

## Image of the Educator: (re)Thinking Identity

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*This paper tells of an early childhood educator's search for meaning making while experiencing a crisis of the self—a deep questioning of personhood, worthiness, ability, and purpose. It represents a snapshot of a particular time in a particular life at the convergence of a master's program in ECE, a worldwide pandemic, and a provincial research project, which culminated in personal crisis and a great unsettling of identity. It is written in first person, from the 'I'—the author's humancentric appraisal of a personal pedagogical intervention, a reckoning with the self—in the hope of finding something otherwise, and something more generative as an educator within early childhood education. The paper grapples with the question of how we can create the conditions for early childhood educators to “read hard, think hard and write hard”—to dig deep, and to go deeper (St. Pierre, 2019) without dismantling a sense of self or a personhood that embodies a deep desire to contribute positively to our unfinished world.*

**Key words:** *identity, early childhood educator, meaning making, pandemic, early childhood education*

### Preface

*“I stand on the shoulders of giants.”<sup>1</sup>*

I cannot recall where or when I first heard this quote, but it resonates deeply. For me, it illuminates our interconnectedness and our reliance on others for not only our human survival but also our human flourishing. It reminds me that who I am—a white settler/colonizer woman—is always in relation to who I walk with, live with, read with, and write with. It is these encounters that infiltrate and contaminate, offering a vitality that “changes who we are as we make room for others” (Tsing, 2015, p. 24).

There are many giants in my life: ancestors who have gone before me and those who continue to walk with me offering moments and memories that linger in multiple and meaningful ways. One example is a particular professor and a particular assignment where I was asked to write a pedagogical intervention articulating *what I believed was needed now in education*. At the time, I wasn't even sure what a pedagogical intervention was, but I was quite sure *I needed one*. You see, it was the spring of 2021 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. I

was living in rural British Columbia and nearing the completion of my first year in a master of education program. And, I had just received the news that I was being released from a contract with the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network—a position I felt certain would bring me closer to answering all the questions I had been ruminating and bumping up against for years. Questions I could not quite yet articulate. Questions that gestured toward my higher purpose and how I might make a difference. I felt that perhaps, as an early childhood educator of thirty plus years and a woman, daughter, sister, mother, and grandmother, I had something to offer the children, families, and educators in my community. When this opportunity abruptly ended, I felt like the door to my future, or any future,

had closed—the rug had been pulled out from beneath me. The ground where I was standing now felt unstable, unknowable, and foreign, and I was now struggling to find composure and a way to reinvent myself, stand tall, and move forward.

The following series of ruminations represents how I answered the call of my own pedagogical intervention. How I laboured to unjumble the complex and intense emotional response I had to this event. This assignment was a way for me to save myself—or to preserve what I felt was left of my “self”—through the art of writing. Writing for me has always been a way of collecting and working through the complexity of my feelings, revisiting and reconsidering my beliefs, ideations, sorrows, and shames. Through writing I am able to create space and to imagine an alternate space wherein hope is ignited and new perspectives can emerge. It is my way of relating to the events that make my life, define my life, or in this case *redefine my life*.

Writing this pedagogical intervention enabled me to stand up, steady myself, brush off the dust, bandage my bruised ego, and get down to the business of reimagining other futures and possible ways to contribute to the project of early childhood education. What follows is an edited version of the original essay. The paper grapples with the question of how we can create the conditions for early childhood educators to “read hard, think hard and write hard”—to dig deep, and to go deeper (St. Pierre, 2019) without dismantling a sense of self or a personhood that embodies a deep desire to contribute positively to our unfinished world.

## On (un)becoming

*Wanting to be human too, I sought for evidence that I was.* (Le Guin, 2019, p. 31)

I have heard it said that early childhood education (ECE) is in a crisis of imagination and in need of an intervention (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 2013). I have heard it said that the self is not an actual place to exist, and in the words of Nicholas Rose (1996), “the idea of ‘the self’ has entered a crisis that may well be irreversible” (p. 169). I have heard it said that we must slow down, go slow—slow, slow, slow—as a way to pay attention, notice, attend, and (re)think (Richardson & Langford, 2022). And to begin again—always beginning, and beginning, and beginning again—a perpetual and disorientating process of never-ending beginnings (Said, 1975). I have heard it said that education is violent, that it invokes a shuddering, fracturing, and rupturing as an inevitable state within the process of subject formation (Todd, 2015). I have heard it said that we are in the age of *man*, the Anthropocene—a geological epoch known for *man’s* impact in and on the world—a time of human exploration, exploitation, and colonization, whereby “natural” materials are resourced, extracted, commodified, contaminated, and exploited in the name of who knows what (Braidotti, 2020). A time of climate catastrophe and the mass extinction of multiple living species, an undoing of epic proportions by the overreaching, all powerful hand of “man” (Braidotti, 2020).

It has been said that the way forward is to decenter (dethrone, devalue, debunk) the human—this is the way to reimagine, reinvent “the self” and recreate more livable worlds for animate and inanimate beings (Haraway, 2016; Moss, 2014; Rose, 1996). I have heard it said that the structures and systems of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism are designed to segregate, silence, govern, manage, and control in the name of assimilation, eradication, conformity, and normativity—a way of “making the other into the same” (Moss, 2006, as cited in the *Early Learning Framework*, Government of British Columbia, 2019, p. 17). Moss (2019) talks about “ethics of an encounter” and how we make decisions to see or not to see what is encountered. Taylor writes, “violence today is facilitated by our blindness, by our no longer needing to meet our victims face-to-face” (p. 5): We see what we want to see, or turn a blind eye, thus avoiding seeing anything at all. Klein (2023) explains that one way we avoid seeing the other or seeing difference and seeing the consequences of our own actions is by creating a mirror image, rendering the other recognizable only through a mirrored image of the self.

I have heard it said that our species' survival and livability on our planet is at stake and that we must find other ways of being (Braidotti, 2020; Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2016). I have heard the rebel calls to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016) and that “everything is dangerous” (Foucault, 1983) and to “think we must” (Woolf as cited in Despret & Stengers, 2021) and that we must at the same time move beyond the self and the logics of independence and self-awareness toward interdependence, collaboration, and contamination, for without sustaining these complexities, we shall all die (Tsing, 2015). For me, these ideas have been deeply unsettling, troubling, and at times ungraspable. As exposures, they are felt as experiences of “estrangement, refiguring, altering ... called by a sensing” (Vintimilla, 2020, n.p.) that I couldn't quite yet sense or make sense of, and that I would (and even still) continue to bump up against.

### On questioning

I have grappled with understanding particular knowledges, philosophical pronouncements, and pedagogical frameworks that purport a particular form of containment—of a particular subject formation, the ideation of who one is supposed to be, a subjectivity that promotes a particular way to think, act, respond while at the same time rebuking the container<sup>2</sup>—the self, the individual thinking, feeling, and breathing human being. Or, in the words of Latour (2004), “like mad scientists who have let the virus of critique out of the confines of their laboratories ... it mutates now, gnawing everything up, even the vessels in which it is contained” (p. 231).

These seemingly opposing perspectives represent my ongoing struggle to reconcile binaries of either/or toward both. From within a humanistic vantage point, I seek a place to land, a place of certainty, of knowing and of *a truth* or a common point of connection—a collecting/bridging prior to departing. To know where I have come from and where I might be going. But this is untenable in the pedagogical position that insists on the denial of the self, that rebukes the desire for certainty, a distancing from the I and any individualistic form of knowability (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1996; Vintimilla et al., 2023). I am left wondering, how is *one* able to know, to think, and to do? How is *one* able to perform, move, and make meaning under what feels like a constant call for undoing and dismantling what it means to be human?



Figure 1. Disorientation.

What identity can possibly emerge under a barrage of tropes that bequeath conformity (albeit a particular image of conformity that appears to masquerade as a transformation of the self) to a particular way of being, knowing, and thinking (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1996; Vintimilla et al., 2023)? How does one breathe, never mind think and formulate a coherent thought, under the constant gaze of unrelenting critique? How does one arrive at some place otherwise when the journey is not knowable, accessible, or graspable? How does one navigate the tensions of being asked to move in particular ways that not only have truck with but also fantastically exploit and use (in the name of something otherwise) the logics, systems, and structures it purports to abhor?

Returning to Latour (2004), I too wonder if “a certain form of critical spirit has sent us down the wrong path” (p. 231) and positioned us in opposition to those for whom we say we are most concerned. I am left wondering: Can the means ever really justify the ends, when all I feel is disorientation (Figure 1<sup>3</sup>) and confusion that threaten to be(come) my undoing?

## On “rug pulling”

Katy Perry’s song “Roar” (2013) and Rachel Platten’s “Fight Song” (2015) represented giants in my life. Their lyrics lifted me up at another moment in time when I needed something to lean into. The song line “I stood for nothing, so I fell for everything” was a reminder to “know thyself” alongside “this is my fight song, take back my life song, prove I’m alright song,” which became the mantra that grounded me as I navigated my way through this difficult time. Today, as I look back, I can see how these women and their words helped me to see who I desired to be in the world at this time. Today, however, I recognize that these artists and their messages are situated within the same cultural and racial milieux as me. These songs are written for me, about me; they reflect my white, middle-class cis-gendered life. At this time, I had yet to understand this reality or gain the awareness of how my white privilege creates blinders that make it possible to not see the normative, whitewashing colonial narratives I would soon bump up against. However, this is part of *my story*, and I am leaning into it, reckoning with it, as a way of acknowledging that I am always and ongoingly implicated in the present by what I bring with me. Any attempt to not see would be an act of denial and would negate the opportunity for me to live and act differently here in this place, on this land with the multiple others that make this place home.

I share this as part of my history, my memories and stories, not to flaunt my privilege or to move about the world with a false sense of humility, but rather as my ongoing grappling with the question of how to live well with these realities and how to find a way for me to occupy and move in this particular body/selfhood with some sense of authority or authorship and to give myself permission to express my passions, my desires, and to acknowledge my fierce determination to be(come) the protagonist of my own life. You see, at this time becoming an independent, strong, intelligent woman *felt monumental*—it was my life raft and my anchor.

The question that lingers is whether or not I needed to give up my independence to live well with others. Does being the author of your own life neglect or negate the value or belief of the collective, of community or the commons—a space for the cultivation of a care ethic that extends beyond the egocentrism of the world today toward a positive regard for others and transformative human and more-than-human relationships and pedagogical commitments? If I subscribe to the ideology that the self is an illusion—a socially constructed identity that is not real (Rose, 1996; Todd, 2015)—can this not cause such a deep fracturing, unsettling, and disequilibrium that one runs the risk of losing oneself to deep despair, grappling and grasping for meaning in an already uncertain world? Does this stripping/denying of oneself dehumanize and overexpose one to an unreasonable vulnerability that gestures toward exploitation, marginalization, and oppression?

If I buy into the poststructuralist notion that the I doesn’t exist apart from others, and that the independent individual human subject is not possible or survivable apart from others, then what? How is the unknowable and nonexistent self to live? How then is it possible to stay with it, to slow down and jump to action—to *even know what the right action might be*? At some point does not the I have to speak from the I, think from the I, and perform from the I? Does the I not have a moral obligation to cultivate awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness to creating and sustaining an ethical and humanizing space that begins with acknowledging how the self is positioned? Is not the cultivation of reflective practice the ability to articulate who I am, how I got here, what I am responsible for, and what I must account for? If I am not permitted the words/utterances of the I, the individual self, how can I begin to deconstruct, make meaning, and engage in a dialogic process toward transformative ways of being, knowing, and doing that nourish the conditions for creativity, experimentation, and innovation with/in a vibrancy or *joie de vivre* necessary to reimagine a purposive and meaningful life?

## On landing

I turn now to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Here, I find a place to touch down, land, linger, and reflect. A much-welcomed reprieve from the cacophony, chaos, and confusion of the space I felt I was left dangling from. *Dangling* is interpreted here first as a space of precarity but also of liminality and eventually of potentiality and possibility. As I worked to rethink the meaning of dangling, I had to concede that perhaps it was not such a bad space to be! For I was neither falling nor flying, I was just simply dangling.

As a suspended space, dangling offered me the invitation to pause and to reflect. To see this dangling as an in-between space wherein vibrancy, creativity, inventiveness, liberation, and the reimagining of a new pedagogy of hope might be able to germinate.

As Freire (1970) said, “human beings are not built in silence, but in the word, in work and in action-reflection” (p. 88). Here, the author was referring to dialogic praxis that is active and functions not only as a tool for liberation but also for connection and collaboration with others—the sharing and exchanging of ideas toward transforming the ways we narrate ourselves and the world around us. I discovered with/in Freire another giant; his words were, for me, a way into the transformative potentials of posthuman theories that gesture toward diffraction, entanglement, assemblage, and contamination (Haraway, 2016, Malone et. al., 2020; Tsing, 2015). Freire helped me to recognize that we are already deeply entangled in multiple relations with the world—relations that are complex and uncertain, micro and macro units of assemblages that react, interact, and diffract ongoingly. The task then is to see it, recognize it, and respond to it. Here again is the invitation to slow down, pay attention, and act in careful and responsive ways. To act responsively to me begins with/in a care ethic—a caring for, caring with, and caring about (Richardson & Langford, 2022). Working to preserve each other's dignity, respecting personhood and one's sense of self and one's abilities to contribute meaningfully as a precondition for nurturing well-being and belonging. To offer to walk with as a companion who is able to construct bridges for crossing and benches for resting and shoulders for leaning, or perhaps at times shoulders for standing, raising each other up so that we might be able to see farther.

I do wonder if education is not so much a crisis of imagination, or of not having the ability to think deeply, but rather is a crisis of care. It seems to me that to curate the conditions for human flourishing, inventiveness, and innovation, we must first imagine and reinvent different ways of relating, within a community that is concerned for others as a “matter of concern” (Latour, 2004). A community that welcomes multiple iterations of the self, of engagement, inclusive of silences, dissensus, outrage, and disagreements.

Freire (1970) wrote, “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of profound love for the world and for people” (p. 89). A profound love—but also, he goes on to write, with humility and faith in humankind. His pedagogy is not about promoting humanistic doctrines or about decentering the human per se, but rather a way of seeing the human as implicated in the world—part of the problem and part of the solution.

Herein is the crux of the intervention I *profoundly* felt was required for me to be able to reclaim a space for myself within ECE. A space where people, policy, pedagogy, practice, and the educational institutes were not at war with each other but rather working together, joining together in collaborative efforts calling all of us “to dialogue, inquire, invent, and encounter ... to create ethical and pedagogical spaces through acts of *mattering* (Barad, 2007) and *matters of concern* (Latour, 2004)” (Vintimilla et al., 2023, p. 6) as well as *matters of care* (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). And perhaps *what matters now* is to pay attention to what is already happening in early childhood education, to acknowledge the deep thinking, acting, and doing of educators as part of our everyday lived experiences. To see that we have a voice and invent our subjectivities as we gather, converse, and exchange ideas. It is here in the

midst of our everyday, ordinary, and mundane chores and responsibilities that seeds of activism are sown (Pahl & Rowsell, 2020).

So, when we insist that early childhood educators must “read hard, think hard and write hard”—dig deeper and go even deeper (St. Pierre, 2019), I want to invite us to slow down, pay attention, and notice where this is already happening, and to approach these encounters with care, to notice how we are (or are not) able to contribute meaningfully to our worlds rather than dismantling one’s sense of self through the ongoing onslaught of critique. The early childhood educators I have known navigate their worlds with their hearts forward, caring, giving, doing, thinking, and loving children deeply while wiping noses, drying tears, offering helping hands and the daily frantic searching for the must-have-right-now, coveted toy from home. Do we really want to disrupt this deep ethic of care? What for? And in the name of what?

Perhaps we can reimagine a pedagogical praxis that allows for thoughtful, kind, helpful, *and intellectual* educators whose hearts and minds can be liberated. Herein lies that task at hand: to rejuvenate, enliven, and heal a sense of well-being for the early childhood educator. Why not begin with viewing her as a coconspirator and an active participant, one who is able to create an image of the educator for *these times* (BC Early Learning Framework, 2019), who is seen and heard as well as being response-*able*—able to engage in collaborative dialogue, capable of deep thinking and meaningful engagements within the ongoing tensions and material conditions and mattering of daily living with children and their childhoods.

But how, Freire (1970) might ask, “can [we] dialogue if [we] always project ignorance onto others ... how can [we] dialogue if [we] regard [ourselves] apart from others ... how can [we] dialogue if [we] consider [ourselves] member[s] of the ‘in-group’ ... how can [we] dialogue if [we] start from the premise that naming the world is the task of the elite ... how can [we] dialogue if [we are] closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others” (p. 90)? Todd (2015) writes about the etymology of dialogue, saying that it is “not derived from di, meaning ‘two’, but dia meaning ‘across’ ... [as in] the image of a bridge that spans a gap or difference” (p. 57). What might it look like to curate pedagogical encounters as connections between here and there, which is in line with Freire’s vision of a pedagogy that activates *through or across dialogue*. Dialogue as a reciprocal encounter where people, experiences, ideas, and possibilities come together. For me, I cannot see how transformation and flourishing will ever emerge from the persistent glare of eye-rolling, undoings, and redoings. Such rigorous critique—from the academy, from those in positions of power who assume a moral stance as keepers of the gate through which early childhood educators must pass if they are to make the grade—is not survivable.

## On healing



Figure 2: Castlegar street art.

Todd (2015) writes that “pedagogical spaces can be seen as sites of liminality, or threshold spaces, whereby the self undergoes a process of change occasioned by what lies in-between what one knows and what is utterly strange” (p. 55). Todd’s idea of liminal/threshold space provides a way in for me. To my way of thinking it represents the bridge between here and there. Change is hard. Being asked to change is hard. Insisting that we see, think, and do differently in a space that is knowable, comfortable, and familiar will create a shattering and instill fear. And yes, we need to know that it’s okay to be unsettled, afraid, and undone at times. Uncertainty is, after all, a precondition of living, but to live well wouldn’t it be nice to have something to lean on, to hang onto, or to stand upon?

I want to return for a moment to reflect on another giant in my life, and my encounter with a riptide, wherein I thought I would surely die. I was in the Caribbean Ocean, in a very non-touristy area of Costa Rica, and on this particular day, I was the only human being in these particular waters. The ocean’s warmth invited me in, to surrender to the surf and to the waves like it had on so many other occasions. On this day, however, it was different. The waves were not bringing me closer to shore, but rather my body was moving out and away from the shoreline at a pace that was not at all comfortable. Against all reason, I began swimming hard and yelling help! “*Andy! Andy help me!*” The harder I fought the stronger the rip pulled and tugged at my legs and yet I persisted, fighting hard against the water, working to muscle my way back to shore while overcome by a full-blown panic attack. *Why!* I remember thinking was the man I loved, and whom I thought loved me, not trying to save me—why was he just standing there? Doing nothing! And then I heard his voice, “*Just stand up.*” He repeated this several times—“*just stand up*”—and when his command eventually registered, I pulled my legs up toward my belly, and my feet found the sand. You see, I was swimming hard against the tide in barely three feet of ocean. And all I needed to do was stand up.

Healing for me gestures toward hope, and hope gestures toward other possibilities, other ways in and through a life. Perhaps it is the notion of possibilities lingering in the liminal spaces between humancentric pedagogy and the demand to decenter the human (or to decenter the child) that I am working to interrogate. Perhaps it is more than just working to navigate and/or disrupt the binary or oppositional thinking that underpins much of early childhood educational discourse, but rather about curating pedagogical processes that actually build bridges. Bridges as healing or hopeful pedagogies that notice and reflect our efforts, a way to be with / walk with, to see “each other in our full humanity” (Keenan, 2021, p. 553). Healing pedagogies that are responsive and reciprocal, situated in “the idea of an ethics of care as an ethics of encounter ... committed to the long-term maintenance, nourishing, and hard work of sustaining ... relationship[s]” (Arndt & Tesar, 2019, p. 39). Attending to the individual early

childhood educator matters—educators’ liberation, intellect, autonomy, and agency are the heart of this matter. If there is to be an intervention in early childhood education, it is within, as Freire (1970) said, *communion*, and within *unshakable solidarity*—people acting together, for, with, and about the people and the world in and around us. To be clear, I see a real and tangible need to heal the hearts, minds, and intellect of the early childhood educator in our province. *Individuals* who are ethnically and racially diverse working-class women who front up every day so that other women are able to work and contribute “meaningfully” to the economic security of our communities (and beyond). Early childhood educators as embodied subjects who harbour profound feelings of inadequacy, illegitimacy, and anti-intellectualism (Vintimilla et al., 2023)—individuals who have been silenced, marginalized, and invisible for far too long, even to themselves.

## On moving on

*It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.* (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

What is needed now in education? What intervention might create the conditions for a pedagogy that responds to the everyday, ordinary, and mundane moments educators engage with? How might we begin to (re) enact and enliven such a pedagogy? A pedagogy that enables folks *to move across* while also engaging with academic rigour. Bridging the gap so that we can get down to the hard work of dismantling systems and structures (not individuals) that have historically functioned to stagnate and cement particular theories and practices into the fabric of early childhood education. Imperialistic, colonial, and capitalist systems and structures that promote particular regimes of “truth” that have become essentialized discourses that make some things possible and other things impossible. To interrogate discourses that privilege particular bodies, knowledges, and practices over others and to illuminate the regimes of power that function to control, manipulate, and manage bodies and decide for us in advance what it means to be a rational and natural woman and/or caregiver and/or mother (or a child within a particular childhood). These views act as covert scripts dictating who is human, who is able to be human, and how the human is able to think, act, and be, while silencing the multiple diverse iterations of our humanness and our shared humanity (Ailwood, 2003; Bernstein, 2011; Blaise, 2003; Keenan, 2020).

Perhaps moving on for me means investigating other pedagogies for early childhood education—pedagogies that respond to the world as it is at present, pedagogies that are able to imagine new ways to live and be in the world. Pedagogies that can feel their way across our uneven inheritances, across competing social, cultural, and political agendas with/in these uncertain and precarious times (Nxumalo & ross, 2019). Pedagogies that maintain a deep ethical concern for the individual as always and already deeply entangled within the context of a larger, more fantastic collective, community, or commons. For early childhood education, these urgent pedagogies may create for us the supports to enable us to see beyond individualism tropes toward a more dynamic concern for all of humanity, to see clearly how all of our human flourishing can only really ever exist within an interconnected, layered, and contingent system of being (Tsing, 2015). Toward a new pedagogical approach that ushers us to look beyond the individual child of developmentalism, toward the more urgent concern of dismantling systems of racism, sexism, ableism, terrorism, subjugation, and exclusionary practices that we have inherited from colonial regimes that insist on assimilation, conformity, performativity, and normativity (Arndt & Tesar, 2019; Blaise, 2005; Keenan, 2017). To move beyond discourses in early childhood education that promote a kind of “colour blindness” as the way to navigate difference that are touted to be more inclusive and create a more welcoming space. This is, to my way of thinking, a harmful position that not only negates but also refuses to see that it is the “difference that makes the difference” (Bateson, n.d.). How might we create more inclusive and welcoming pedagogies that see difference as vitality, as the life of the party, as the vibrant contaminations Tsing (2015) writes of and that contribute to our “world making project[s]” (p. 27).



Perhaps moving on for me also means slowing down, but a slowing described by Clark (2022) as “balance rather than perpetual slow motion” (p. 8). It is this idea of a slow pedagogy that knows what is required, knows how to attend, knows when to jump to action and when to wait—this notion of slow pedagogy implies *time-full-ness* as in having time, taking time, imagining that the only thing that matters right now is “this child in this moment” and “this child in this childhood” as an actual space to be (Malone et al., 2020) Time-full-ness as an intentional slow pedagogical practice for countering the “hurried” narratives that proliferate throughout early childhood education, centered on the individual successes or readiness of the child, always forward facing, looking toward what’s next, pushing for higher, faster, quicker as evidence or assurance of whatever we have been told is best practices or represents developmentally appropriate practice without pausing to question where these ideas come from or what perhaps they might do.

Yes, there is much to do, to undo, and to redo, and this will take a whole lot of academic and intellectual rigour AND it will require a being *with* in relationship. If we want to promote other ways of being, we need to create the conditions for educators to begin to think differently and divergently, so that we can begin to flirt with “bending and breaking the rules ... and enact ‘strategic defiance’” wherever we think it is needed (Keenan & Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2020, p. 77). That is to say, to create a pedagogical space where questioning, provoking, and interrogating are encouraged, but in ways that are generative, affirmative, and hopeful (Braidotti, 2010). And perhaps, rather than seeing this as meeting children or educators where they are at, we can reframe or rewrite/rescript it as the place giants linger, guiding us to a landing, a space of (re)turning, tending, mending so that we begin and begin again.

Creating an ethical, caring, and hopeful space in early childhood education *is* the intervention. A space that invites the early childhood educator to persevere, to not give up before they’ve even begun. St. Pierre (2019) tells her students to *push through the fear* of difference, inadequacy, doubt, imposter syndrome, and our all-too-human insecurities. For this is not a time for idleness, or a time to acquiesce, defer, or capitulate under a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. No, this is not that time.

### *Spiralling reflections*

I have heard it said that our writing is never done, our thoughts are never final. We must always return and return again to our work as an ongoing process. This is for me, an ethic and a practice that I have taken to heart. Writing has become a space that I often return to, to reread, to linger, one that often reveals new perspectives, new paths, and otherwise possibilities. In all the various iterations of my selfhood and identities, writing has been my greatest companion. Writing offers me a way in and through—a way of making sense while de- and reconstructing meanings. I have come to understand that even though I drag my past experiences and inheritances along behind me, I do not have to keep feeding their dragons or allowing a single story of a single experience to negate or foreclose what else might be possible for a life. Perhaps I just need to feel the ground beneath me, find my feet, and stand tall alongside all my giants.

What does it mean to (re)think identity? I ask myself questions such as this often. What do I even mean by (re) think or rethink—what does the *re* do? A peer once said to me that they didn’t like to use *re* as it implies *wrong*. We got it wrong, therefore we need to rethink. For me the *re* is an invitation—always an invitation. An opportunity to return, to circle back, to revisit and reflect, and to marvel at how what was once unnoticeable is noticeable, what was unknowable is now knowable, what was once unthinkable is thinkable now. For me this is the *re*. And for me identity is much like how I engage and think with the notion of *re* as an invitation to consider what was and what is now and what else might emerge.

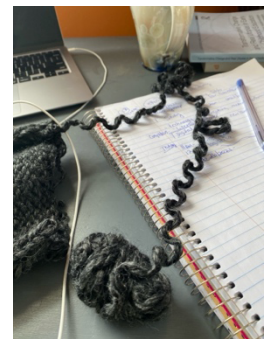


Figure 3. My desk.

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- 1 The quote in its entirety is “we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size” (as cited in Chen, 2003, p. 135). There is speculation as to whom the original author is—John of Salisbury in 1180, or Issacs Newton, 1675, or the French philosopher Bernard of Chartres.
  - 2 I am using the word container as a place holder for me / my body / my personhood. In my deep questioning of my worth and my identity, I was grappling with how to write, think, and speak as an individual and was wrestling with the notion that I was meant to somehow deny myself and recreate a new person.
  - 3 All of the images in this article were taken by the author. They were taken during the time this article describes, and they created meaning for me as I noticed and reflected on them almost daily as I regularly begin each day going for a run or walk. They are collected traces of my processes of (re)thinking my identity as an early childhood educator.

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