directors with a consensus decision.
- The award will be presented promptly and in person when possible.
- Publicity of the award and the recipient(s) will appear in the journal, *Canadian Children*, and other publications where possible.
- The number of awards per year will vary.

## Book Review: Ann Pelo's *The Goodness of Rain: Developing an Ecological Identity in Young Children*

Reviewed by Randa Khattar

**Randa Khattar** researches in the area of social justice, attentiveness practices, and children's rights. She teaches in the bachelor of early childhood studies program at Charles Sturt University in Burlington, Ontario, and Australia. Email: rkhattar@csu.edu.au

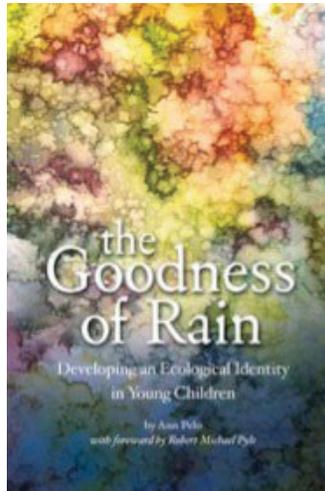
Yes! Doors open, and the whole living world waiting outside, beckoning to us. (Pelo, 2013, p. 31)

Being outside every day with Dylan, inviting her to braid herself into this place, re-aligned me with this place. Nourishing Dylan's ecological identity re-enlivened my ecological identity. Inviting Dylan to know her home ground carried me home. (Pelo, 2013, p. 185)

Every once in a rare while, a book provokes a reorientation of pedagogical stance and invites critical imagination (Giroux, 2000) in what our work with young children might look like when we view children (and ourselves) in competent, creative, and thoughtful ways (Rinaldi, 2006). *Ann Pelo's The Goodness of Rain: Developing an Ecological Identity in Young Children* (Exchange Press, 2013) engages with complex questions about nurturing an ecological identity and literacy. These two things are necessary, in her view, to develop with society's youngest citizens a sense of democratic participation and care for one other in a "beyond human" (p. 175) world.

Pelo asks: "What are the earlier offerings we can make in a child's life" (p. 48) that can nurture an ecological identity? What are the dispositions that can cultivate the capacity to be ecologically literate? Exploring different dimensions of these questions, Pelo tenderly documents a year of working (and journeying) alongside a young child, commencing with Dylan's first birthday. In each season, every day, "no matter the weather" (p. 32), she and Dylan spent the day outside. In so doing, they encountered a living, animate world through each other's exuberant eyes, and a vivid reminder of what can happen when the familiar and habitual are experienced as curious, tentative, attentive presence.

This book is timely. It presents a pedagogical challenge in a generation of children (and adults) increasingly inundated with consumerist, commercialist, and instantly gratifying messaging. It offers an authentic alternative to educational contexts where computer screen time and the enclosure of the four classroom walls can engulf and obscure connection to a "world of wrens and robins, worms on the sidewalk and wind that scatters leaves along



the street" (p. 49), potentially leaving child and adult disconnected, anesthetised, and apathetic. An ecological identity, as Pelo describes it, harkens toward an embodied "pedagogy for ecology" (p. 34) that offers up "an antidote to the displacement that makes possible the wounding and wrecking of the planet" (p. 50)—empathy rather than apathy.

*Pay attention; be curious; open your heart; be modest and humble*—these are dispositions of becoming ecologically literate. Pelo invites educators committed to this pedagogical stance to intentionally start from an orientation, not of "teaching" children about the outdoors or giving instruction about the environment, but of dwelling alongside children in a deep space of attentive listening, responsively "rooted in care for and knowledge" (p. 175) of their situated contexts. Pelo invites us to be curious and to wonder, and to intentionally present occasions for children to be curious and to wonder. She writes: "When we strengthen in children the disposition to participate fully in the majesty and delicacy of the natural world, we strengthen such a capacity in ourselves, and we learn alongside children how to be ecologically literate" (p. 47).

An ecological identity signals a reorientation from a humancentric perspective to a stance of active engagement, care, and mutual reciprocity with a living, breathing world. Daily sojourns along blueberry-bushed roads to (re)visit a neighbour's apple tree and become friends with tiny buds delicately transforming into nourishing crimson offerings mark Pelo's and Dylan's days together. Enacted ritualistically, daily walks are experienced as opportunities to (re)activate the senses, to savour each moment, to carefully notice, to wander, and to wonder about "the ordinary extraordinary" (p. 86).

Pelo introduces the notion of *home ground*, "where landscape is a part of your life" (p. 34), to signal toward a pedagogical decision to anchor everyday experiential encounters around ritually revisited common happenings. The reoccurring myriad experiences of rain in the narrative—"misted"; "sputtered"; "spit"; "sprinkled" (p. 32)—enunciate somatic (re)turning to a place again and again, different yet still the same—in an act of (re)cognition, which deepens relationship, and with relationship,

empathy and compassion. Dylan's deepening knowledge of life and death through an experience with an injured butterfly, which later dies, is punctuated first with "Hurt wing. Crying" (p. 136) and then "Butterfly all done. Hurt wing. All done crying" (p. 138)—all acts of ecological identity and literacy.

Pelo writes on rain-etched paper in a recursive iteration among the poetic, the narrative, and the dialogic—a multivocal conversation—that braids together the authentic voices of Dylan and Pelo, the evocative memories that Pelo brings to bear of her own life growing up outdoors (described not as being in nature, but simply as being home), and the writing of cherished authors that speak to the themes Pelo explores: walk the land; practice silence; learn the names; embrace sensuality; explore new perspectives; create stories; make rituals. Pelo navigates through these themes, not as static titles, but as productive pedagogical tensions that can nurture an ecological identity.

Take *practice silence*, for example. When is it important to offer up a vocabulary for young children's outdoor excursions, and when is it more important to maintain a sense of silence, to allow the experience to announce itself? Must these different responses be situated in diametric opposition, or can they act reciprocally as pedagogical intentions, walking and working alongside one another, (re)orienting the decisions educators can make to render deeper meaning possible? This living tension between naming and practicing silence speaks to the power of offering names to things we experience in nature. As Pelo writes, "it's not enough to know the name of a place or a being—that doesn't make intimacy. But without knowing a name, intimacy is more difficult" (p. 107).

Educators are constantly faced with decisions of whether and when to name things for young children—a chickadee, a heron, a bald eagle, a flower—and when to remain silent. These moments all present themselves as acts of intervention, drawing and directing attention in particular ways while simultaneously obscuring other potentialities, other possible stories. How does the act, for example, of naming a butterfly as an insect that has three body parts and six legs compare with Dylan's deeply empathetic encounter with the butterfly who emerged from its cocoon with an injured wing? How do educators make the complex decision of when to offer up a name for a being and when to offer more intimate iterations? We would do well to heed Pelo's words:

When do we teach children the names of things? Not at the outset of time outdoors, not as a substitute for it. Not from the hope that learning the names of things and creatures will create a feel for life-in-place or a reverence for a particular plot of land and its small, tender creatures. Not as environmental instruction. We offer the names of places and creatures, of growing things and living things, in the context of relationships. (p. 109)

When educators give a name to a particular encounter, they invite certain mappings, selectively weaving closer relationships with particular iterations—and a way to get to know something more intimately. Naming, seen in this way, is part of the act of *reconnaissance*, which, as Rinaldi (2006) offers up, is "an attempt to re-visit and re-understand what has taken place by highlighting previously constructed relations, developing and challenging them, and consequently, producing new ones" (p. 103). This act of reconnaissance—of selective naming—highlights certain enunciations and renders possible new meanings while silencing alternative meanings, other questions and curiosities. Educators mindful that the decision to name, like the decision to practice silence, is an act of intervention can intentionally and productively work the tension between naming and keeping silent.

Provocative, invitational, and relational—this is a lovely book to be read widely. Written accessibly, it evokes deep thought into the ways we can mindfully reorient our pedagogical stance to cultivate dispositions of ecological identity in our work with young children. Read as an inspiration for becoming ecologically literate, this book presents a challenge to situate our selves pedagogically in more ecologically relational spaces, within which different metaphors, different questions, and different ways of thinking, being, feeling, conversing, and living might emerge from a local attentiveness to time and place. To take the time to experience and become friends with an apple tree across seasons, across the different senses, is an act of love. "Time is intimacy," writes Pelo (p. 65). What relational possibilities there are for growing an ecological identity are not predictable beforehand, of course. This book is not a recipe for ecological identity. But in growing a mindfulness to intentionally present opportunities for young children and adults to experience the outdoors intimately and to intentionally use these powerful interactions in our work with young children, we might move, in deep and subtle ways, into nurturing what it means to relate with one another in more ecologically sustainable and transformative ways—to come home.

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## Book Review: Claire Warden's *Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools*

Reviewed by Rebecca Sung

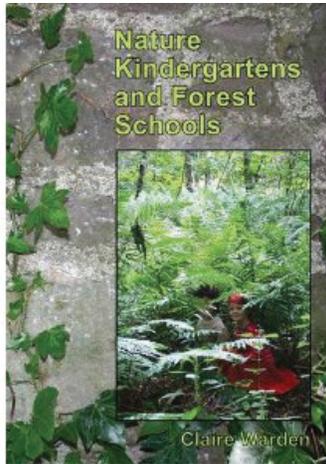
**Rebecca Sung** has a geography degree and is an early childhood educator with the Simon Fraser University Child Care Society in Burnaby, BC. She did a practicum at Claire Warden's Auchlone Nature Kindergarten in Scotland in the spring of 2013. Email: [dbeccaann@gmail.com](mailto:dbeccaann@gmail.com)

Claire Warden's *Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools* (2nd edition, Mindstretchers, 2012) is an aesthetically pleasing summary of the philosophy behind the programs she has founded in Scotland and the talks and workshops she gives around the world. This book presents the values that underpin Warden's approach to quality outdoor-focused early years programs. These values are wide ranging and all encompassing, evidencing both the holistic nature of Warden's style and one of the big themes of this book: nature kindergartens are not just about the nature.

The book is laid out in short chapters, with each one striving to summarize a specific aspect of Warden's nature kindergartens, starting with the core values. It's a challenging goal, considering the deep and diverse nature of these key aspects, and one that is not quite accomplished due to Warden's scattered writing style. However, the reader gets a feeling for her philosophy and the great passion fuelling it. A few main themes pop out as the important and integral pieces. Beyond that, it is up to the reader to pick out the tidbits they are interested in and follow up on them elsewhere. The book is therefore a good introduction to outdoor-focused programs and all their wonderfully varied potential. Warden has a way of inspiring all of us to get outside and just try it! Case studies and beautiful photographs add to the book, offering glimpses of the richness of life and discoveries in a nature kindergarten.

Chapter 1, with its description of core values, is where you first realize that Warden's nature kindergartens are about much more than children playing outside. This theme runs throughout the book and is shown through its emphasis on holistic learning as well as the big-picture view. Warden writes about quality in every aspect of the methodology, from the image of the child and the adult's role to the kindergarten's resources, materials, and space. As Warden writes, "the journey to create a nature kindergarten is as much about the minds of the people as it is about the landscape" (p. 40).

Another main theme that comes up in various chapters, and is more thoroughly explored in chapter 10, is time. Warden stresses the importance of children learning on nature-time and being given the time and space to learn from in-depth, intimate experiences in nature. Risk taking and trust are other important themes because they often come up for educators and parents who take children to



natural areas. Warden points out that risk taking is a valuable part of childhood and she devotes chapter 15 to positive risk exploration. A fourth major theme is the child's connection to nature and how it inspires wonder; Warden describes and contrasts biophilia and biophobia in chapter 18. Warden writes that "children have always been connected to nature. It is so often the adults around them who have lost the link" (p.13). Taking that observation into account, the book explores the question of what is the best way to offer nature to children.

Of course, no book about nature kindergartens would be complete without presenting ideas for ways to use natural materials, explore fire, build dens, grow gardens, and inspire a culture of stewardship. These are some of the tidbits you can pick up on in Warden's book and be inspired to learn more about. Also a given for a book like this is the rundown of how time spent in nature benefits children—Warden gives a quick summary of this topic and refers to an excellent book by Richard Louv (2005), *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, for more information.

Warden's book is more about inspiring educators to get outside and try nature-based learning, whether they have a wild forest at their doorstep or just a cement patio with some weeds growing in the cracks. As she states, "young children have a natural connection to nature and will seek out and find nature in even the most unlikely places" (Warden, 2012, p. 14). It is our job to enable this connection and build on children's experiences. This book is great for anyone wanting to learn more about how to do this in an innovative, respectful, and collaborative way. Warden's philosophy, experience, passion, and ideas make *Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools* a good book; however, seeing her present is a much more engaging and provoking experience than reading her writing. I highly recommend attending one of Warden's presentations or workshops if you get the chance!

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## Book Review: Affrica Taylor's *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*

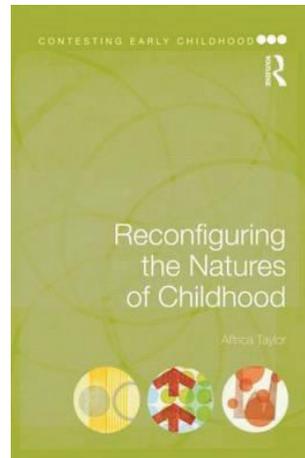
Reviewed by Kimberley Ainsworth

**Kimberley Ainsworth** is an early childhood educator and an MA student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. She is interested in exploring posthuman, poststructural, and postcolonial perspectives as they apply to our understandings of children, materiality, and early childhood environments. Email: [k.ainsworth@shaw.ca](mailto:k.ainsworth@shaw.ca)

Within the early childhood field, the back to nature movement is fast becoming a quintessential part of early childhood pedagogy in the EuroWestern world. In Norway, outdoor environments figure centrally in early childhood programs, with forest daycare centres rapidly expanding to all parts of Scandinavia (Borge, Nordhagen, & Lie, 2003; Melhuus, 2012). Similarly, the number of forest schools is mushrooming throughout the UK (O'Brien, 2009). In North America, Richard Louv's (2005) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* ignited an urgency to move programs for young children out into nature. In the US, it spurred the "No Child Left Inside" Act (United States Congress, 2011). As author Affrica Taylor states in *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* (Routledge, 2013), "childhood and nature seem like a perfect match" (p. xiii). Yet is this coupling as pure and innocent as it appears at first glance?

As an early childhood educator, I wonder what the implications of this popular movement might be for children, families, educators, the early childhood field, and, indeed, nature itself. With a desire to think more deeply about children and nature discourses, my interest was piqued in Affrica Taylor's *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood*. Taylor offers intelligent and well-articulated insights into the geo-historical shaping of the early childhood renaturalization movement, sharing her perspectives on a reconfigured and more inclusive approach. In this review of Taylor's book, I summarize the chapters and reflect on how Taylor's views might be taken up by early childhood practitioners.

*Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* is part of the Contesting Early Childhood series edited by Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss. Taylor is associate professor of sociology of childhood and education at the University of Canberra, Australia. Her past work has included exploring issues of gender and racialization in early childhood. In this publication, Taylor argues for reconfigured views of childhood and nature relationships. She draws on her extensive background in human geography and ethnography, her onto-epistemological positioning in postcolonial, posthumanist, queer, and Indigenous theories and feminist science studies, and



her experience teaching and researching in an Australian Indigenous community. The intended readership of this book includes postgraduate students, scholars, and educators at the college or university level.

Taylor's transdisciplinary and multitheoretical approach to the subject area offers inroads to contextualize and complexify the current Western world "nature's child" and "nature as teacher" discourses. Taylor's writing contributes to "material turn" conversations by offering a strong counterdiscourse to current anthropocentric views. As Taylor argues, humancentric paradigms have disconnected nature from culture and humans from nonhuman worlds. With this publication,

Taylor adds to the material turn scholarship of writers such as Donna Haraway, Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, Karen Barad, and Bruno Latour. In *Reconfiguring the Nature of Childhood*, Taylor shares her "common worlds" approach as a means of opening up new spaces for understanding children and their relationships with nature. Common worlds offers an ethical approach for decentring humans, centring instead on relations between human and nonhuman worlds.

### Book Overview

In keeping with the goals of the Contesting Early Childhood series, *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* provides critical reflections on dominant discourses of early childhood, offering readers alternative views. In this publication, Taylor takes up the EuroWestern confluences of romantic and valorized constructions of nature and childhood. The book is divided into two parts, each comprising three chapters. Part One, "The Seduction of Nature," offers a comprehensive deconstruction of the coupled discourses of nature and childhood. Part Two, "Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood," offers a reconstruction—other ways of viewing child/nature relationships. Taylor is clear from the outset that her reconstruction offers only a starting point for further engagement and research—a foundation on which to build further critical reflection and reconstructive theory. Throughout the book, Taylor questions the normalization of nature education discourses and

unravels how these discourses have been shaped through forces of history, tradition, politics, culture, and science. In Taylor's words, her intention is not to "discard the relationship between nature and childhood, but to hijack it from the Romantics, to politicize, reorient and reconfigure it as a lively and unenclosed set of relations with a different set of political and ethical affordances" (p. xiv).

### Part One Chapter Summaries

In Part One, Taylor traces the historical roots of "nature's child" and "nature as teacher" discourses. In the first chapter, "Rousseau's Legacy: Figuring Nature's Child," she describes the broad-reaching impact of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th-century Enlightenment philosopher who wrote compellingly of his utopian visions of a society in which nature and children figure centrally. Rousseau's writing of the treatise *Emile* in 1762 sounded a reverberating chord that revolutionized views of childhood and nature (Taylor, 2013). In *Emile*, Rousseau positioned childhood as a time of innocence and purity. He saw children's immersion in nature as the method through which children's innate goodness is preserved and protected from society's ills, and children's development thus nurtured. Rousseau advocated for a "negative education"—keeping formal education from children until age 12 and employing nature as teacher (Rousseau, 2003, cited in Taylor, 2013, p. 9). Taylor points out the dualisms that founded Rousseau's philosophy. Rousseau saw nature as the source of purification for children and society as the source of evil. In presenting nature as the "moral authority" and "salvation" of society (Taylor, 2013, p. 6), Rousseau also positioned society as the source of corruption and "slavery," thereby discursively disembodied nature from society and culture. He juxtaposed his positioning of childhood as a time of innocence and purity with adulthood, stating, "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything denigrates in the hands of man" (Rousseau, 1762, cited in Taylor, p. 11). In this way, both nature and childhood were valorized and imparted as monolithic, a view that obscured their many complexities and entanglements. Throughout Chapter 1, Taylor points out tracings of European romanticized discourses of "idealized natural childhood" through writings (p. 18). She draws connections to Romantic-era writings and the transcendental wilderness movement in 19th-century North America that grew through the writings of authors such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In Chapter 2, "Representing Nature's Child," Taylor elaborates on inheritances of Rousseau's philosophy, pointing out ways it has been integrated into popular culture. Taylor describes how the good nature / bad culture divide has been propagated through cultural transmissions in the form of children's texts, using an array of examples of 20th-century representations of nature's child from North American, European, and Australian children's storybooks and movies. Taylor's examples include the Disney movies *Bambi* (Hand, 1942) and *Pocahontas* (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995) and the Australian stories *Storm Boy* (Thiele, 1964) and *Dot and the Kangaroo* (Pedley, 1899). The author draws on these

texts to illustrate how nature is presented as wild and unpeopled, with animals (representing nature) living harmoniously with one another while humans (representing culture) are represented as evil. Taylor employs Foucault's concept of "heterotopic spaces" as a device with which to queer these examples of nature's child representations. She defines heterotopic spaces as "ambiguous in-between spaces that remain as part of the existing 'real world' while offering possibilities beyond it" (p. 32). The heterotopic worlds offered up through these children's story examples act to symbolize the real world; however, by portraying romanticized notions of nature, they also act as foils to the real world, revealing their places of slippage and rupture. Taylor asks how these heterotopic "other" spaces shape our children's views of nature: "How do these nature purification rites and rituals affect [children's] sense of self and belonging in the world?" (p. 33). Do they inspire children's love of nature or serve to disillusion children about the real world?

In Chapter 3, "Educating Nature's Child," Taylor turns her attention to the ways Rousseau's philosophy has influenced early childhood pedagogy over the past three centuries. Taylor outlines how reiterations of Rousseau's nature's child and nature as teacher surfaced in Friedrich Fröbel's kindergartens, later in Montessori and Waldorf pedagogies, and again in contemporary pedagogies, including the "new nature movement" (p. 53). Taylor uses many examples to reveal pedagogues' connections to romantic thinking about the natural world. I will expand here on Fröbel's connections. Prior to establishing his kindergartens, Fröbel studied crystallography and had a vast knowledge of botany. He held Rousseau's belief that young children held the closest bonds to the natural world. As evidence of his values, Fröbel established children's gardens as part of the kindergarten environment. The physical layout of the gardens, the plants, and the children's gardening methods adhered to stringent guidelines set out by Fröbel. As well, Fröbel's "gifts"—open-ended learning objects used by the children in the kindergarten programs—were designed to simulate natural materials such as sticks, rocks, and crystals. For Fröbel:

*just as children will learn how best to become good cultivators (and good citizens) by observing these natural patterns, rhythms and processes, so will their own cultivation within the kindergarten environment be ensured by pedagogical forms, patterns and processes that are modelled upon nature.* (Taylor, p. 41).

Taylor also maps Rousseau's broad-reaching influence on child-centred, play-based, experiential approaches to early childhood education. She states that a 21st-century variation of Rousseau's philosophy is the "endangered nature's child" discourse, which was spurred by Richard Louv's (2005) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. The popular book inspired the "no child left inside" movement in the United States and increased attention in North America to young children's relationships with nature. The Scandinavian

and German forest school movement, established in the late 20th century, has its own historical trajectory and a growing popularity, as does the Scottish nature kindergarten movement. Taylor offers interesting insights into contributing factors to the popularity of the contemporary EuroWestern back to nature movement, including growing environmental concerns, concern about rising obesity rates, New Ageism, an increased valuing of rationalist pedagogical approaches, and a concern about the effects of increased technology on children, all combined with impassioned calls to action. In Taylor's view, underlying the back to nature movement is a nostalgic adult longing to reclaim "innocent" childhood through nature. The author describes ways that science has been recently deployed as a means of validating children's development in and through nature while providing heightened motivation for children's environmental stewardship. In conflict with these forces is a move toward "risk-averse regulatory regimes" and economic rationalism (p. 56). As Taylor comprehensively outlines, the back to nature project comprises complex agendas, tensions, and politics with an enduring connection to Romantic-era beliefs of the unique relationship between nature and children.

## Part Two Chapter Summaries

In Part Two, Taylor acts to reclaim childhood-nature relationships from their Romantic-era bindings. Her stated intention is to move the childhood-nature relationship "elsewhere" (Haraway, 2004, p. 90, cited in Taylor, p. 62). She does this by drawing on theory from human geography, science and technology studies, posthuman, poststructural, feminist, Indigenous, and ecological studies. Most notably, Taylor turns to the writings of acclaimed science and technology scholars Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour.

In Chapter 4, "Assembling Common Worlds," Taylor argues that casting children as innocent and in need of "pure" and valorized nature sets up a binary division between children and the very real worlds in which they live. These binaries serve to divide nature from culture and "innocent" childhood from "degenerative" adulthood. These binaries also restrict us from viewing children as always an inherent part of the messy worlds they inherit and enmeshed in nonhuman worlds. Taylor enacts Haraway's concept of "queer-kin" to offer up queer reconfigurations to help illustrate a common-worlds approach. She argues for a hybridization approach that moves us beyond human-centric thinking. Provocative questions she asks include these:

*What kinds of heterogeneous common world relations make and remake childhoods? What kinds of dance patterns weave between children, educators, texts, the curriculum, pedagogical materials, the architecture of the early learning environment, families and the wider world? How might we rechoreograph these patterned relations to reshape common worlds? What ethical dilemmas might children encounter in the dance of relating, especially in relating across difference? How might we best support them to respond to these ethical dilemmas and to co-exist*

*with difference?* (p. 81)

As Taylor states, a common-worlds approach requires us to wrestle with tensions as we broaden our gaze to the intersections of human and nonhuman worlds and the multiple ways they are already entwined. She makes the point that broadening our gaze in such a way is not only an ethical move but is also highly generative in opening up space for new ways of understanding nature and children.

Having previously laid the groundwork for her common-worlds approach, in Chapter 5, "Enacting Common Worlds," Taylor examines child-animal convergences. Her intention for this chapter is to disrupt dominant individualistic, developmental, and anthropocentric views of children-animal relations. As she points out,

*child-animal common worlds are leaky, messy, challenging, dynamic and transforming. They are about as far as you can get from the hermetically sealed, pure and perfect child-animal worlds manufactured by Disney Dreamworld Studios. . . . They seriously consider the geo-historical specificities that constellate to produce queerly heterogeneous and configured child-animal common worlds in particular times and places—common worlds that are characterized by their own distinctive political and ethical challenges.* (p. 88)

Taylor uses common-worlds examples from postcolonial Australia to bring our attention to the various ways in which animals have been viewed, for example, as food, exotic "others," pests, pets, and an inherent part of Australian identity. Recalling her experiences teaching in the Australian Aboriginal community of Mparntwe, Taylor recounts her struggles to understand the complex and layered relations among the Yeperenye children, their kin, dogs, caterpillars, plants, and land, all set within the embedded legacy of colonialism. The author describes how Yeperenye creation stories, or "dreaming stories" (p. 93), are performative, shaping the children and their elders by carrying into the present spiritual and kinship origins connected to caterpillars, land, and other Aboriginal "skin groups" (p. 98). The "two-way learning" of the community emphasizes children's learning within relationship to ancestors and elders. With these accountings, Taylor describes ways in which the relational ontology of the Yeperenye challenges EuroWestern notions of individualism and child-centredness. Other common-worlds examples Taylor uses come from interspecies relationships between Australian wombats and settlers. The convergences of wombat and human lives that Taylor describes take many forms, alternatively coshaping wombats and humans as pests and hunters, neighbours sharing land, the focus of study and scientists, anthropomorphized characters and readers, and friends. Taylor's purpose in sharing these examples is to draw our attention to ways in which nature and culture form an "entangled and inseparably related imbroglio" (p. 112) to help us move forward in creating new common-worlds ways of thinking

about children and nature.

Taylor's concluding chapter, "Towards Common Worlds Pedagogies" (p. 114), highlights two ethical challenges we currently face as communities: to live peacefully in a multispecies world, full of complicated relationships, and to ensure ecological sustainability in a world with dwindling natural resources. The common-worlds approach she articulates forms the foundation for moving beyond romanticized versions of children and nature. As she reiterates, the current back to nature movement is based on developmental views of children that hinge children's learning about nature on their immersion in nature during critical life ages/stages. This humanist, individualist approach demarcates culture from nature, children from adults, and humans from nonhumans. Taylor's common-worlds approach offers an inclusive alternative—tackling issues of agency, subjectivity, and interconnectedness between human and nonhuman worlds. Taylor makes the point that going forward in the 21st century means creating new pedagogies to shift us beyond humancentric thinking. Indigenous onto-epistemologies offer inclusive ways of viewing more-than-human relations, and Taylor offers a number of examples of these throughout her book. She makes it clear, however, that it is not her intention to appropriate these knowledges. Instead, she offers these examples to create ruptures so that we might find openings for new pedagogies to emerge. In this final chapter, Taylor offers three guiding principles for generating 21st-century early childhood pedagogy: (1) relations in both human and more-than-human worlds should be seen as central; (2) pedagogy must attend to place and its specificities; and (3) pedagogy should be developed through collective inquiry with children and educators.

### Critical Reflections and Concluding Thoughts

My purpose in reading *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* was to critically reflect on my own early childhood practice. With the early childhood field rallying passionately behind the back to nature movement, my concern is, how do I respond ethically with pedagogy? I wonder how to reconcile the competing discourses that are persuading us to take children out into nature to optimize their physical and psychological health, learning, and sense of wonder, to mould children into environmental stewards, to rescue children from urbanization, yet to also keep children safe from the harms of the wild. Quite simply, I wondered if there were other ways to view children and nature. Taylor's book did not disappoint. She offers a well-thought, socially just approach.

Taylor opened my eyes to the pervasiveness of the nature's child and nature as teacher discourses. Both of these normalizing discourses are infused within EuroWestern pedagogy, and Taylor's book left me pondering what I believe and why, and what forms the basis of my beliefs and values. As Taylor points out, it is not her intention that we abandon these nature-based discourses, but rather that we reflect critically on them to understand what they do.

Taylor's writing highlights the ways in which alternate constructions of place, nature, and childhood have been silenced. Her attention to relatedness and intersections of species in nature was refreshing. I wondered why, in a field that highly values relationships and connections, such thinking has not been seen as mainstream. At first blush, shifting from child-centred practice and decentering the child seemed to me an unethical move. However, Taylor is convincing in her well-supported arguments for the ethics of centring on entanglements between species and nature. In doing so, we make space for considering colonial legacies, ecological shifting, and the importance of geo-histories as inherent aspects of our pedagogies. Taylor's approach is an inclusive one that includes responding collectively to "messy worlds of co-implicated histories, uneven power relations and ethical challenges" (p. 79). Her book motivates me, as an early childhood educator, to observe through this lens. New questions have emerged for me about what happens when we move early childhood programs outside. What happens when I join with the children in nature? How do we (the children and I) define nature? What do we pay attention to and what might escape our gaze? Can the material world figure more prominently in our gaze so that we pay closer attention to the in-between-ness of things? My previously held romantic visions of untouched, uninhabited wilderness have been dispelled through new awareness gained through this book. I wonder now about the histories and legacies of place and my responsibilities in teaching children about these. I found particularly interesting, in Chapter 2, Taylor's exploration of children's texts that contain anthropomorphized animals. As she points out, these children's stories also portray glorified representations of nature. I found the questions she raised in this section thought provoking. She asks, for example,

*Do these heterotopic nature representations become [children's] primary referents for nature? ... Does the pure nature heterotopia inspire their love of nature or effect disappointment in or disassociation from the less-than-pure and perfect material natures that they encounter in their everyday lives? (p. 33)*

These are questions I hope to co-investigate more fully with children. I wonder how such representations shape children and their relationship to the natural world.

As Taylor states from the outset, her intention with this book is to lay the groundwork for thinking more deeply about nature and children. She offers an extensive and insightful deconstruction of the current renaturalization movement and its history. In my own practice, this deconstruction will function to temper my responses and offer some resistance to the dominant child-nature pedagogies that abound. Taylor follows up her deconstruction with her reconstructed, hybridized common-worlds approach. This reconstruction forms a thoughtful base on which to build research in early childhood practice. In considering how to move forward, I share similar questions to Taylor's. Indigenous knowledges offer inclusive approaches, yet I wonder how we

might walk the fine line between respecting Indigenous ways of thinking and crossing over into appropriation. *Reconfiguring the Natures of Childhood* offers a richly layered and contextualized view of childhood and nature relations that leaves me thinking about my own complicities in the stories and pedagogies I co-shape in early childhood practice. I am left pondering what could be and how to respond pedagogically to thinking about early childhood settings' relations to nature.

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## Friends of Children Award

### Jacqueline Tisher

Jacqueline Tisher has demonstrated dedication and patience in improving the lives of medically fragile children in Saskatchewan.

Working as a registered nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit at a Regina hospital, Jacqueline was finding that, on very rare occasions, parents were either unwilling or unable to take their child home from the hospital, and if they did, they found it almost impossible to live. In many situations, one parent would have to quit their job to stay home to look after the child, with the extreme stress of trying circumstances leading to burnout. Jacque herself was the mother of a little girl with spinal bifida, and she knew first hand some of the challenges faced by parents whose children are born with difficult medical situations. Some of these little people spend days and months in incubators with no one coming to visit.

Jacqueline came to love one little girl whose mother was unable to care for her. She fought with government agencies, trying to adopt the little girl and take her home from the hospital. Sadly, the little girl, Hope, died before this could happen. Jacque became more determined to fight for medically fragile children and their families. She opened a day care in her home, hired another nurse to help her, and started Hope's Home ([www.hopeshome.org](http://www.hopeshome.org)). As more children came, they outgrew the space in her home, and she bought a bigger one. After several years, she was able to buy a building to offer care to more children.

Hope's Home is the first integrated child care facility in all of Canada. Twelve children moved from the Tisher home into the new building. When it opened, it also had a few infant spaces. The present staff consists of nurses, early childhood educators, developmental workers, and rehabilitation therapists. The facility looks after typically developing children as well as those who are considered medically fragile. The focus of Hope's Home is on



inclusion, with a special emphasis on pedagogical principles from Reggio Emilia. A second centre opened a few years ago in Regina and then another in Prince Albert. Now plans are in the works to build a 4,000-square-foot building in Regina to house a 90-space childcare facility that also has the capacity to offer 24-hour respite care.

At Hope's Home, one might see children with wheelchairs, feeding tubes, severe cognitive delays, and various types of "special needs" playing alongside children who are developing more typically. All activities are inclusive, so every child participates and is given whatever support they need. Children help one another.

Jacqueline has worked nonstop for years to try to make children with medical needs and their families enjoy life like anyone else. She spends endless hours promoting her centres. She has been approached from all over Canada to help others create working models, including teams from Saskatoon and Winnipeg with interest in setting up similar centres.

Jacqueline is a leader in Saskatchewan's health care community. She understands the needs of children and their families and freely offers her time and energy to be a voice for children with complex medical needs. She was awarded the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for 2013, as well as many other provincial awards.

In recognition of her commitment to children and her passion for their care, CAYC is very pleased to acknowledge Jacqueline Tisher with the Friends of Children Award.

*Respectfully submitted by Peggie Olson, CAYC Saskatchewan*



Iris Berger

## PUBLICATIONS CHAIRPERSON

**In The Name of Multiple Perspectives**

It will probably not come as a surprise to anyone if I suggest that, at certain points in history, a particular discourse (a language, a theory, or a perspective) about education (and early childhood education) gains popularity and, with it, the power to affect not only how we think about education, but also how we “do” education. Recently, I have witnessed how in British Columbia and in other parts of Canada, especially Ontario, the discourse of self-regulation and self-regulated learning has gained exactly such prominent status in the domain of formal education. I believe that it is always important to raise questions and to problematize discourses that gain popularity, because it is impossible (and even dangerous) to try to understand education through a single theory or perspective. In fact, my hope is that the publications in *Canadian Children* will continue to remind our readers that there are always multiple ways of imagining, understanding, and enacting learning and education.

My intent in this short entry is not to argue with the validity of the theory of self-regulation, and I am well aware of the rigorous, extensive, and valuable research that has been done in this area. Rather, what I hope to do is to invite the readers to consider how the prevalence of a single discourse, for example the discourse of self-regulation, may cast a shadow on alternative pedagogical perspectives and questions. My concern is especially for the importance of making visible alternative educational viewpoints that engage with the agency of the child in more politically oriented ways.

**Some Questions about the Language of Self-regulation**

The theory of self-regulation emerged in the 1980s. Its roots are in the fields of social cognition, especially with the work of Bandura’s social learning theory, and metacognition, a concept coined by Flavell which entails an awareness and knowledge of one’s own thinking (Schunk, 2008). Over the last few years self-regulation has become a key player in educational reforms in Canada, and has been featured in educational research, new curricula documents and policies, and the national and provincial media (see, for example, Shankar, n.d.; Wells, 2013). In BC, a fairly large research project involving six school districts was initiated with the intent of implementing and monitoring the impact of a self-regulated learning instruction model (Canadian Self Regulation Initiative).

Self-regulated learning (SLR) was advanced by Barry Zimmerman, who defines self-regulation as “students’ self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions, which are systematically oriented toward attainment of their [learning] goals” (cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994, p. ix).

Self-regulated learning is linked with achievement of educational outcomes and improving academic performance. In fact, theorists of self-regulation wanted to challenge the more traditional understanding of students’ abilities as emanating from the learners’ particular backgrounds or levels of intelligence. Instead, self-regulation researchers attributed individual difference to lack of self-regulation strategies (Zimmerman, 2002). Importantly, self-regulation theorists postulated that self-regulatory strategies such as goal setting, planning, persistence, monitoring and evaluating effectiveness, adapting, and reflecting, are teachable. Therefore, they argued for transferring more responsibility for learning to the learner as the latter develops a capacity to self-regulate (Zimmerman, 2002).

Yet, as with other highly popularized discourses, definitions of self-regulation have become diluted to the point that self-regulation scholars admit that currently there is great confusion about the meanings of this term (Schunk, 2008). While self-regulation scholars are quick to clarify that self-regulation is not about compliance, and while they further claim that, in order to promote self-regulatory strategies, children need to encounter complex learning situations, engage in collaborative projects, and be offered choices of academic tasks (Perry & Hutchinson, n.d.; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001), the connotations of a word such as “regulation” link the self-regulation discourse with self-control and obedience. The literature about self-regulation is replete with words such as control, monitoring, and personal efficacy (see for example, Schunk, 2008).

Beyond the unintended connotations of self-control and compliance, the discourse of self-regulation (with its focus on the “self,” as in promoting self-awareness, self-observation,

self-monitoring, etc.) also implies a highly individualized view of learning and education. Even when learning takes place in social situations, the achievements of self-regulated learning are typically measured on an individual basis. An individualized view of education begs the question about the role of educational institutions to entice children to take a more collective view of their responsibility for each other and for the world, especially in times of serious ecological and political crises when public aptitude to take responsibility for these crises seems to be eroding. Another issue with viewing learning as a highly individualized endeavour is that it makes it easier to direct the blame for the “failure” of learning to particular individuals (and their families). A hint of this attitude can be seen in the Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative (2014) website, where it is stated: “We are seeing an increasing number of children coming into the school system with problems in self-regulation” (BC’s Self-Regulation Story: Engaging the First Wave Classrooms and Schools, para.8).

### Alternative ways of Imagining Learning and Education

The educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2005), for example, offers a different view of learning than the one espoused by the self-regulated learning literature. While acknowledging that learning as acquiring more and more knowledge and skills (in a cycle of setting goals, attaining the goals, and evaluating the attainment of these goals) can be suitable for certain educational purposes, Biesta proposes to see learning *also* as a response to a question. He argues that learning happens when we encounter resistance, difficulty, something new, and that, most importantly, learning becomes pedagogically significant when children gain an opportunity to show who they are and where they stand as a response to a common problem or interest (Biesta, 2005). From his perspective, learning always entails a risk, because we cannot always know where learning might take us and how we may be transformed by it. He says,

*To negate or deny the risk involved in engaging in education is to miss a crucial dimension of education. To suggest that education can be and should be risk free, that learners don't run any risk by engaging in education, or that 'learning outcomes' can be known and specified in advance, is a gross misrepresentation of what education is about. (p. 61)*

### Making Space for the Rebellious Child

As educators, if we take the responsibility to critically engage with the question of *what education is about*, we may be curious not only about how children can achieve better academically, although I do see the significance of research that attends to this question. We may also become curious about how we can imagine and actively bring into existence alternative ways of doing education *with* children. As Malaguzzi (1998) once said: “Either a school is capable of continually transforming itself in response to children or the school becomes something that goes around and around, remaining in the same spot” (p. 90).

Perhaps the ethical risk of desiring the self-regulated child is precisely in closing the door for the rebellious child -- the child who provokes us to think about our automated ways of doing education, the child who inspires us to resist what has been given as inevitable, as the truth, or the good. In other words, if we want to remain open to new and alternative perspectives, we need to maintain the space where a child has the possibility, as Malaguzzi proposed in his poem *The Hundred Languages of Children*, to say: “no way!”

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## Canadian Children Vol. 39 No. 1

This special online issue of *Canadian Children* contextualizes and maps pedagogical moments, practices, events, discourses and conceptualizations of Canadian early childhood education. The articles critically examine how neoliberal arrangements, linkages and assemblages can simultaneously create limitations and possibilities for children, educators, parents, researchers, policy makers and curriculum developers.

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#### *Special Issue: Neoliberalism*

By Dr. Luigi Iannacci

### Child Study

#### *I've got my EYE on you: Schooled Readiness, Standardized Testing, and Developmental Surveillance*

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#### *Bear-Child Stories in Late Liberal Colonialist Spaces of Childhood*

By Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Lara di Tomasso and Fikile Nxumalo



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### News

#### *Call for Contributions*

By Dr. Sylvia Kind

## Call for Contributions

*Special Issue on 'The Visual Arts in Early Childhood Education'*

*For Canadian Children, 2016 On-line edition*

*Guest Editor: Dr. Sylvia Kind, Capilano University*

Children's artistic engagements are increasingly taken seriously as investigative, relational, and meaning making processes involving various fabrications and compositions and multiple ways of knowing. This is a shift from thinking about children's artistic engagements as primarily individual, self-expressive, emotional representations. Rather, artistic engagements are understood as complex, intertextual, performative, material practices that produce particular worlds and meanings.

As such, we are interested in what art is, what it does, and how it matters in early childhood educational settings. We invite submission of papers that address the visual arts in early childhood from a variety of perspectives, particularly those that offer an alternative to conventional understandings of children's art making. In addition we are interested in contributions that:

- a. Propose innovative ways of thinking about the visual arts in early childhood education.
- b. Conceptualize children's artistic engagements and experimentations through relational-materialist, Deleuzian, and Indigenous perspectives.
- c. Explore the interconnections of contemporary art/artists and early childhood contexts.
- d. Experiment with visual/textual forms of representing children's artistic experimentations and forms of world-making.

Educators, researchers, and artists are invited to submit a 250 word abstract for this issue of *Canadian Children* focused on Visual Arts in Early Childhood Education to Sylvia Kind by August 15, 2014. If the abstract is accepted, the manuscript is due by January 31, 2015. Once the review process has been completed, accepted papers must be resubmitted by July 31, 2015.

Abstracts and papers can be submitted via email to Sylvia Kind (skind@capilanou.ca)

### GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

**Canadian Children** is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), a national association specifically concerned with the well-being of young children in Canada. The journal is published in print twice yearly and online once a year. *Canadian Children* contains invitational articles, peer-reviewed articles, articles from professionals in early childhood related fields, and reviews of books and other resources.

**Canadian Children** is a multidisciplinary journal. Authors from across Canada, and elsewhere, are invited to submit articles and book reviews which reflect the variety and extent of both research and practice in early childhood education and child well-being. Submissions should appeal to an audience that includes professionals in the field of childhood education and other child related fields, as well as researchers.

We welcome manuscripts between 4000-6000 words for the Invitational & Child Study sections, and between 1500-3000 words for the Directions and Connections section.

### Form, Length and Style:

- Articles may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Edition).
- Articles should be sent as an e-mail attachment to the email address below.
- All submissions should be accompanied by a copy of the signed permission form available on the website.
- Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs prior to submitting the manuscript via e-mail. Signed permissions need to be included in the submission.
- Please include a brief biographical sketch (4-5 sentences) including the author(s) full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information.
- An abstract should be included at the start of the manuscript and not exceed 100 words.
- 4-5 keywords should be included following the abstract
- Footnotes should not be used. Endnotes need to be located in the text by numbers.
- In order to enable blind review, manuscripts must be anonymized. No author information should be included in the manuscript.
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- It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

### Submission email address:

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### Contact Information:

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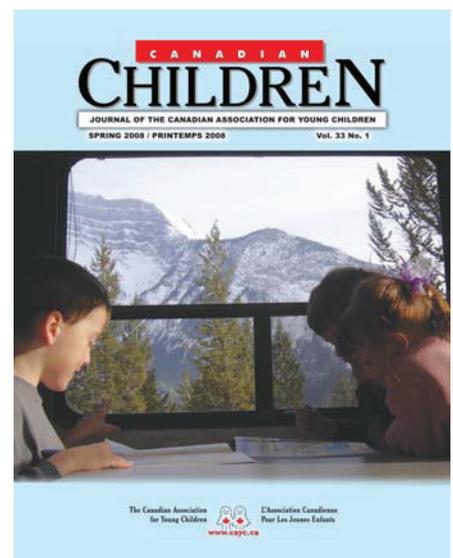
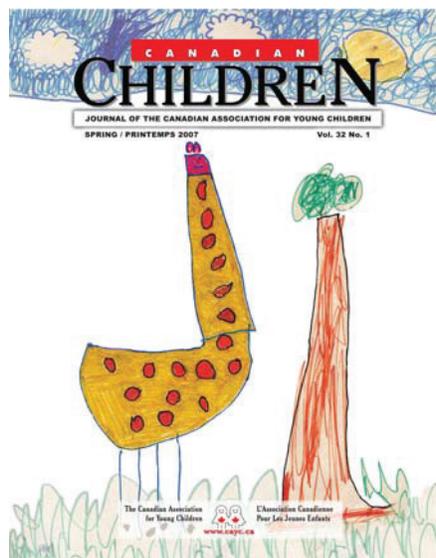
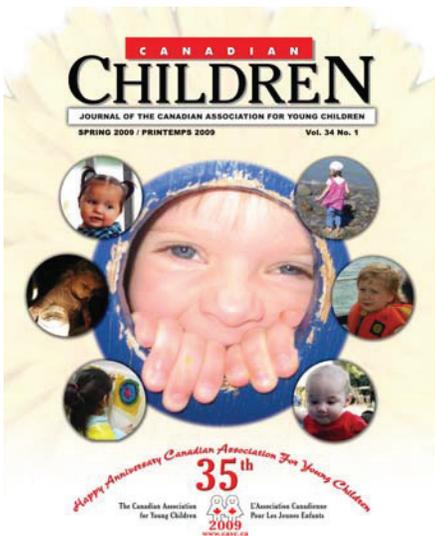
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Vicki Brown  
356 B Prospect Bay Road  
Prospect Bay, Nova Scotia B3T 1Z7  
Phone:902-852-2954  
Email: membership@cayc.ca

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