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Living a Philosophy of Early Childhood Education: A Festschrift for Harriet Cuffaro

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Living a Philosophy of Early Childhood Education: A Festschrift for Harriet Cuffaro

Introduction

Miriam Raider-Roth & Jonathan Silin

Essays by

Celia Genishi

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Living a Philosophy of Early Childhood Education: A Festschrift for Harriet Cuffaro

Miriam Raider-Roth & Jonathan Silin

This issue of the Occasional Paper Series is a Festschrift in honor of Harriet K. Cuffaro, a Bank Street College faculty member from 1968-1998. A Festschrift—a volume reflecting the values, theories, and passions of a senior scholar in a field—seeks to offer scholarship that builds on these contributions. Harriet Cuffaro has touched and shaped more lives of teachers, scholars, and colleagues than we can possibly count. A teacher in her soul, and an esteemed scholar of John Dewey, Harriet has “unfolded and connected” essential Deweyan ideas and made them accessible and meaningful in the lives of teachers. It is our hope that this volume honors the lessons we have all learned from Harriet.

It has been more than 25 years since I (Miriam) first sat in Harriet Cuffaro’s office at Bank Street College of Education, but the image of her welcoming space is still vivid. The centerpiece was a glass case whose wooden frame rested on the floor and met the hanging bookshelves halfway up the wall. On each shelf, Harriet had carefully placed sets of blocks that she had acquired through her own travels and as gifts from colleagues and former students. Each set had a story and a history, color and texture, purpose and possibility. On any given day, with a simultaneous playful and serious gaze, Harriet would tell me about a particular set, inviting me to touch, hold, and play with the blocks. In those moments, Harriet’s philosophy of teaching rested in my hands. We would talk about the history of the set, how it reflected the philosophy of the designer, the opportunities it offered the children at the time, and how it might have informed other educational materials to come.

For me, as a student studying to become a teacher and seeking to understand and experience progressive education, my meetings with Harriet were formative. As her student, I understood

that deep learning was rooted in relationship, in joint study of evocative texts, in being alert to and aware of the social context in which we lived. When Harriet left Bank Street, she gave these block sets to colleagues and students. Today, a miniature wooden farm set sits on my desk, inviting students to touch, hold, and play. They are a beacon, a touchstone of what matters in teaching, a tangible artifact of history and philosophy.

I (Jonathan) never formally studied with Harriet, but like Miriam I have been her lifelong student. And if Miriam's first memories are about Harriet's respect for the past and the way she works with adults, my own are about the courageous and yet supremely tactful way she approaches the present moment with children.

In the fall of 1969 I was working on my master's degree at Bank Street and proposed a thesis to my advisor, Roger Cartwright, on young children's understanding of death. At the time there wasn't much professional literature on the topic, let alone books for children, and he immediately suggested I talk with Harriet. I don't think faculty at the College had real offices in those days, and so I first caught up with her late one afternoon in the hectic lobby of 69 Bank Street, where children and their caregivers mixed with graduate students, School for Children teachers, and Graduate School faculty in a very narrow space. Introducing myself, I spoke awkwardly and nervously about her 1964 article on young children's responses to President Kennedy's assassination. She replied with her characteristic modesty by asking about my own project. I feel like we've been deep in conversation ever since.

What I admired most about Harriet's article 46 years ago and what I continue to admire about her work: the clarity of her thinking and her writing; the specificity with which she records the voices of students and teachers; and the mindfulness with which she offers interpretation. Beyond the description of the children's responses in the days, weeks, and months after the assassination and their individual concerns about power and vulnerability, there is this: Harriet's invitation to talk about a deeply troubling, impossible-to-explain event.

Knowing that the children had spent the long weekend after the assassination in their homes either in front of the television or avoiding it, Harriet left a copy of the New York Times on a classroom table opened to a page of articles about the events of the preceding days. Children might accept or decline the invitation, but this gesture signaled that the classroom with its play-based curriculum was very much part of the larger world. She didn't impose herself and her knowledge; rather, she pointed to that world and welcomed the children to share their own knowledge, accurate or inaccurate as it might have been. Harriet models the essence of progressive pedagogy: a willingness to take responsibility for a world that we have neither made nor of which we approve.

For this Festschrift we have invited contributors whose current work reflects the core ideas that Harriet brought to the field of early childhood education and the study of John Dewey. Above all, Harriet reminds us that to teach means to have a philosophy of education, to articulate the whys of what we do, and to understand that it is this philosophy that guides and shapes the

decisions we make in the classroom. Celia Genishi’s close reading of Harriet’s acclaimed book, *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*, highlights this dimension of Harriet’s work. Understanding teaching as an enactment of a considered philosophy is deeply informed by Harriet’s study of John Dewey. Dewey—or as Harriet likes to say, “our friend John”—in fact powers every teaching muscle in Harriet’s powerful framework. We are pleased that this issue offers two insightful essays, “Doing Dewey” by Carol Rodgers and “An Inquiry into the Pedagogical Implications of Dewey’s Ecological Thinking” by Simon Jorgenson, that describe the ongoing influence of Dewey’s philosophy in contemporary thought and practice.

Central to Harriet’s understanding of curriculum is her deep-seated belief in open-ended materials, such as paint, clay, water, and sand, that encourage children to examine and reexamine, represent and re-present their experiences. Worldwide, Harriet is best known for championing the use of unit blocks, which she describes as the texts of the early childhood curriculum. At Bank Street, her legendary block workshops and her signature courses on curriculum and principles and problems in education invited generations of students to consider how social studies can become the integrative core of curriculum.

Kristin Einarsdottir’s essay, accompanied by a vibrant photo album of children building and playing, documents Harriet’s 1990s work in Iceland, where her teaching about blocks inspired an entire country’s early childhood curriculum. Complementing this international perspective and adding to the historical scholarship about the role of carefully designed materials in children’s learning, Jeroen Staring’s essay offers new insight into the work of Caroline Pratt, founder of the City and Country School in New York City. City and Country was a formative space for Harriet, where she taught the four-year-olds for many years and later returned as a mentor and beloved friend to the classroom teachers. Through her essay and companion videos, Jane Clarke, current director of City and Country’s Lower School, offers an inside look at the school today and how the essential materials of learning continue to shape the experiences of young children.

The stance of the early childhood teacher—one who listens with keen respect to children’s ideas—is central to supporting children’s exploration of the world. It is also central to Harriet’s scholarship. “Presence in Double Vision” (Miriam’s essay) describes the work of a gifted kindergarten teacher whose colleagues listened closely to him so that he could in turn connect with a boy who challenged his understanding of himself as a teacher and as a man. “Thinking Through Early Childhood” (Jonathan’s essay) suggests that the early childhood teaching stance is a way of being in the world. His essay helps us appreciate not only how Harriet’s teaching shapes the field of early childhood education, but also how it can be viewed as a philosophy of living in a democratic society. For Harriet, learning to live in a democracy is the means and the ends of early childhood education. To learn to live in a community as a citizen and as an activist is the essential work of children and teachers.

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One Perspective on Harriet Cuffaro: A Story of Engagement and Experience

by Celia Genishi

In order to find a beginning point for this essay, I took Harriet's book, *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*, off my shelf. I thought I would reread sections of it to help structure what I would write. What naïveté—Harriet's written thoughts about teaching and John Dewey are not ordered in neat linear sections. Instead, they are of a piece, continuous, interwoven, and challenging, like the work of teaching and of understanding the work of John Dewey. Here I present my learning process in creating this essay, by highlighting some of Harriet's many insights, which she offers within the context of an unfolding story. Although I have not had the privilege of working alongside Harriet as a close colleague, I take the liberty of weaving my story together with hers, interwoven with aspects of John Dewey's philosophy.

First, a bit of background: The story of my relationship with Harriet began in the 1980s. If I remember correctly, it was our late and dear friend Professor Leslie R. Williams who brought us and many others together on the ambitious project of creating an encyclopedia of early childhood education. This was an enterprise that I cherish to this day because I met so many colleagues, now friends, in the profession, as the encyclopedia developed and was eventually published (Williams & Fromberg, 1992). This personal and professional confluence strikes me as a fine example of an educative experience, in Dewey's terms, that continued over time as people on occasion changed geographic locations and/or professional positions. The profession of early childhood education and the personal, relational threads that were spun during the encyclopedia project provided for me a deep and warm continuity of friendships and ideas. Harriet's geographic location did not change, but I think she would agree that her ideas evolved, and some foundational ideas are intricately woven into *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*.

In my own experimenting with the world of academe, I often assigned Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938/1963) or *EE* (as Harriet refers to it) to classes in early childhood education. I did not aspire to have students fully grasp Dewey's ideas, but I hoped that they would have an incipient understanding of education as something other than sequenced objectives or discrete lessons, units, or school years. I also wanted my students to read Dewey in his own words, so I opted for the shortest yet most representative selection—or so I thought until I reread Harriet's book. In it, we are introduced to many works that intersect with and elaborate upon the ideas in *EE*, and I no longer know which of them is “most representative” of Dewey.

Teaching as the Framework

The story of the book I have chosen as my central focus is aptly embedded in its title. Its essence is “experimenting with the world,” and it embraces a philosopher and a place close to the heart of teachers, the early childhood classroom. Life in classrooms is not easy, nor is the telling of stories that unfold there and are interwoven with a philosophy that grounds one teacher’s practice. Throughout the book, Harriet’s wording is so precise and apt that it is tempting to present her thoughts by stringing together numerous quotations, but that linear string would not show how the ideas in the book invite engagement—even intellectual struggle—with multiple facets of her story. Having said that, I nonetheless conclude that some of her statements are essential cornerstones—for example, the opening sentence (p. 1):

A basic assumption of this book is my belief that it is essential in teaching that practice be grounded in a consciously held, critically examined philosophical framework created by the teacher.

This single sentence tells me that any new understanding I gain of the philosophy of John Dewey will be framed within—or, perhaps more fittingly, woven into—the activities of teaching, shared by a teacher, Harriet, who has a deep familiarity with and understanding of teaching and Deweyan philosophy. It is she, the teacher, who has created a “critically examined philosophical framework.”

One of Harriet’s insights is that it is possible to teach without having a *formally* articulated philosophy of teaching. She herself illustrates this possibility, since she encountered EE during her last year of teaching young children. This means that a teacher may plan a curriculum *as if* s/he were a follower of Dewey without first examining his philosophical ideas. In other words, the basic principles of a theory may be applied without knowledge of a specific theorist. Thus we can appreciate Harriet’s sense of enlightenment after reading *EE* when she states, “In an astonishing and curious way, the book unified all my years of classroom teaching” (p. 7). I can imagine many teacher colleagues having similar aha moments when they discover a theorist who has provided the “why” underlying their past practices. They might say that the theorist gives them the language to explain what they do; for example, words like experience and continuity could be understood and used in new ways by teachers engaging with Dewey’s theory.

In the years after Harriet left the early childhood classroom, she dug deeply into Dewey’s ideas as she enlarged her scope and viewed other teachers’ classrooms through a Deweyan lens. In 1982 she completed her dissertation, entitled *Unfolding and Connecting Dewey’s Thought from a Teacher’s Perspective*. Nowhere in *Experimenting with the World*, however, does she suggest that teacher colleagues need to model themselves on her actions. Creating a “critically examined philosophical framework” is something individual teachers accomplish on their own, selecting a theorist (or theorists) that suits them. Harriet is not advocating that teachers study the work of a specific theorist, although she might say that discovering Dewey was essential in her case; she is

describing and explaining her own processes and inviting readers to raise their own questions as they create their own frameworks of teaching.

Teaching as Unfolding Experience

There are no facile definitions or understandings within a Deweyan framework. Experience may be “the transaction between the individual and the environment” (p. 58), but each word in the definition represents underlying ideas and connections that make *defining experience* an ever-evolving process. The process, like the definition, is never static, but instead aims toward a harmony or balance that is dynamic in multiple dimensions. In Dewey’s words, “[experience] recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed reality” (Dewey, EN p. 10, as cited in Cuffaro, p. 55).

My own understanding of experience started, as I noted earlier, when I read *EE* to prepare for a class in early childhood education several decades ago. I took from that reading, and from subsequent discussions of *EE* with students and colleagues, the dynamism of experiences and the impossibility of separating past from present experiences, as each one builds on the others. I found Harriet’s discussion (pp. 55–61) immeasurably illuminating because I gained a clearer understanding from it of what makes an educative experience dynamic.

I came to understand that in addition to the knowledge being imparted or discovered, there are aspects of an educative experience, such as feeling and quality, that are not always verbalized; rather, they are sensed. And they are sensed in frequent, everyday encounters, not in rarefied epiphanies separate from the continuity of daily existence. In the context of schooling, one can imagine numerous—perhaps countless—instances in which children and teachers contribute to each others’ experiences. In the next section a rich example from dramatic play demonstrates such contributions.

Dramatic Play Epitomizing Experience

No one has ever watched a child intent in his play without being made aware of the complete merging of playfulness and seriousness. (Dewey, AE 279, as cited in Cuffaro, p. 85)

In a focal chapter of her book, Harriet offers an elaborate anecdote entitled “The Drama of Island Life” (pp. 85–97), which so profoundly illustrates experiences in early childhood classrooms. Not surprisingly, the context is dramatic play, and the time frame is five days, a week in school. My purpose here is not to analyze or interpret the entire anecdote, as readers will want to do that on their own. Instead, I include excerpts from it and from Harriet’s insights that gave me the feeling and quality of playfully serious experiences as well as knowledge about how experiences unfold or develop in time and space.

On the first day of the week, the teacher suggests that children take a new direction in their block play (p. 86):

Teacher: I've been thinking—what would it be like if all the floor in the block area became a river?

Yvonne: So what do we do, swim all the time?

Richard: You could fish, too.

Yvonne: I don't want to fish. I want to make a school.

Richard: You could do that.

Yvonne: (incredulous) In the river?

Todd: Wait, wait!! I have an idea! An ocean, an ocean. All the floor an ocean.

Children pick up on Todd's enthusiasm, and the teacher provides a literal grounding by asking, "What about islands?" Todd concurs, and the children are clearly excited; one exclaims, "Islands, hurrah!" Because the task is complicated, teacher and children move to the block area to solve the multiple problems involved.

Note what follows during the rest of the work period: Chalk lines are drawn as boundaries, but these sometimes shift as children negotiate the space they need for their own islands, sometimes working up close to them and at other times taking a look at them from a distance. Eventually buildings are constructed: a school, a fish store, an airport, a hospital, homes. Some children work alone, others, in pairs; and a few begin working on details for their structures. For example (p. 87),

Steven made colorful, monster-like fish for his store with paper and crayons which he then cut out. Amy made blankets from material and drew and cut out "medicines to make people better" for her hospital.

Embedded in these rich interactions among teacher and children are the elements of everyday experience in the classroom: the shared feeling of excitement, the identification of problems, the experimentation leading to block constructions that take on different meanings to different children or different meanings to the same children over time. The island drama continues for five days, and the children's interests change during that period. On the third day, Steven, for instance, becomes discouraged when his fish store fails to attract customers and loses its meaning as a desired object. He later decides to build a weather station for which he sees a greater need.

On the same day, children decide to have a boat that carries people from island to island so that they do not have to swim. The following day there is a discussion about how people will know when the ferry is coming, and Todd suggests, “Let’s have a schedule like real ferries have.” Thus the narrative of the island drama grows and builds upon experiences inside the classroom and out until the fifth and last day, which, according to classroom custom, is the day that blocks are put away. Children at first engage in the usual activities of fishing, swimming, going to school, and so on. Soon, however, the storm that Steven predicted the day before has become “the biggest hurricane I ever saw” (p. 90).

What a clear and persuasive example of how experiences are complex wholes that build upon each other and cannot be separated from feelings and experimentation. Steven and Todd soon negotiate with the teacher about creating lightning by flicking the lights on and off. Swimming doctors save people who fall into the ocean. Children have reunions with each other following the capsizing of the ferry. Yvonne rolls her eyes and exclaims, “BOY, we *really* have to clean up today!” (p. 90). Indeed, populated islands made of blocks must create quite a mess.

Individual children have quickly taken up threads of the ongoing drama, illustrating the Deweyan construct of habit, defined in part as attitudes and dispositions that may lead to assertive and immediate action (p. 19). When making suggestions about the direction of play, Steven is predisposed to being inventive on a broad stage, seeding the idea of the hurricane that creates the mess, whereas Yvonne shows a disposition to being grounded and practical, declaring a real need for cleanup. Both are ready to transform their thoughts into communal action.

Yvonne and Steven, their friends, and their teacher illustrate that experiences in the classroom context do not belong to what Dewey calls social individuals; rather they belong to members of a community. The following week, the teacher helps keep memories of the communal experiences alive by initiating conversations that include reflections on the class’s island drama. Drama seems the perfect word, since children not only have immediate views to express about their vivid experiences; in the months that follow, they also remember together key dramatic incidents (for example, the wind turning the ferry over). They remember too that people cannot typically swim from island to island; hence, in a future shared drama, a bridge (rather than a ferry) may be the experimental solution to a new but related problem (p. 91). New problems are solved in light of past experimentation and experiences, anchored in feelings and memorable interactions among social individuals. The playful drama will have playful and serious reverberations well into the future.

Taking from Harriet Cuffaro’s Wisdom Today

The insights and deep knowledge so intricately woven into *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom* offer a platform from which to consider experiences of children and teachers in present times. Some researchers have conceptualized teaching as an observable and standardized set of behaviors (Pianta & Hamre, 2009), and teachers have been

cast in a range of roles, for example, technician, assessor, or curriculum maker. Harriet—and Dewey—would cast teachers as curriculum makers who “make” curriculum only with reference to the children they teach, the circumstances or situations in which the children live, and the unique experiences that are created communally.

Early in her book, Harriet lauds the shift from seeing the teacher as one who implements the ideas of others to recognizing teachers as imaginative thinkers (p. 9):

For too long teachers have been described as faceless constants, not unlike furniture found in the classroom, mechanically enacting and implementing the ideas and plans of others. What was too often neglected or understood in these portraits were the conditions and systems that implicitly and explicitly silenced teachers and thwarted the emergence of imaginative teaching.

In fact there have been times in the last few decades when teachers were portrayed as imaginative, professional, and relatively autonomous. The era of the “open classroom” of the 1960s and ’70s (Silberman, 1973) is an example, as is the period in the 1990s when the teacher as researcher was acknowledged and foregrounded (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992).

At the same time, when bureaucratic systems have required teachers to implement narrow instructional goals and have thereby “implicitly and explicitly silenced teachers” (p. 9), teachers have continued to be cast and recast as “faceless constants.” Early childhood teacher educators know from recent visits to classrooms and centers for children under age eight that the world that nurtured the “drama of island life” has simply become hard to find. Problem-setting and -solving are not typically shared by teachers and children, and even in some prekindergartens, extended play with blocks is not present.

The sense of time that teachers experience in 2014 is often shaped by a commercially published curriculum adopted by the school or school district. Classroom experience is therefore often segmented according to a fixed daily schedule, with little time and space for child choice. Children do not experience the creation of a communal story over a period of days and then remembered, and perhaps recreated, over a period of months. Thus teachers and children today seldom experience education as a continuous whole, what Dewey calls an “affair of histories” (p. 58), which may develop as unique dramas over stretches of time.

In 2014 the prevalence of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in public schools in the United States has led some practitioners (often under duress) to define education as teaching particular skills in a restrictive time frame to prepare students for college. These skills in themselves—for instance, reading for meaning, writing about memorable experiences, discussing, and arguing—may be valuable. Still, teachers who create curriculum with children and their social contexts

in mind feel the need to recast the purposes of CCSS to make space and time for imaginative teaching.

Concluding Thoughts

What Harriet’s work, and particularly her book, offers educators is a way—a kind of metaphorical path—to recast contemporary purposes of education. Her historical and philosophical anchors may be decades old, but her ideas about teachers and teaching, seen through a Deweyan lens, are still current. Regardless of era or year, grounding one’s practices in a philosophy that is personally resonant is vital (p. 99):

Having Dewey enter my teaching was similar to listening to and trying to have a conversation with a reason-maker of teaching, to hear another story about teaching, and while listening, to compare, contrast, question, and try out reasons for my teaching.

Like children engaged in classroom dramas, teachers continually “try out reasons” for the experiences that build the stories of their lives. In Harriet’s teaching life, she eventually raised questions, tried out reasons, and rethought the questions in dialogue with Dewey. Other teachers, in contrast, might create their own theories after years of practice, with or without an ongoing dialogue with a particular theorist.

In the course of reading her book, I too felt invited to engage in conversations about my own teaching life so that I could weave part of my story into Harriet’s. As I shared earlier, a small scene in that story consisted of my learning and teaching Dewey’s *EE*. I remembered other scenes from my days as a preschool teacher, offering four-year-olds experiences like cutting fruit, creating art with found objects, or walking together to the supermarket to orient ourselves to the community. I wondered how many of those experiences had any influence over time, how many were educative. My career as an early childhood teacher was short in comparison with Harriet’s, so our collective story seems better woven together through our writing as teacher educators. Woven into much of my writing is the language of children, each child distinctive from the other, creating dramas, trying out reasons in play and other settings, demonstrating abilities to pose and solve problems (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). The stories Harriet and I individually told about children were placed in classroom contexts so that thoughtful teachers were always close at hand; though perhaps not visible at every moment, they set the stage and knowledgeably decided on next curricular steps. Children and teachers we have worked with and known in diverse early childhood settings have placed Harriet and me in similar but separate spaces over an extended period of time, making possible our collective story. Collective and individual stories are indeed affairs of history (p. 58). They develop over time, as Harriet has beautifully illustrated. The feeling of time passing as children and teachers build experiences together is evident throughout the pages of her book. The broad and human-oriented definition of *development* here is not highly specialized, professionalized,

or restricted to the discipline of psychology; nor is it predetermined or constrained by stages or fixed landmarks, now called benchmarks. Rather, this process of development begins with an invitation to feel, sense, question, think, experiment, reflect, and more. It is open to incorporation of individual and social histories/stories that have been experienced, interpreted, and remembered in multiple ways. Development in this sense is educative and truly open ended.

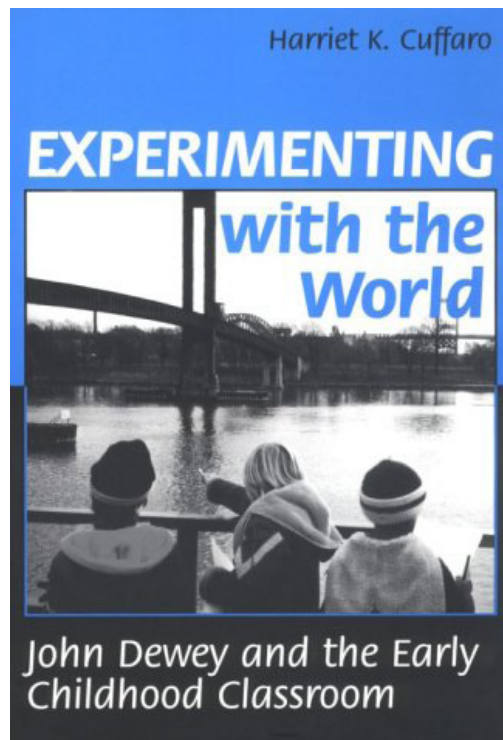
Teachers are of course essential to development and to creating educative experiences. If teachers put themselves on a metaphorical path to recast contemporary purposes of education, they may at the same time reflect on Harriet's metaphor of the teacher as a bridge, a metaphor that is as nuanced as it is visible and concrete. A strong bridge, the result of careful problem-solving and construction, makes it possible for children and teachers to go from one place to another securely. Still, it seems important not to take the metaphor too literally. Teachers may provide a bridge, but Harriet's view of curriculum within a Deweyan framework suggests a uniquely complicated bridge that children engage in building communally with their teachers. Like educative experiences, an educative bridge is continuous and dynamic. Teachers guide its evolution over time, balancing the provision of support and knowledge with the incorporation of children's ideas and preferences.

Finally, the photograph on the cover of the first paperback edition of *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom* provides an apt and reassuring image, I think, to close with (at right). In the foreground, there is a small footbridge close to a group of investigative children. In the background are two other bridges, different in size and structure, familiar elements of the New York City skyline.

Each child has distinctive experiences, stories, and destinations, always interwoven with those of teachers. The work of Harriet Cuffaro ensures the possibility that these stories will be rich with purpose, imaginative thought, and experimentation over a long period of time.

Endnote

Page numbers within the text, for example "(p. 9)," refer to pages in Harriet Cuffaro, 1995, *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom*. References to Dewey's works follow APA style, with the addition of the abbreviations that Harriet used, e.g., EE for Experience and Education.



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Thinking Through Early Childhood

by Jonathan Silin

Since the beginnings of formal group care of the young in the nineteenth century, the early childhood educator has been cast in a facilitative role. The child, understood as vulnerable to threats posed from the outside by harsh social circumstances and from the inside by the workings of fraught psychodynamic processes, was seen to be in need of a protector and nurturer. The caregiver/teacher was viewed as a disinterested presence in the classroom, defined solely by the needs of the undeveloped and immature child. This was very much a gendered story. Although men like Friedrich Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi were among the early theorists of the field, and psychologists like Erik Erikson and Jerome Bruner later made important contributions, the task of providing care was always construed as woman's work—undervalued, undercompensated, and largely misunderstood.

Working against the grain of this history and contemporary assumptions about the nature of the field, in this essay I make a counterintuitive argument that decenters the child and brings forward the adult in early childhood education (ECE). Over time, ECE has become a complex discipline that offers unique and powerful ways for understanding human experience. My claim: The early childhood perspective can tell us as much about how to be with the old as how to be with the young, as much about the needs of the old to lead socially relevant lives as how the very young want to make their mark on the world and achieve social recognition. This is to untether the field of ECE from its foundational intention of bettering the lives of young children and to ask how the insights learned in that arena might contribute to work with people of all ages. My goal is to reimagine the affordances offered by the ECE point of view so that we become not only better providers of care and education for the young but also better positioned to contribute to larger social and intellectual conversations.

Our Reciprocal Lives

To make this argument, I draw on four and a half decades of working with young children, their families, and teachers. I also draw on the reciprocal relationship between my professional and private lives—the way that work in ECE has informed my responses to my life outside the classroom and, in turn, how these experiences have influenced my understanding of what it means to care for and educate children. I ask the reader, skeptical as she may be, to join me in *thinking* through ECE to the present moment—a moment, to be sure, which is characterized by anxious watchfulness and stunning mindlessness about children, when continuous surveillance of young lives and programs that focus on only the narrowest band of the skills and capacities that children possess are the rule.

To be clear, thinking through is not the same as thinking about early childhood. Thinking about suggests a distancing and objectifying process akin to describing something that is outside of oneself. Thinking through ECE requires a Foucauldian question: How has ECE functioned in my life, or how might it function in the future? This is to ask how knowledge lives within us and within the practices to which it gives rise. It is to privilege the performative nature of our knowing rather than a search for its truth value and to privilege the messiness of lived experience over the rationality of theoretical constructs.

For me such a phenomenological exploration raises personal as well as professional quandaries. I suspect that, in general, teacher educators are comfortable asking themselves and their students how the life experiences they bring to the classroom influence their pedagogy. Often they do this in the interests of helping neophyte teachers articulate potential curricular biases, purge themselves of “personal” opinions when in the classroom, and recognize how they are drawn to invest in particular kinds of students. Indeed, for decades teachers have been exhorted to act only in the best interests of the child, as if they enter the classroom selfless and disembodied, without social biases, political commitments, and psychological self-interests. As if we know only about the vulnerable child in need of care and protection.

In reality, however, I suspect that there is a far more reciprocal relationship between life lived inside and outside the classroom than we are inclined to acknowledge, and that attempts to mask the porous nature of this divide are bound to fail. I ask myself the traditional question: How do the experiences I bring to the field shape my research and teaching? I also ask less obvious questions: How has my life in ECE influenced my work as an AIDS advocate, my role as caregiver of two fragile elderly parents, and my response to the loss of a life partner?

Looking more closely at the permeability of the membrane that separates the personal and the professional offers a nuanced and complicated appreciation of the powerful ideas that frame the best work in ECE. Most often, ECE has been characterized as a subject matter—the study of young children, their care, and their education. In contrast, I would suggest that the field of ECE might best be understood as a discipline in its own right, a constellation of ideas that can enable us to make sense of many situations in which we find ourselves—some related to young children, and others not. If ECE is imagined as a posture that we adopt in the world, supported by a toolkit of linking ideas, then we can better grasp the unique contributions of the field to the larger study of social theory and practice, to life lived in and out of the classroom. A discipline as well as a subject matter, ECE offers us a way of describing the world as well as a particular set of objects to be described.

ECE: A Fraught History

The field of ECE, like childhood itself, has a fraught history. When I entered the doctoral program at Teachers College in 1978, the early childhood program had just been subsumed under the larger umbrella of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Nationally, in the preceding

two decades—during the War on Poverty and the creation of Head Start and Project Follow Through—the field had been colonized by psychologists and behaviorist of all stripes. ECE was neither a highly valued profession nor an independent scholarly discipline. Practitioner knowledge, generated primarily by women caring for young children—Susan Isaacs, Caroline Pratt, Patty Smith Hill—had little saliency in the academy.

Throughout the 1980s and '90s, mainstream leaders in the field focused on the need to professionalize early care and education through better articulated career ladders and licensure for individual teachers and early childhood centers. Central to this effort to improve the status of underpaid and undervalued child care workers was the legitimizing claim that the field of ECE was grounded in a scientific knowledge base. In 1984 Bettye Caldwell, president of NAEYC, confidently summarized, “Our field represents the applied side of the basic science of child development” (p.53). Not practitioner knowledge, not women’s supposedly natural sympathies with the young, but the growing developmental canon was to guide our work. Even more forward-looking thinkers of the time, like Leslie Williams, my Teachers College advisor, described the three roles of early childhood educator as catalyst, synthesizer, and translator (Williams, 1978). In short, although we were supposed to study children, we were primarily positioned as consumers of other people’s knowledge rather than as scholars who generated knowledge, let alone as scholars who produced theory that might have currency for anyone other than those who worked with the very young.

Thirty years later, the same devaluing of ECE continues. In the United States, for example, although the Common Core would directly impact the lives of every young child, not one of the 135 people called upon to create K-12 standards was an ECE teacher or professional. In Ontario, where I live, new full-day kindergartens in the public schools are staffed by a certified classroom teacher and an early childhood specialist who earns about half of what the teacher earns. The salary differential reflects both the more limited licensing requirements of ECE specialists and their realm of expertise—child observation and development—as opposed to direct classroom instruction.

A Critique of Developmentalism in ECE

In the 1980s my response to the low status of ECE was twofold (Silin, 1995). First, I highlighted the distinctions between the two equally important fields of education and psychology and, most especially, emphasized the value-laden work of educators in promoting a democratic society. To me, it was the social and political dimensions of the educational domain that were too easily subsumed under the purportedly scientific gaze of psychology. Second, I constructed a critique of the way that developmental theory had come to dominate ECE, obscure its history, and blind us to its possibilities. I reasoned that the work of the classic stage theorists—Piaget, Erikson, Freud—limited our appreciation of children’s competencies. As encoded in the ECE canon of “developmentally appropriate practice,” stage theories contributed to a singular focus on the how

and the *when*, rather than the *what* and the *why*, of educational endeavors. No matter the intention of their creators, most stage theories led educators to a singular focus on the undeveloped and therefore vulnerable nature of the young child and to a heightened sense of their protective responsibilities as adults. The curriculum was cleansed of conversations deemed unsettling to children no matter how much these troubling topics reflected their lived realities. It is as if adults and children inhabited different worlds.

In retrospect too, it's clear that my critique of the role of psychology in education was an act of personal-professional reciprocity, fueled by my history as a gay man and the particular sensitivities that I brought to normative assessments of human development. Knowing full well that gay people were often stereotyped as child-like—pleasure seeking, playful, even imaginative—I sought to champion these very same characteristics as strengths to be sustained across the life span. Enduring painful judgements of my own sexuality, I could begin to imagine the experiences of woman, people of color, and other minorities whose development might also be judged inadequate against inappropriate norms.

While my concerns about the distinctions, hierarchies, and exclusions perpetuated by stage theories continue today, I have also seen that those theories can function as important rationales against the grinding march of standards and the standardization of the curriculum. In Newark, NJ, during the 1990s, where I worked as an evaluator for an early childhood school reform initiative, I observed teachers and some reformers trying to resist the spread of narrowly conceived, highly academic programs for even the youngest children by referencing the idea of developmentally appropriate practice (Silin & Lippman, 2003; Silin & Schwartz, 2003). Today, when the demands of national standards and high stakes testing have obliterated any consideration of the lived experience of children, too often teacher education focuses on preparing professionals to map their work onto predetermined templates, and even child development falls by the wayside (Boldt & Ayers, 2011; Taubman, 2009). Few have time to stop and ask: Who are these children in my care and what do they want to know?

Interestingly, my 1980s critique of developmentalism was echoed during the 1990s in the new field of queer theory. Impelled to examine the meaning of time in lives often unscripted by traditional models of family life, queer theorists rejected the logic of “reproductive temporality,” with its assumptions about order, progress, and delayed gratification (Halberstam, 2005). They sought a temporality that more accurately reflected the experiences of lesbian and gay people who inhabited the social margins, who would never achieve “heterosexual maturity,” and whose lives might only be accounted for in unruly narratives.

Most especially, queer theorists rejected the future orientation embedded in ideas of a developmental progression from immaturity to maturity—from dangerous, ungovernable desires to safe, stable, and properly disciplined lives. The child, no longer an emblem of reproductive futurism, grows sideways as well as forward (Edelman, 2004; Stockton, 2009). New skills, ideas, and ways of

being emerge beside those that already exist, and do not require jettisoning the old and familiar in the interests of a “better” future.

Temporality and Tenderness

Questions of temporality are inevitably at the heart of the work of ECE. For the young, of course, it is all about the present—the immediacy of needs, wants, and desires. I listen to Daisy’s infant cries summoning her parents in the middle of the night. I remember three-year-old Christopher’s despairing arrival at my classroom door in the morning, little comfort in the promised reunion with his family later in the day. There is no future. As I write I can hear Jennifer, my four-year-old neighbor, who has recently mastered a two-wheeler, exuberantly calling out to no one in particular as she practices her new skill, “I am a professional biker. Ladies and Gentlemen. Watch me bike.”

Jennifer, Christopher, and Daisy remind me of the intensity, the passions, and the fierce attachments that adhere to children’s lives in the present. They speak unmediated languages of pleasure and pain that are increasingly scorned in classrooms as signs of immaturity and failed socialization. But whose failure is it when we turn away, unable to tolerate and help children tolerate a full complement of human emotions? Whose maturity is really in question?

For adults, work with children points not only to the present and moments of beginning, but also to questions of mortality and temporal continuity. Ushering the young into the world with all our hopes and dreams, it is hard not to reflect on time gone by as well as time remaining, on our accomplishments as well as our future projects: What will be carried forward and what will be left behind of the worlds we have made? As we observe how the young change, questions about which traits will serve them well and how those traits might be transformed with the passage of time are always with us.

To me, these temporal considerations suggest the complex ways that power and vulnerability circulate between adults and children, teachers and students. When we look at the child, we see someone in need of protection, frail, and powerless and, at the same time, we see someone full of potential who is defined by her not *yetness*. Knowing that the passage of time has foreclosed our own moment of open possibilities, we experience ourselves as far less powerful than the child with her future before her. Even as we offer the strength of our protectiveness, we experience our own vulnerability, all that we can no longer become. In turn, the child is strong because of her futurity, her possibilities, even as she is frail in the moment. Real tenderness toward the child is expressed in the understanding that she too will one day suffer the loss of potentialities. The complex temporal dimensions of tenderness open out the present to include both the past and the future, to incorporate the powers and frailties that characterize the young and the old alike and bind us together in one world.

To be sure, it is difficult to stay in the present where children live and not rush toward the future where educational rhetoric draws us with carefully couched arguments about the economic and

social benefits of early education. I make no claims to rational arguments about such benefits, which mostly fall on deaf ears of politicians and budget markers anyway. I prefer instead to find my ground in a more existential perspective that values the moment-to-moment lives of children.

An ECE Point of View

I do not make these claims in a vacuum. Recently, for example, I came across two books that exemplify different strategies used to advocate for the time of childhood and for time in childhood (Hall & Rudkin, 2011; Young-Bruehl, 2012). What I found most striking is how the differences between the two works highlight what I consider to be the unique strengths of the ECE point of view.

In *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (2012) Young-Bruehl takes a modernist approach to the defense of childhood and to the importance of ECE as a protective discipline. Identifying *childism* as a prejudice against children akin to racism, sexism, and homophobia, she marshals overwhelming data on the mistreatment of children across the world. She calls for more enlightened policies and practices and the fulfillment of the promise of the UN Convention on Rights of the Child and the 1960s vision of the Great Society.

When looking at how childism works within individuals—the fears, anxieties, projections prompted by children in adults—Young-Bruehl (2012) relies on a traditional Freudian framework. When justifying the needs and rights of young children themselves, the rationale is almost exclusively the science of child development. This scientific rationale appears to preclude more probing ethical or sociophilosophical consideration of what it means to care for the next generation. Nor does Young-Bruehl turn to children themselves in an effort to unpack their understandings of rights and responsibilities. While she offers narrative case studies from her psychotherapy practice, only her adult reflections on the past bear witness to the experiences of the young. I don't find Daisy, Christopher, Jennifer, and other children I know in the text.

By contrast, Hall and Rudkin's *Seen and Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education* (2011) is grounded in their daily work with children at the Boulder Journey School in Colorado. Like Young-Bruehl, they recognize and decry the socially marginalized position of the young in society. However, rather than address all three core themes of the UN Convention—protection, provision, and participation—Hall and Rudkin focus on supporting participation. The emphasis is on the here and now—the rich realization of social relationships and communal responsibilities possible in groups of young children.

For me, three qualities in Hall and Rudkin's (2011) work exemplify what makes the ECE perspective unique. First, they provide many examples of close, careful observation of children, long a core practice in the field. Hall and Rudkin are part of a community in which teachers continually exercise the pedagogical watchfulness and thoughtfulness described decades ago by phenomenologically oriented educators like Aoki (in Pinar & Irwin, 2004). They observe

and listen with intense curiosity, without judgement, without rushing to intervene. They allow themselves to be instructed as easily by nonverbal as by verbal behavior. And when they do respond to children's questions and concerns, it is often by modifying the physical and social environment rather than by engaging in long wordy conversations.

Second, Hall and Rudkin (2011) assume childhood competencies rather than vulnerabilities, social attunement rather than egocentric self-absorption. They emphasize the ways that children are able to manage the dialectic between their own and adult perspectives, between their need for protection and desire for participation, between claims for individual liberties and group responsibilities. No matter how much our national policymakers would like to believe that children passively absorb the standardized curriculum, early childhood specialists understand the young as agents who selectively attend to, resist, and transform their local worlds as they interpret them (Dyson & Genishi, 2013).

Respecting childhood competencies, the teachers at the Boulder Journey School talk *with* rather than *for* children, engage the young directly in problem solving, and identify the larger political and social issues raised in children's words and deeds. Consequently, Hall and Rudkin's (2011) text is alive with children's voices.

Finally, at Boulder, the right to participation is linked to the emergent curriculum, which is negotiated between children and adults, realizing the present interests of the former and the insights of the latter into the potential for future learning. The resulting curriculum, always dynamic, never scripted, reflects the rich lives that the children bring to the classroom. It is created as much, if not more, from the children's questions as from the adults', from the children's ways of being in the world as from the adults'. The French philosopher Barthes (2013) puts it this way, "For a teaching relationship to be effective the speaker should know only slightly more about the topic than the listener (sometimes, on certain points, less: this is the process of exchange)" (p. 21).

It is the ECE point of view—close observation, assumption of developmental competencies, openness to instruction from children—that I find deeply compelling in Hall and Rudkin's work and notably absent in Young-Bruehl's. It is this point of view that in the past has been so eloquently articulated in the work of Harriet Cuffaro. Drawing on her close reading of John Dewey, Cuffaro (1995) looks to schools as democratic communities in which the voices of both teachers and children are honored. More than laboratories, classrooms are dynamic communities that should function with full participation of all concerned. Like Hall and Rudkin's text, Cuffaro's are always filled with closely observed narratives of children at play. At the same time, Cuffaro is careful to explicate the critical role of the teacher in listening to children's immediate interests and using them as starting points for learning about ever-expanding communities beyond home and classroom. The teacher provides invitations—through the questions she asks, the materials she introduces, the clarifications of intentions she seeks, and the vocabulary she provides—for the children to experiment with the world.

ECE: At Other Times, In Unanticipated Places

I should not be surprised that the work of early childhood educators—especially those who, like Cuffaro and Hall and Rudkin, value the potential of building strong democratic communities through education—is largely ignored in the world of politicians and public policy. Democracy, enabling young people to become activist-citizens, is threatening to those who benefit from the status quo. But I am continually disappointed by the absence of dialogue between early childhood educators and scholars from other disciplines. While a growing minority of the former have productively engaged in interdisciplinary projects, seldom is work done in ECE referenced elsewhere (Block, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014). I was recently intrigued therefore when perusing Judith Butler in *Conversation* (Davies, 2008) to find myself immersed in the world of early pedagogy. I associate Butler's work with challenging, if at times impenetrable, theorizing about gender and sexual identity, which takes place far from the haunts of young children. And of course there is that, but there is also this: a description of accountability as an ethical responsibility that happens in dialogue with others and strikingly resonates with an early childhood perspective.

In contrast with popular approaches to accountability weighted down by the supposed certainty of quantifiable measures, or even a Nietzschean call to account that elicits a rationalizing defensive posture, Butler (in Davies, 2008) poses accountability as an open, relational process. She knows, the way that good early childhood educators know, that taking place within the context of caring human relationships, accountability—like the curriculum itself—is always partial, always incomplete.

Butler (in Davies, 2008) surprises yet again when commenting on an ethnographic study of children's dramatic play. She immediately recognizes that early childhood is an untapped site for thinking through cutting-edge social theory. In their playful ability to reimagine the social order, children are themselves burgeoning theorists of gender norms and transgressions, family politics, and queer belonging. This is the kind of theorizing, and the probing questions that it generates, that first drew me into the classroom in 1968. As a young adult I was struck by how the children's concerns about independence/dependence, autonomy/enmeshment, safety/risk were the very ones with which I was struggling.

Today I worry that if novice teachers are not taught to listen carefully to children—as carefully as they are now taught to assess academic accomplishments—they will miss the critical provocations that make life in the classroom so engaging. This kind of listening and watching means giving children opportunities to reveal what they already know about the world, the funds of knowledge with which they enter school (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Helping young students acquire a narrow band of cognitive competencies can be satisfying for some adults, but I doubt it is intellectually challenging enough to keep the best and the brightest young teachers in our schools for very long.

From the start, then, I experienced the early childhood classroom as a place to explore fundamental ontological and epistemological questions with children. Fifteen years later, when I became a teacher educator, I began to see that the knowledge I had acquired through the practice and study of ECE also informed my view of the world beyond the nursery school classroom. Here I return to a theme with which I began: the ways that our personal and professional lives intersect, enrich each other, and provide steadying ballast against difficult times.

As a newly minted college professor teaching young adults, my pedagogy reflected habits of mind acquired while working with young children—finding a balance of thinking, doing, and reflecting in the classroom; constructing a curriculum that allows individuals to pursue their own interests within a set of common themes; promoting a caring community of learners. Closely observing individual students as well the collective student body, their use of space, and my own, I found myself haunted by a familiar question: Who am I in the lives of these students? How do I negotiate the appropriate distance in these new relationships, positioning myself as both the one who cares and the one who knows, the one who identifies with the life and struggles of the student and the one whose authority is grounded in mastery of the subject matter?

In 1984 I left academia to become a professional AIDS educator and advocate, a project in which I had been informally engaged since the very first diagnoses of the “gay cancer” in 1981. This was a carefully considered move—a move to help the community that I loved, in which I loved—but one that I was sure would take me still further from the worlds of young children.

I was wrong. The early childhood lens, the lens that looks at the “whole child,” the child in context, the child who is constantly constructing meaning, was the same lens that allowed me to understand adults living through the health crisis. Unlike many of my colleagues, for example, I did not believe safer sex was a group of behaviors that could be legislated, technologies that once explained rationally would be applied consistently, a set of practices that might be sold by resorting to fear and intimidation (Silin, 1987a). In the 1980s I often found myself isolated at conferences by other activist-educators who were impatient for quick fixes that came in the guise of behaviorally oriented projects that narrowly focused on condom use. From my early childhood point of view, I argued that adults too live in meaningful worlds, that sexuality is both integral to, and expressive of, our continuously unfolding identities. I was no less worried than anyone else, but my sense of urgency was tempered always by a need to respect these complexities and even redefine the meaning of success.

During the crisis years, I was frequently called to schools to calm anxious parents about children and teachers diagnosed with HIV, to help create just policies, and finally to construct curriculum. I hoped to move AIDS conversations, mostly viewed as a topic for high school biology or health classes, into literacy and social studies classes as well as into the early childhood curriculum. Again, my ECE perspective dictated an integrated and multidisciplinary approach that allowed

students to enter and explore the issue from a range of vantage points and to understand it as a socially constructed phenomenon (Silin, 1987b).

During this period I was often a caregiver, employing early childhood knowledge in yet other unexpected contexts. As we do with the young, I realized that often we simply need to position ourselves *alongside* someone who is vulnerable—no press to fix the unfixable, no rush to proffer interventions. I recognized too that in the hospital room, as in the early childhood classroom, I had to monitor the emotions prompted in me by the situations we were living through. I needed to use my perceptions to gain insight into, but not displace, the emotions of the person for whom I was responsible, the one in need of care.

What I couldn't know was that living through the worst of the AIDS crisis would also prepare me to take responsibility for my aging parents in the succeeding decade (Silin, 2006). Initially, their precipitous decline from being elderly and independent to being frail and completely dependent sent me into a tailspin. It helped to recognize that I simply could not meet all their practical and psychological needs. Like the good early childhood teacher, I was familiar with simplifying complex tasks, breaking them into their component parts, and prioritizing what needed to be done.

More fundamentally, I had practice at containing the fears and anxieties of people who were vulnerable and who felt their survival in question. When bouts of dementia overtook my father, I knew about setting firm boundaries as a way to restore calm and about allowing myself to imaginatively enter another's life. Children had also taught me the power of play, of playfulness, and of joining with, rather than resisting, other logics and alternative worlds.

I was not a caregiver for my life partner. He died suddenly and unexpectedly while on a photographic assignment in a far-off city. I was left without the opportunity for shared moments of reflection, without the chance to say good-bye. Perhaps that was why it became such a difficult struggle to move forward with my own life (Silin, 2014). The struggle was lived in and through my understanding that re-presenting experience is an essential way to find solace for the inevitable losses that mark our lives, a process I first saw at work in children's play. Cuffaro (2005) explains:

As they imaginatively experiment with materials—with the fluidity of paint and water, the unyieldingness and durability of wood, the soft malleability of clay—they bring their thoughts and feelings, and questions, to their activities. And in the process of experimenting and discovering, of giving form to and transforming their experiences in play, they author their own texts, create meanings, and make sense of their often mysterious and complex world of which they are a part.

As an adult I don't use blocks, work with art materials, or have access to a home corner in which to rehearse my experiences and to reimagine them otherwise. Instead, I play with words. More abstract than the material props used by children, nonetheless they enable me to re-present the past and project a future when the possibilities seem most bleak. I choose a genre too, the essay—from the French essayer (to try, to attempt)—that maximizes the possibilities for the experimental

and provisional and for shifts in tone and perspective. The essay invites the digressions, moments of incoherence, and self-reflection required to find my subject matter when I am feeling lost. Ultimately, writing enables me to organize pain and find a perverse pleasure in the process.

Although I didn't begin to construct personal narratives until I tried to make sense of my experiences with AIDS, the seeds for such a disposition were surely sown during my years working with young children. It was in those classrooms that I learned the truth of Isak Dinesen's observation: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (as quoted in Arendt, 1958, p. 175).

I don't want to be a Pollyanna or to speak for others. However, I do want educators to attend to recuperative processes and consider the ways that children accommodate their own losses. I long ago rejected the idea that learning involves the replacement of "primitive" ways of knowing with increasingly more sophisticated ones. I subscribe to an account of growth that is additive; earlier ways of knowing continue forward even as we acquire the new.

In classrooms, I want teachers to help children sustain older modes of responding to the world—most especially embodied forms of knowing—just as they celebrate freshly acquired skills and ideas. Children need to build a fuller repertoire of behaviors—engaging in music, dance, drama, and graphic arts—for representing their worlds than the increasingly narrow literacy and numeracy curriculum found in most schools offers. They deserve a curriculum that sustains fluidity between their verbal and nonverbal selves, between their minds and their bodies, between times of social coherence and moments when they are in closer touch with the seething cauldron of emotions that boils beneath the surface of all our lives.

Three Themes for Life

Thinking through ECE prompts me to attend to the way the field has shaped my responses to a range of personal situations. In turn, these situations have undoubtedly had a reciprocal impact on my professional commitments, something I could never have predicted when I first entered classrooms filled with young children. Describing the interaction between what I have learned as an early childhood educator and my life outside of schools, I find three themes that are applicable whether the object of our gaze is the young child, the vulnerable adult, or the frail elderly. It is this broad impact of the field, with its foundational ideas and questions, that contributes to my understanding of ECE as a discipline, not as just a set of practices for minding the young.

First, thoughtful early childhood educators are continually concerned with the ethics of care. They take up the question of surveillance, the balance between the need for safety and protection and the need for independence and privacy when working in the helping professions. Knowing the value of all that can be learned from close observation, from an openness to others that withholds judgement, early childhood educators teach us to weigh both the impulse to intervene and the rights of others to enjoy and learn from the full scope of human experience. They model

a certain disposition to encounter otherness, in oneself and in others, and to read these encounters as invitations for connection and meaning-making rather than as moments for distancing or alienation.

Second, effective early childhood educators focus on socially relevant curriculum. Spending their days with the young, they bear witness to the passions that fuel our attachments and make our losses, imagined and real, feel life threatening. They know that for the curriculum to be meaningful, it must be emergent and reflective of our lived realities.

The ECE point of view affirms that we learn from and with others not by talk alone, but by mutual participation in shared projects, as we discuss how to construct an entrance for people with disabilities to a block building, investigate how deliveries are received in the cramped urban supermarket up the block, and research the supplies that will be necessary to build a terrarium in the classroom. At other times, when a child describes a painting, dictates a story, or requests a prop for a dramatic play scenario, we must suspend our rational and relational defenses and make imaginative leaps of faith in order to stay alongside her as she explores the world.

Third, reflective early childhood educators draw our attention to questions of human temporality. In my critique of the developmental canon, I wanted to reassert the messy, nonlinear ways that humans grow and change over time. I questioned the heuristic value and politics behind a commitment to a carefully sequenced hierarchy of developmental stages. Life in classrooms and too many hospital rooms confirms for me the singular importance of the present, awash as it is with past history and future possibilities.

When reimagining temporality, the boundaries between adults and children, the mature and immature, the healthy and ill, become porous. One existential reality emerges: We all live in a common world, face similar questions, and deserve equal opportunities and privileges. Respecting children's rights to active participation in the decisions that affect their lives requires that we give special attention to observing, listening, and staying in the moment. Above all, it requires that we resist the efforts of those who would push children into the future before they and we have fully realized the richness of the present.

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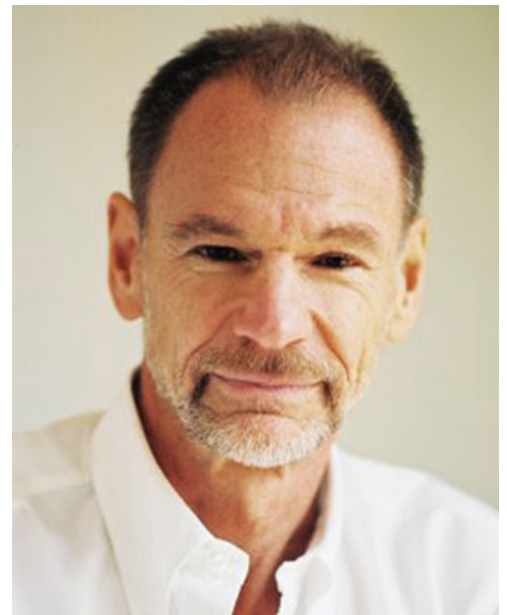
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Jonathan Silin

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When Unit Blocks Came to Gardaborg

By Kristín Einarsdóttir

A very good friend whom I have great respect for once said to me, “my duty is my pleasure.” That might sound strange to some, but if you think about it and apply it to life, you can understand that it is indeed a pleasure to do one’s duty. And that statement perfectly describes how I feel about my duty to tell you about the unit blocks in the Gardaborg preschool.

Unit blocks have probably been used in some Icelandic preschools since 1950 or 1960. But a turning point occurred when one of my teachers from the Iceland University of Education (Fosturskoli Islands), Jonina Tryggvadóttir, returned from studying with Harriet Cuffaro at Bank Street College in New York City. Jonina learned about unit blocks there, observed children working with them at the City and Country School, and developed the idea of bringing them back to preschools in Iceland. Harriet came to Iceland in October 1991 to teach a block course in Fosturskoli Islands for preschool teachers; she describes the initial idea of going to Iceland and her work with Jonina in a sound recording I made with her in New York in June 2011.

From January through May 1992, five preschool teachers in two schools (Gardaborg and Stardarborg) took part in the block project. Having recently completed my degree in education, I was lucky enough to be one of those teachers. Here is what Harriet said about our work together: “This was an adventure and a gift and it still is.” I find it hard to describe how thankful I am for all the questions that Harriet raised with us. Even when I considered that I had thought something through completely, Harriet would say—never expressing a judgment about my opinion—“I just have one question, Kristin.”

Gardaborg

Gardaborg is a public school run by the Department of Education and Youth in Reykjavik. It opened in 1983. The school’s community consists of 54 children, their parents, 13 teachers, and a chef. The children range in age from 18 months to six years and are organized into two classrooms. The school is governed by the 2008 Preschool Act, which establishes preschools as the first stage of the Icelandic education system and makes them available to all preschool-age children. It is the aim of the preschool to create a healthy and safe environment for the children, providing them with opportunities for emotional and physical development and a happy childhood. The school also adheres to the



Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools, published by The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In Iceland children do not need to pass tests to move up a grade level. Compulsory education begins in August of the year that children turn six.

The teachers in Gardaborg are united by their commitment to John Dewey's philosophy and Caroline Pratt's methodology. At the same time, they understand that Gardaborg is an Icelandic preschool, a product of Iceland's society and culture. At the beginning of the block project, both Jonina and Harriet emphasized that they were not introducing an American method that teachers should adopt unquestioningly. Instead



it was up to each teacher to use unit blocks in a way that was consistent with the existing methods and cultures of their schools (H. K. Cuffaro, personal communication, June 2012).



The Impact of the Block Project on Gardaborg

The participation of teachers in the block project has had a major impact on the school. Soon after the project began, teachers started to see the value of unstructured materials. They gradually placed more emphasis on them than on traditional toys. The school got its first set of unit blocks in November 1991, and two years later we received our first set of large hollow blocks, built by the husband of one of the teachers. By the fall of 1995, unstructured materials had become the main teaching material used in the school, and they remain so today, 19 years later.



The work with the blocks has changed since the project began; this is consistent with Jonina and Harriet's position that they were not presenting a recipe for teachers simply to follow.

With the introduction of every new material, the teachers now ask themselves: "How do I use this material? How will the children learn from using it? What does it have to offer?"

What Do the Children Build?

The children mostly build what they are interested in. We often see what is happening in our community reflected in their buildings. They may build something that they connect with our natural environment, such as an eruption or an avalanche, but they also build things that reflect their own culture, worlds they have experienced in books and

cartoons. The play with the blocks is free play. The children are never told how or what to build; they make their own decisions about that. Through their dialogue with the children, the teachers encourage them to continue to find solutions to problems and ways to expand their ideas. The

teacher's role in the children's learning and play is to be involved in their search for the answers to the questions they have raised.

One very popular activity has been to build a track with many slides and lots of barriers and then let a glass ball roll down it.

For some time it was also popular to use the unit blocks as dominos. When the children started working this way, the initial response of teachers was to stop them, since the sole aim seemed to be to make the blocks fall. But then

teachers began to hear the children say things like "no, this turn is too wide and we have to find another solution." The children started to work together, and we listened to their talking and thinking. We realized and their joy was in solving a problem, not just in watching the blocks tumble.

The large hollow blocks are only used indoors. Our Icelandic weather does not allow them to be used outside. The hollow blocks are used in the same way



as the unit blocks; the children build with them without directions from the teacher.

Over the 31 years that the school has been in operation, emphasis has been placed on staff development. The teachers have always been interested in exploring and experimenting with new materials and ways of teaching. They have never been afraid to step outside the box, and I think that in part that is directly due to their participation in the early block project.



Over the years, Gardaborg teachers have taken three trips to New York to observe in schools that use unit blocks. These visits have provided the teachers with a strong incentive to develop their own work further. During each of these visits, Harriet met with the teachers, and they had an invaluable opportunity to discuss and reflect on their work with her. In 2012, during our most recent visit, we attended a course at Bank Street College on field trips, given by Salvatore Vascellaro.

More about Gardaborg

Preparing children for their transition to school is a project that is constantly evolving in order to best meet the needs of each child. Considerable effort has gone into it. Five years ago we decided to make a book about the school for the children. It was first written by the teachers after they read Nancy Balaban's *Everyday Goodbyes*, and is yet another example of the impact of our visits to New York. The book is rewritten every year.

The implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) began in Iceland in 2002. It is the policy of the city of Reykjavik that the CRC is part of the curriculum in all schools. Accordingly, Gardaborg has integrated the CRC into our work with children throughout the year.

In Gardaborg we also do a lot of work with poetry. Children create poems under the guidance of a teacher whose primary role is to be supportive and encouraging, along with documenting the children's words. Writing poetry can be an important aspect of development that enhances the children's vocabulary and literacy. It is also a significant form of self-expression and creativity in which ideas fly and the children get to enjoy themselves. We have published two books of the children's poetry.

Here is one of their poems:





The Light Post

*If the light post outside
were alive
it would like to
walk to Gardaborg
and look at the children*

*if it were stuck
it would feel bad
always*

*Maybe it comes alive
overnight
when no one knows*

We have made considerable progress in recent years in documenting the children's play and work. Now every child has her or his own portfolio. All the teachers use an iPad to document their observations. You might say that it has replaced the camera and pen and paper.

The iPads have also proven very helpful in working with parents. From time to time, for example, teachers email parents a short video or photographs of their children playing or engaged in other activities. At Gardaborg only adults are allowed to use iPads.



Last year parents and teachers engaged in a pilot project about democratic government in the preschool. The members of the group had a meeting where specific issues were discussed, and they made collective decisions about methods of upbringing and the use of funds. Because the goal was a conversational rather

than an electoral democracy, the group had to reach a consensus.



The Gardeborg preschool has been awarded the Green Flag, an international recognition of the school's environmental program. Outdoor learning is a large part of the children's education. All the children spend time outside every day, and older children frequently go on field trips. During the winter, it is dark when the children and teachers go outdoors because sunrise is

late in the morning at that time of year.



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Gardaborg preschool web link: <http://www.gardaborg.is/>

Bókin: <http://issuu.com/gardaborg/docs/gardaborg14>

Kristín Einarsdóttir

Kristín Einarsdóttir, a principal in the Gardaborg preschool, graduated as a preschool teacher in 1991. Along with four other preschool teachers, she participated in Harriet Cuffaro's 1991–1992 block project in Iceland.



The Experience of Working and Learning Together

By Jane Clarke

A teacher's classroom life often feels isolated from what lies outside the walls of the school. The experience of teaching is both fragile and powerful; it is full of contradiction, confrontation, and quiet celebration, all woven into the timeless moments of a school day. The central responsibility shared by all teachers is the knowledge that the decisions you make might influence a child's life experience in some important way.

I am a former early childhood teacher with twenty years of experience as an administrator in public and independent schools, as well as in Head Start and Day Care Centers. As the Director of the Lower School at City and Country School in New York City for the past nine years, the most important times of my day are spent in classrooms of children between the ages of two and seven. During the precious moments of observing the interactions between children and teachers I am constantly identifying, revising, adapting, and then re-identifying the multiple qualities that go into making a "good teacher." And in turn, I am looking closely at the supports that teachers need to be successful.

Each teacher I have had the pleasure to observe in action over the years has shown me some of the pathways in their individual evolutions as teachers. Before describing some remarkable learning experiences that stand out from my most recent observations of and conversations with teachers, I want to look closely at an activity that most of us engage in everyday.

The Art of Making a Bed

Making a bed is a daily activity for most of us. It is a task that can be accomplished alone and can also be accomplished without a great deal of thought or attention. However, when it is given mindful attention, and when it is shared with someone else, the experience is different, more satisfying, and probably more effective.

The motivation for making a bed successfully is so that it will be comfortable enough for a good night's sleep.

If you are making a bed with someone else, you must be able to rely on your partner to match your actions in perfect symmetry; this way each side of the bed will be balanced and therefore more comfortable. The satisfaction in this simple task lies in the pleasure of working in harmony with someone else.

Sheets need to be straightened and smoothed out as much as possible. The bottom sheet should be well flattened.

The top sheet needs to be centered in order for there to be sufficient overspill to tuck under the mattress, conveniently and securely. Hospital corners are preferred. The operation is much easier when two people are involved, concurring on the best way to do the corners.

If you add blankets for seasonal warmth, they should be blankets that are both aesthetically pleasing and comforting. For example, if you like penguins choose a penguin pattern, and take time to find just the right softness and fabric quality, important for both warmth and comfort.

Blankets may become cumbersome if they are wrapped too tightly. Blankets should lie centered on the bed, but they do not have to be tucked in.

The wonderful thing about making a bed is that you get to practice it each day. Each experience of making your bed will be slightly different; there may be different colored sheets and blankets and pillowcases, and different qualities of fabric, but there may also be subtle variations in the way you perform the specific tasks.

Although it is work that is usually done alone, it is easier in many ways to make a bed together with someone else.

The Art of Getting One Yard Box on Top of Another

Please observe these brief film clips by following the links:

http://youtu.be/jM2HAjh8_xY

<http://youtu.be/skycty2D444>

<http://youtu.be/mhnbAP297HE>

The film clips demonstrate some activities that can become an important “habit,” as children engage daily in outdoor activities using simple, open-ended building materials. The materials offer an opportunity to practice a daily routine in which, like making a bed, each experience of the routine will be slightly different.

Children of various ages are working together, learning from and with each other and gaining, over time, a trust in, and mastery of, the same open-ended materials. In each segment the children are working with the materials they have used consistently, each day, over several years – indoor unit blocks and accessories, outdoor building blocks, boxes, and boards. The children are experimenting, they are encountering unexpected challenges, they are working together, and they appear to be feeling empowered by their successes.

In the first clip, “Outdoor Challenge,” the two four-year-olds finally get to feel taller than anyone else as they climb into the box they have successfully placed on top of another box. As in making a bed, this operation can be tricky but is made easier when two people are involved. In the

second clip, “Teamwork,” a group of six-year-old girls manages to respond to the guidance of an emerging leader and get that box securely and solidly placed. In the third clip, “Bowling Build,” the three- and four-year-olds are able, over time, to perfect a game they have invented, a game with its own “rules” that others can participate in and have fun playing.

The activities in the first film clip indicate that the drive behind successfully balancing one box on top of another is that you can climb into the top box and feel taller than anyone else in the world. An important first step for a four-year-old is the realization that this is a feat that cannot be accomplished alone; yard boxes, large and small, are heavy and lifting them off the ground requires assistance. Another important recognition is that one person may have a good idea worth exploring but that it needs to be shared with a partner if the team is to work successfully – two heads are better than one.

These are some other important realizations offered by the activities:

- Good ideas don’t always work. When they don’t work, partners need to persevere and try something new in order to get the job done.
- Materials most often used one way can sometimes offer a surprise when used in a different way.
- There is nothing like an unexpected discovery in the midst of solving a problem; always be open to the unexpected!
- Working together with someone else can present challenges, but when both partners reach a common vision it is worth persevering.
- A sense of humor always makes hard work seem easier.
- If there are grown-ups around, it feels good to check in with them. There may not be a need for hands-on assistance, but encouragement helps.
- The pleasure of telling your story after a feat has been accomplished is part of the experience, something that in itself can be thrilling and add to the feeling of satisfaction.
- The most important first step for a six-year-old to recognize is that working on this feat with others is efficient and effective.
- A good leader can be kind and supportive as well as someone who can deliver clear and forthright directions.
- In order to accomplish this feat with perfect balance, it is important to adjust the direction of the box on top. This fact can be learned through practice.

- Girls are just as strong as boys and can accomplish heavy lifting work with enthusiasm.
- Getting it right requires patience and good humor.
- Hard work can be fun and you can learn unexpected things about the people you work with.

The Art of Being a Good Teacher

What is missing from each of the three film segments is the physical presence of a teacher. We hear the voices of two City and Country teachers in *Outdoor Challenge* and *Bowling Build*. They are not visible to the viewer, but in both cases they are fully present to the children. When they speak, they are calm and reassuring. They have a kind, humorous tone that evokes an understanding of the individual children they are talking to. They do not say much, but what they do say, and when they say it, seems to subtly support the children to go ahead with their work. It is this influence, whether silent or verbal, that profoundly affects a child's learning experience. Jerome Bruner (1996) says: "We carry with us habits of thought and taste fostered in some nearly forgotten classroom by a certain teacher." (p. 24)

These film clips invite me to consider the important attributes of effective and successful teachers that have emerged in my own practice over many years.

Making time and space for having a good idea

Supporting teachers to take the time to listen and closely observe children as they think and work is central to the challenge of creating meaningful curriculum. Too often teachers become clouded by a curriculum they are asked to teach, and forget the importance of watching and listening to children to discover meaningful connections into deeper learning. Throughout the school day, whether during snack, working with open-ended materials, or during a more structured activity, children never tire of imagining how something might work. As a teacher commented: "The children in my group seemed fascinated by the concept of 'infinity' and also by the very sound of the word itself. They wanted to know how big infinity was, and what it would look like."

Through her observations this teacher saw children working collaboratively to investigate further, writing endless pages filled with zeros and taking up a lot of space as they taped the pages together. The teacher was captivated by the children's fascination and curiosity about quantity, number, and space. She brought this awareness into her classroom the following year by setting herself the goal of focusing more on mathematical thinking.

Also intrigued by size and space, this group of children built tall block buildings and then looked for the tallest person in the school to compare their building to. How big is big? From here they went on to think about the size of their classroom. How big was it? How could they measure it? Someone suggested Snap Cubes and the idea was "snapped up." Everyone worked to put them together from one end of the classroom to the other. The counting of this large number of Snap

Cubes was a long and complicated feat, but clearly satisfying to the children as they enthusiastically worked together to accomplish their shared goal. When achieved, the final number certainly felt big.

The next idea was to question whether the classroom was bigger or smaller than the director's office. The teacher invited everyone to find out the answer to their question and a trip was organized with an accompanying bag of Snap Cubes. The investigation was thrilling. The number the children counted out together sounded big, but it wasn't as big as the number reached for their classroom dimension. This was also a satisfying reality for the children: we are perhaps more important than we thought, our classroom is bigger than the director's office! Their investigation demonstrates the children's courage to believe in the power of the unknown and in the imaginative process – retaining an ability to “wonder.”

Isamu Noguchi (1967) offers a view of the child's “beginning world”:

Children I think must view the world differently from adults, their awareness of its possibilities are more primary and attuned to their capacities. When the adult would imagine like a child he must project himself into seeing the world as a totally new experience. I like to think of playgrounds as a primer of shapes and functions; simple, mysterious and evocative, thus educational. The child's world would be a beginning world, fresh and clear. (p. 161)

Retaining our openness to a child's natural ability to simply “wonder” requires us to connect flexibly with the unknown, which is not so easy when our work as teachers requires us to be rooted firmly in the reality of the moment. However, for teachers to encourage children to share their wondering, they also need to authentically model this practice. My observations of teachers suggests that they require ongoing support from administrators to remain connected to this crucial aspect of life.

*Not knowing
The name of the tree
I stood in the flood
Of its sweet smell
—Basho (2008)*

One way of nurturing this important connection for teachers is by offering them hands-on experiences with open-ended materials. Allowing teachers the time to paint, arrange, and rearrange collage materials and build with unit blocks can often reawaken pathways to wonder. Reflections on these experiences encourages the practice of asking genuine questions to come alive.



Watching teachers rekindle these values in their teaching practice is always exciting. A kindergarten teacher of many years enthusiastically shared a book the children in her group had made. The teacher had asked the children to remember something particular about their year spent together, and then to “wonder” about what next year would hold for them. One page in the book said: “and I wonder if I will have a friend next year”

Being aware of the power of your tone of voice

If teachers want children to listen and to truly hear what we are saying it is critical to remember that “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it.” This old maxim is perhaps never more relevant than in the relationship between teacher and child. This does not mean that the teacher needs to become a different person, but that teachers should constantly gauge and monitor how they communicate with young children. A kindergarten teacher reflecting on her first year in the classroom commented:

There was a strong current of meaning between myself and the children with every syllable I uttered. I was their teacher. My every move, my expression of body, voice and face, would hold great meaning for them as we all made our way with the ebb and flow of our day(s).

Providing for varying needs within a busy classroom

Every teacher struggles to balance paying enough of the right kind of attention to each of the children in her care. At times the support needed by some children simply requires a presence and/or a look. Many children do not need obvious guidance from a teacher. They are self-sufficient, able to focus, and to resolve conflicts independently. They are often the students we rely on to keep things moving smoothly, the children who we know will quietly and independently engage with materials and other people. But this doesn't mean they don't need anything from us, and it is important for us to build a personal connection with them. Some of the subtle and effective ways to do this are indicated by the year-end reflection of a teacher of three- and four-year-olds:

I want to continue to try and form connections with children who may not always be asking for my attention, or sitting in my lap, or asking me to read them a book. I try to do this by sitting next to some of those children at snack or lunch, or having them come on a “special” one-to-one trip to pick up the snack or to run an errand. But this is an area I'd like to continue to develop, as there are children who do feel so independent, they want to convey that confidence to all the adults in their life. And our connection does not have to be about things they need from me – so my goal is to figure out what I can do to form and strengthen those connections throughout the year.

Recognizing the centrality of conversation

Conversation, silent or verbal, is one of the most important ways in which people, children and adults, get to know and trust each other. It is central to the experience of working creatively and effectively together. As in the art of making a bed, the heightened satisfaction in this simple task lies in the pleasure of working in harmony with someone else.

A classroom that honors conversation is a classroom in which the teacher honors this process of communication in her own life. Making time to talk and connect with teaching partners, and to invite conversation about life and experience is essential to effective school communities. When students observe teachers actively engaging with other adults in curious, authentic, and inviting ways, it has a profound effect on their own desire to connect with others. As they learn the skills needed to enjoy conversations, adults act as role models. Conversations with other teachers outside the classroom are also important. A teacher of two-year-olds reflected at the end of the school year: “The meetings (with other teachers) were thought-provoking as well as a great place to feel understood.”

Practicing the skill of stimulating children to talk to each other is an intrinsic part of building an experience of community. For example, being able to ask a genuine, open-ended question that will invite a child to think about his answer rather than give the teacher an answer he thinks the

grown-up wants to hear is an important skill. The ability to do this requires practice, support, and confidence. We take a risk each time we ask these questions. What will happen if we get “off track” and don’t finish the plans for this part of the day?

Teachers as a community need to feel supported and encouraged in these moments, to ask these questions of each other, to go to unknown places together. As one teacher noted about teacher meetings held at the close of the school year: “The conversation sparked heart-felt, provocative and in my opinion necessary conversations I hope we continue to have as a community.”

Hitting the balance between planning and organization and flexibility and spontaneity

In order to open up spontaneous and connected pathways into learning for children, teachers need time for authentic conversation outside the classroom and to collaborate on curriculum ideas. Such time is crucial for inspiring new ideas and cultivating new ways for children to be truly connected to their learning experiences.

There are many moments in our lives as teachers when we feel overwhelmed with our own agendas, and perhaps those of administrators, parents, and school boards. Teachers need time to “float on top of the water,” and the courage to allow ourselves to confront the unknown unprepared – balanced with the confidence that we are prepared, we know what we are doing, and that we know our children. A kindergarten teacher reflecting on her experience, said:

We headed into the project open, not knowing, and OK with sitting in our dis-equilibrium. We were flexible, we went back and forth and finally we have ended up with a digital shadow book that we will share.

These are just some of the components that feed into the experience of becoming a good teacher. Julie Diamond (2008), a kindergarten teacher with many years’ experience, reflects:

Slowly, I learned to manage my own feelings when things went wrong. The struggle brought hard-won confidence in my powers. Throughout the school day, I communicate – not perfectly, but well enough – a presence that they and I can count on. Teachers’ predictability and flexibility, emotional resilience and resourcefulness, the ability to share children’s sense of humor and to demonstrate firm intent; these create a classroom in which children feel respected, safe and able to learn. (p. 207)

I’ve talked about the art of making a bed, about putting one box on top of another successfully at different ages, and about what goes into the art of being a good teacher. What do these seemingly disconnected components have in common? To me, the common thread that runs through them is the opportunities we have when working consistently with the same open-ended materials and

when working with each other. It is crucial to have the chance to explore and better understand the possibilities that different materials offer and the opportunities collaborative activities reveal for ourselves and for others. Hard work and practice can yield extraordinary results, experiences that we remember, and that silently help us to develop a clearer awareness of who we are and what we are capable of doing. We often surprise ourselves and each other in the process. As an experienced a pre-K teacher said recently of her group of children:

They (a group of pre-K students) became more practiced at the teamwork it took to hoist boxes on top (of other boxes). They used sawhorses to raise a roof, stabilize it with boards and then build a bed or table high in the air. We saw things I have not seen four year olds do prior to this year.

Teaching is hard work and may often feel isolating. Perhaps a key to continuing to feel energized by and excited about our work lies in keeping ourselves open to the wonder that children experience each day. As one kindergarten teacher put it: “What I found out, when the door closed and the families left for the day, was that I was faced with 18 surprises daily!”

It is by remaining open to surprise, building trust in ourselves, making time to “float on top of the water,” and communicating and allowing for mistakes that we as adults stay connected to the mind and essence of the child. It is through this window of connection that the possibility to educate lies. As John Dewey (1915) explains:

His [the teacher’s] problem is that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing. Hence, what concerns him, as teacher, is the ways in which that subject may become a part of experience; what there is in the child’s present that is usable with reference to it; how such elements are to be used; how his own knowledge of the subject-matter may assist in interpreting the child’s needs and doings, and determine the medium in which the child should be placed in order that his growth may be properly directed. He is concerned, not with the subject matter as such, but with the subject matter as a related factor in a total and growing experience. Thus to see it is to psychologize it. (p.85)

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Jane Clarke

Jane Clarke is the director of the Lower School, City and Country School, New York City. Beginning as a classroom teacher in London, Los Angeles, and New York fueled her passion for arts education. Transitioning into an administrative role, she worked as a teacher-director at Little Missionary's Day Nursery and as the codirector of the early childhood program of Studio in a School. In this role, she worked collaboratively with visual artists, classroom teachers, and school administrators in Head Start day care centers and public school settings. This work continued to ignite her belief in the creative process and its role in deeper learning for children.



Caroline Pratt: Progressive Pedagogy *In Statu Nascendi*

By Jeroen Staring

This article explores two themes in the life of Caroline Pratt, founder of the Play School, later the City and Country School. These themes, central to Harriet Cuffaro's values as a teacher and scholar, are Pratt's early progressive pedagogy, developed during experimental shopwork between 1901 and 1908; and her theories on play and toys, developed while observing children play with her Do-With Toys and Unit Blocks between 1908 and 1914. Focusing on her early and previously unexplored writings, this article illustrates how Caroline Pratt developed a coherent theory of innovative progressive pedagogy.

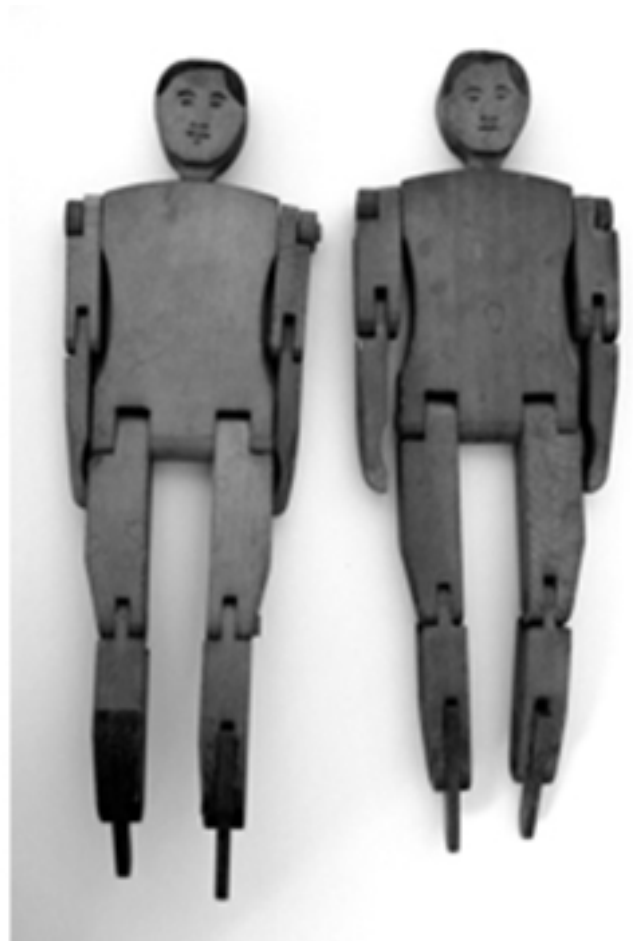


Figure 1 (left). Original drawing of Do-With doll, by Caroline Pratt. Figure 2 (right): Two wooden, jointed Do-With dolls. (Photo: Jeroen Staring, 2011; Courtesy City and Country School, New York City)

Caroline Pratt's Education

In 1884, Caroline Louise Pratt, age 17, had her first teaching experience at the summer session of a school near her hometown, Fayetteville, New York. Two years later, she took the Regents' Advanced Examination and in 1887, she was appointed assistant teacher at the Fayetteville village school. In 1894, she finished a two-year professional diploma course in manual training and kindergarten methods at Teachers College in New York City. The manual training course was based on a method of teaching woodwork crafts started by Calvin Woodward at the Manual Training School in St. Louis. Pratt immediately moved to Philadelphia where she taught woodworking at the Normal School for Girls until 1901 (*Journal of Education*, 1896).

The *School Journal* (1895) offers a portrayal of her teaching practice at Philadelphia Normal, where new female teachers became special teachers "able to correlate and co-ordinate the woodworking with the language, arithmetic, and other work of the school" (p. 475). The report (see Figure 3) depicts Pratt already advancing a position she would explicitly advocate later in her life: the woodshop represents the school's heart, and manual work is fundamental in the curriculum (pp. 475-476; emphasis added):

Every girl makes her own working drawings, figuring until she has them mathematically correct, and then starts away sewing and planning with the precision of a skilled carpenter. They do not make articles such as carpenters produce, however, but devote themselves simply to exercises illustrative of the principles of carpentry, devoting special attention to the pedagogy and relations of woodworking in other school work and studying how the interest of the child in the manual work may be carried over into other studies.

Woodwork for Girls.

PLAN ADOPTED IN THE GIRLS' NORMAL SCHOOL,
PHILADELPHIA.

The class in woodworking was established in the Girls' normal school at Philadelphia three years ago has proved itself a marked success and those who have watched the experiment are confident that this will induce other institutions for the education of women to take up that branch of manual training. How the work came to be introduced may be briefly explained. The girls in this school are studying to be teachers. It has been proposed to establish in Philadelphia manual training departments for boys of grammar school age, and Dr. Brooks, superintendent of schools, has written an elaborate report upon the subject, in which he warmly advocates the introduction of woodworking in



Figure 3. Excerpt from *School Journal* (1895).

Pratt's Early Progressive Pedagogy

In Philadelphia, Pratt experimented with alternative teaching methods. In 1896, she attended a *Sloyd* woodworking summer course at Nääs, Sweden. (*Sloyd*, after the Swedish *Slöjd*, refers to a method of teaching woodwork crafts that originated in Finland around 1865.) Later, Pratt (1901)

offered a clear critique of *Sloyd*, which she viewed as rigid, brushing aside all individuality in teaching: “I consider the Swedish system of sloyd dangerous, because it does not admit of play of individuality to great enough extent upon the part of the teacher” (p. 419). She added, “The danger . . . lies in the fact that as a system it is considered permanent, and no system was ever that” (p. 420). In 1897, Pratt enrolled in a University of Pennsylvania manual training course designed for teachers. At the same time, with her lifelong companion Helen Marot, she immersed herself in the literature of labor, social reform, and education. Pratt’s search for progressive teaching methods in light of her developing political stance is beyond the scope of this essay (for more detail, see Staring, 2013a-b), but it is important to note the influence of social and political issues on her consciousness. After scrutinizing the abhorrent working conditions in the Philadelphia tailoring industry (Marot & Pratt, 1901, 1903), Pratt began work at settlement houses. Her first position was part-time, at the College Settlement of Philadelphia in the spring of 1901. Alas, the archival records regarding her work at the settlement house are missing.

After Marot and Pratt moved to New York City in the fall of 1901, and Helen Marot began working as a child labor investigator for the Child Labor Commission, Caroline Pratt began teaching an experimental woodworking method at Hartley House, a Hell’s Kitchen’s social settlement house. *Hartley House News* (1902a) offered a vivid description of her classes:

With hammer, saw, plane and rule these youthful workers, who average from 8 to 14 years of age were busily occupied in constructing models of various shapes. Around the room could be seen finished bread and sleeve boards, small carts, wheelbarrows, banks, stools, tables, etc.

Complementing her focus on “the part of the teacher” when she wrote about *Sloyd* (Pratt, 1901, p. 419), Pratt now focused on child development. She developed an appreciation for the necessity of choice, child agency and meaningful work in a child’s education, and criticized manual training in public education.

Pratt’s (1902a) first report on her early settlement house shop work experiment states: “The main feature of the experiment is that the children are allowed to choose their own models” (p. 11). She delivered a list of six positive changes that result from this experiment. The first change was smaller classes. Twelve students are “the limit in size of a class which a teacher can handle effectually” (p. 12). The second change was “less necessity for disciplinary measures, or, perhaps it would be truer to say, that the teacher’s standard of deportment undergoes a change in order that her theories may be consistent” (p. 12). Discipline was left to take care of itself. Pratt believed that since adults do not stand between children and their faults and mistakes, children cannot escape from their mistakes: “it is a constant discipline to them” (p. 12). The third change was the children’s interest in the work: “There is an interest never before experienced; an interest which, with the Settlement boys truly competes with the attraction of the street.” Fourth, she suggested: students made their models for a purpose. They were allowed to take the product home, to use

for purposes they chose. Whatever students made should be “useful to the child and he must have it when he wants it” (p. 12). The fifth change was in line with Pratt’s overall pedagogy of letting students make their own mistakes and learn from them:

The standards of work must be lowered... To insist upon a boy’s doing a piece of work over is not in accordance with the theory that we learn by our mistakes as well as by our successes. If the boy’s mistakes are destroyed by someone else he doesn’t benefit by them. (p.13)

The final change concerns “mental activity, a change of greater importance than any other” (p. 13). Since students choose to make their own models, they must plan in advance and be mentally active while working on the model. It is their personal responsibility.

Pratt continued to stress the importance of children’s choice. In the *Fifth Annual Report of Hartley House*, Pratt (1902b) explained that *Sloyd* consisted of “first making the child a producer and afterwards an accurate one, in other words of putting technical skill second” (p. 22). She aspired to go a step further, stating that if a model “is to be truly useful it must be so from the child’s standpoint and therefore that he must choose it” (p. 22). Giving up rigidity altogether, and cooperating with children helps them create their vision, and modifying constructions to fit their abilities was all in strict accordance with the view “that child life is a part of life and not a preparation for life” (p. 23). This view resonated with Dewey’s (1897) position that education is “a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 7). Pratt (1902b) listed the advantages of letting children choose their models: (a) it places the whole responsibility of the work upon them; (b) it trains them in judgment and makes them less satisfied with imitation; (c) children have to develop the habit of thinking carefully before acting; (d) there is a noticeable disciplinary effect of their work; (e) there was not much idling.

Pratt believed that children should become useful members of society as early as possible, “first to his playmates and later to ... adult companions, and later still if all has gone well ... to be useful to society in general” (pp. 22-23). In order to help children to find their interests and abilities, she kept records on how students put their models to work, and how students reported using them. “The keeping of the record of what became of the models contributed towards making the work consciously purposeful” (p. 24), she wrote. By interviewing the students, she found out that the “real fulfilling of the [carpentry] hour was outside the classroom” (p. 24). This child study led her to describe the teacher’s responsibility as follows:

The training towards doing a thing well is only second to that of doing it cheerfully. The cheerfulness acts as the motive force that carries the individual upwards and toward greater difficulties. The skill of the teacher is employed in arranging the difficulties so that the boy will just meet them

without losing his cheer, and in handwork, at least, the resultant must be greater technical ability. (pp. 24-25)

The students also had a responsibility to the classroom. “It was understood that if [the students] did not wish to work they were promptly to leave” (p. 24). Later, Pratt (1948) wrote in her autobiography that she had only one rule, “work or leave the shop” (p. 20).

Pratt’s students embraced and supported the educational experiment, as did the parents and the Hartley House staff. As reported in *Hartley House News* (1902b), this enthusiasm stemmed from the invitation to students to make wooden items of their own choice that were useful to them, to Hartley House, or at home:

The Carpentry Classes are progressing very well. There are 9 classes and 78 members on the rolls. The work done in these classes is very attractive. Each boy is set at something different from that of his neighbors. A good many of the members are now working on articles for Christmas. Miss Pratt is in charge of the classes.

Three years later, *Hartley House News* (1905) again reported on the students’ useful and meaningful work:

The Carpentering Class is one of the most interesting classes at Hartley House. A visit to it would make any one desire to be a member. Many useful articles are made by its members, both for the House and their own homes.

Pratt outlined another core objective in teaching shopwork: to initially trim down work to a minimum with the intention of giving the freest possible scope to the “play instinct,” without, however, reducing shopwork to mere play. Pratt explained this idea in her 1905 article, “A Neighborhood Shop for Children” in *Manual Training Magazine*:

To this end, a low standard of work is permitted in the beginning, and whether the model is a good or a poor one, the child has it when it is finished, thus is used that instinct for ownership which in other forms of school work is shown in collections of various kinds. (p. 159)

The children’s “instinct for ownership” represents their means to exercise will and intelligence. Around the time children start to want to own things because of what these items can bring them in the way of pleasure, Pratt believed that shopwork would appeal to them, boys and girls alike, if aptly presented. She argued that since children are “more individual than we as adults are” (p. 160), it is important to allow them to choose what they wish to make.

Years later, a Hartley House carpentry student talked about his teacher: “Miss Pratt!... Do I remember her?... She let me make what I wanted to make ... for the first time” (in Benedict, 1942, p. 247). Pratt (1905) brought into play the children’s “love of possession” in concert with their “love of physical activity” (p. 161):

If we succeed in carrying a child past the point where the tools are a novelty to him, where he comes merely for the pleasure of feeling ownership in them for a brief hour, to the point where he wants the work for itself, we have one with whom it is worth while to spend much time and energy.

She not only let the children choose a model, but allowed them to choose style and size too. They were not given ready-made drawings. It was up to them to plan the work themselves, to explain their plans, and to make drawings themselves. Pratt’s philosophy was:

To teach a child to do a thing because the drawing says so is like teaching him to think thus-and-so because the book says so. If it is necessary that he should have a better reason than authority for thinking a certain thing, why should it not be required of him that he have a better reason than authority for acting a certain way? (p. 162)

In addition, she argued that children must experience the liberty of explaining themselves to adults in order to become aware of their developing unique personas:

We theorize; the children feel. Our very theories blunt our feelings. We are never sure of them. But in a little child we have something which is all feeling – pure, primitive, direct. Why not use his feelings to test our theories by, especially in those things which concern himself? At any rate, we have nothing better to go by. If the whole plan of nature is purposeful, then each child is here for a purpose.... How shall we ever find this out and be able to give him that help which ought to be ours to give – wisdom – if we always dictate to him instead of allowing him to talk to us? (p. 163)

In *American Teacher*, Pratt (1913) connected the subject of useful, meaningful work to the students’ self-esteem and unveiled her contemporaneous educational policy aims: the US school system pedagogy desperately needed change:

If you were to present your boy with a pocket knife and tell him that he could use it for no other purpose than to whittle pudding-sticks for kitchen use, you should not be surprised that he refused the knife – on these terms.... It is quite the same way with tools. The boys look forward to the shopwork in the

schools only to find when they get to it that it is not for them after all.... It is again their self-respect that rebels against making pudding-sticks when it is so obvious that the tools should be used for the boys' own purposes. (p. 98)

Pratt reminded readers that around 1870 when shopwork was introduced in public schools it “was a more or less unconscious recognition of industry as an educational factor” (p. 98). Her initial hope was that besides “dealing with the symbols of things, the children were to be given the opportunity to deal directly with the things themselves” (p. 98). This hope failed to come true since public schools solved problems *before* students tried to solve them themselves, removing the shopwork’s underpinning: usefulness. Teachers in the public school issued and explained working drawings before students were allowed to make them.

In contrast, teachers in social settlements allowed students to choose their projects; to work them out to their own abilities; to explain them to their teacher, using “every method of expression at his command in order to be understood” (p. 99); and lastly, to sketch and refine working drawings before beginning to start the chosen project. Furthermore, informal shopwork stood for the most important features of industry: “the motive, *immediate usefulness* of the object made; the opportunity to grow mentally through solving problems and inventing; the accumulation of certain definite, appreciated facts to be used in future” (p. 98).

In addition, Pratt criticized the systemization of shopwork in the public school system. She (1902a) found that one had to “actively co-operate with children to secure for them the fullest expression in their own natural way.” She believed that it “would occasion a tearing down of traditional theories and practice for which few pedagogues are ready” (p. 14), and condemned the fact that manual training in public schools had already become part of an inflexible system:

[Manual training] has been systematized almost to death, principally because it admits of systematization as no other subject does, and secondarily, because the teaching of it fell into the hands of men who were essentially mechanical and the law of whose life was system. (p. 14)

Pratt (1905) explained dissimilarities she observed between shopwork at Hartley House and manual training in public schools, frankly addressing the core of the problem:

A single circumstance has made it possible for settlement workers to know and understand the needs of the people, and especially of children. That circumstance is that there is no compulsion in operation in connection with their scheme of education. To work at all, they are obliged to know what is wanted. This is not true of the institutions of public instruction. These

formulate courses of study, and it is a mere chance if they suit the needs of any considerable number of children. (p. 159)

“Theory of Ed.”

Pratt’s critique of the public system and her clarity about the pedagogy of shopwork suggest that from 1896 she was actively developing her own pedagogical theory. The City and Country School Archives hold “Theory of Ed.,” an undated handwritten draft with a list of notes or standpoints. The draft (Pratt, n.d.) stresses that children “must have [materials] which they can work with, can dominate, can have in their power”; teachers should remain “in background,” providing “each child [with] opportunity kept simple”; materials must be used “which promote the purposes of the [child], which serve the present,” allowing children “the freedom of working [with] ingenuity, initiative, imagination”; children “must be allowed to produce something useful & meaningful to themselves”; and, lastly, the “solution of all conduct problems lies in well established work & play habits.”

The draft, perhaps dating from the early 1900s, illustrates Pratt’s distinctive pedagogy. Pratt biographer Mary Hauser (2006) does not believe that Pratt developed a complete pedagogical theory. Another Pratt biographer argues that John Dewey heavily influenced her pedagogy (Semel, 2014). Neither biographer, however, includes the writings reviewed here. In my view Pratt did elaborate a coherent theory. The writings described in this article illustrate that she developed her own unique educational approach. Her texts, forming major theoretical contributions to experimental education, demonstrate a steady progression in independent theorizing based on years of observing children at play and teaching students in shopwork settings. The next section strengthens this argument.

Pratt’s Theories on Play and Toys

Pratt resigned her settlement job in 1908 (*Hartley House News*, 1908), likely because of her growing involvement with women’s trade unions. When Helen Marot accepted the call to become Secretary of the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) in 1906, Pratt also became an active WTUL ally. The women co-organized WTUL support for the largest strike in US history by women working in sweatshops: the 1909 Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike (Staring, 2013a-b). At the same time, Pratt began designing wooden toys, with ambitious plans to manufacture them. The *Kindergarten Review* (1909) and the *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine* (1909) reported that she shared



Figure 4. Advertisement in The Craftsman (1909).

prototypes of her playthings with an audience of teachers at the 1909 Annual Meeting of the International Kindergarten Union in Buffalo, New York. The same year, the United States Patent Office filed a trademark request by Pratt. Two years later, the *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* (1911) affirmed the trademark was registered.

Beginning in 1908 Pratt designed and produced toys (trademarked Do-With Toys) and building blocks (Unit Blocks) aimed to invite children to play, encourage their constructive ability and resourcefulness, stimulate their imaginations, and help them dramatize their experiences. Pratt began by marketing a family of wooden jointed dolls and wheeled farm animals. The *Craftsman* (1909) holds the first advertisement for the dolls (see Figure 4). The *New York Evening Post* (1909) reported that Pratt distinguished three kinds of toys, the first two favored by adults, the third by children: a) toys that do nothing by themselves and are not fun to play with – *Do-Nothings*; b) mechanical toys that do all the playing by themselves after having been wound up – *Look-Ons*; and c) *Do-Withs*, “toys for the do-with children” that “seem to be inviting you to come and play with them” – wooden dolls (men, women and children) and animals (horses, cows, donkeys, sheep, calves, pigs and dogs), houses, stables, carts, and furniture. The article states (emphasis added):

The toys may be bought one or a few at a time, but each is part of a scheme, and with them all or even with several the child may work out systems of play that will inspire it mentally... In making the toys no effort has been made to “particularize,” as it were, but essential characteristics are emphasized and the rest left to the child’s imagination.

The *Christian Science Monitor* (1910) reported Do-With Toys came as a father and a mother doll, a boy and a girl doll “with striking resemblance to their parents, and bearing the right relation to them in the matter of stature,” and all kinds of farm animals, a house, including furniture, a barn for the animals, and patterns for clothes. The newspapers stated (emphasis added),

It is part of the purpose of the “do-with” toys to encourage constructive ability and resourcefulness. The children begin by making clothes for the family, and for this the inventor has provided paper patterns of simple cut and design. Then they will probably want to build houses for them, and after a while they may want more dolls.

Children would find it a simple matter to create additional dolls themselves, more or less accurately copying the originals. It did not matter if the crafted dolls were lifelike: “It is in their capacity for action that [Pratt] illustrates the world of reality.” The *Christian Science Monitor* (1913) sketched the secrets of the toys’ “capacity for action”:

The Do-with toys are quaint wooden mortals of many joints, so many that they can be put through almost any motion. They are plainly clad, this farmer and his family, but one recognizes them at once as a family of respectability and sterling worth. They possess a barn which has stalls and a real door to be opened and shut. The farmer can drive into the barn his many-jointed cow and her calf. He can take a bundle of genuine hay from the loft and feed it to the hungry beast. His arms, legs, body, even feet, are capable of being placed in countless positions, and instead of going through his motions by mechanism, it is left to the child to take that form in his own hands and to “dramatize” with his playthings, as the educational phrase goes.

It was Pratt’s (1914a) view that since modern children are not able to easily gather “play material from the life around them” as children did in pre-industrial times, they do not have “the sort of real experiences of which they see the beginning and end and therefore, to some extent, the meaning” (p. 119). She acknowledged the child Fritz who had inspired her to devise Do-With Toys and blocks especially for him (p. 121). He had “complained about the toys his elders gave him with the remark that ‘All these toys play for me, and I’d like some that play with me’” (Christian Science Monitor, 1910; see also New York Daily Tribune, 1910).

Pratt describes her observations of Fritz, which began in 1908, in her 1948 autobiography. Fritz was the son of a friend, “an inventive and ingenious six-year-old” (p. 23). Whenever Pratt would visit her friend, she used the occasion to study him playing and creating his miniature world: “I thought that this was one little boy’s way of learning about the world he lived in; he had observed for himself, had gathered his facts, and was here, before my eyes, writing the perfect child’s textbook of what he had seen.” In an article in *Woman’s Magazine*, Pratt (1914b) detailed her observations of Fritz playing with playthings and blocks she devised for him:

Although Fritz was not familiar with what goes on in a country barn, the possession of a horse and cart, a cow and a pig immediately threw him into a play scheme the details of which occupied him for months. The addition of a calf, and later a colt, renewed the old play and added new features. At the vanishing point of the play a man doll was introduced, and again the process began all over. Early in the play it became necessary to have a place to shelter the animals, and later the man had to have a house to live in. For this purpose Fritz had blocks especially made for him, as there were no suitable ones on the market. The block-building the boy did for a purpose was a marvel... In fact, in order to have play “succeed” it is necessary to treat it quite as seriously as work, and in many aspects to apply the self-same rules.

Advertisements in December 1910 newspapers indicate Do-With Toys were available at New York City's Gimbel Brothers (see Figure 5). The *New York Herald* (1910a) reported, "The Toy designer, who is Miss Caroline Pratt, is only starting on her career and profession. The 'Do-Withs' are still in their infancy, and at present they are all born in Greenwich Village, where Miss Pratt presides over a small workshop." Six photos illustrate the article, showing Pratt producing and painting the toys (see Figure 6). The newspaper noted, "Miss Pratt's toys have approval of many kindergarten experts in this city and elsewhere."

In the winter and spring of 1911, Pratt demonstrated her toys at Child Welfare Exhibitions in New York and Chicago. The *New York Herald* (1910a) wrote:

Miss Pratt will have charge of the toy shop in the Child Welfare Exhibition, which will be held here in January. The display in her department will include a model toy shop, with work bench and the materials used in making toys. Demonstrations will be given in the shop to show the relation of the one toy to another or the one group to another.

The *New York Herald* (1910b) also announced Pratt's upcoming toyshop:

[The] home section of the exhibit is to show a toy shop, not in charge of mere clerks, but actually operated by fascinating toy makers. And before the eyes of the little ones who peer through the low shop window or cluster around the busy toy makers at work on a bench in Toy Street, wonderful treasures are to grow from wood, cloth paper, bits of wire, paste and paints.... From time to time, children will also serve as toy makers.

Numerous other newspapers and magazines reported the events (e.g., O'Reilly, 1911; Pratt, 1911; *San Francisco Call*, 1911). Consequently, Do-With Toys became well known. For instance, an interview with Pratt in the upstate New York *Whitesville News* (1911) was reprinted in at least nine newspapers in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. Pratt explained her pedagogy (emphasis added):

A 'do with toy' is one that will teach the child how to do things. With it a boy or girl can carry out definite play schemes. It should be simple. It teaches the



Figure 5. Excerpt from advertisement in *Evening World* (1910).

child by stimulating its imaginative nature and inventive faculties.... What we are trying to do through our exhibit is to teach parents that their children have a normal play impulse which can be more easily gratified with a few simple toys that tend to inspire the child's imagination and inventive nature than by all the complicated and mechanical toys in the world. Equipped with a few simple toys the boy or girl will learn to make them work for him and do things.



Figure 6. Caroline Pratt in New York Herald (1910a).

Extending her belief that children need “a few simple toys,” Pratt declared that it is not wise to give a child a whole tool chest. Instead it would be prudent to give him first a hammer, and when the child then asks for nails, give him something to pound. By offering tools when the child asks for them, he will learn to use them, make things, and appreciate them. Due to wide press coverage of the exhibits, Pratt and her Do-With Toys achieved a kind of pre-internet instant fame, not only in New York City and Chicago, but also in many parts of the country.

In the autumn of 1911, the Teachers College educational museum housed an exhibition of Christmas gifts, including the Do-With Toys. The event was broadly reported. The *New York Herald* (1911) quoted Pratt:

“To [fulfill] its full educational obligation,” says Miss Pratt, who has done much settlement work and now revels in producing toys that make one wish one were a boy again, “each toy, within its limitations, should work. Each child through play should unconsciously absorb the useful arts.”



Figure 7. New York Child Welfare Exhibit Playshop, in Life and Labor (1911).

Pratt exhibited her toys on other occasions as well.

Pratt’s toy manufacturing adventure came to an abrupt halt in February 1915, when the New York City Stryvelyne Shop, which had sold the Do-With Toys since 1914, went bankrupt. For a time, the toys were used in Pratt’s Play School and were commended in a book that included working drawings of the dolls (see Marten, 1917), and in some Bureau of Educational Experiments Bulletins (Staring, 2013b). Pratt was awarded the 1919 Mrs. Hubbard Carpenter Award for Toys of Greatest Art and Educational Value at the Art Institute of Chicago, but the toys never regained their popularity. Soon Unit Blocks began to

overshadow Do-With Toys, in both classroom environments and pedagogical importance. Today, Unit Blocks are still at the heart of the City and Country School curriculum, the successor to Pratt’s Play School.

Pratt’s Next Dream

In September 1913, Pratt set up a new pedagogical experiment: the Play School, co-founded by her wealthy friend Edna Smith. They rented an apartment at the corner of Fourth and Twelve Streets, and welcomed eleven four- and five-year olds.

What was the rationale of the Play School, later acknowledged as the first nursery school in the United States (*Daily Boston Globe*, 1929)? Pratt’s (1948) autobiography stresses that social learning was key. It was elicited through children’s play that reproduces the surrounding world and its ways of functioning:

[A] community of little individuals, equals in size and strength and understanding as adults are equals in their own adult communities, would learn not only physical truths about the world, but social truths as well, the

all-important truths of people with many individual differences who must live and work with each other. Certainly this was a harder way to teach children the unity of human endeavor than having them sit in a circle for half an hour at the beginning of the school day. (p. 27)

At Hartley House, (between 1901 and 1908), Pratt (1913) had observed that children are not stupid; some are merely “school stupid.” In order to stimulate child agency in play and work, she suggested startling them out of their “school attitude” by giving them emotional stimuli and tempting them to instantly apply knowledge they already possess. This was accomplished by asking them relevant questions, letting them come up with their own thinking and their own answers, while not allowing for a “guessing habit.” She stressed the implications of her pedagogical approach developed over the years:

Besides better individual training, the great fundamental thing which such work would do for a school is this: It would put it in the position, for the first time, of consciously recognizing that every child has a life of his own; that he has his own interests; that he has his own important social adjustments to make. It would put the child in possession of something with which he could go right out into the world now and solve some of his problems. (p. 100)

In 1914, Marot, Pratt, and Edna Smith moved into a three-story townhouse, with two floors reserved for the Play School. Marot (1915), in *New Republic*, sketched the aspirations of Play School:

The school offers each child an opportunity to carry his curiosity about things through experiment to discovery. It is equipped with an apparatus which is not fixed but is constantly extended. This includes work-benches furnished with full-sized tools. Girls as well as boys of four and five years use hammers, saws and planes without dire consequences to tools or fingers... With the help of such tools and by dramatization the children reconstruct the world of adults ... in miniature. Given this opportunity to interpret their environment, an understanding of it becomes for them a very pressing need. It is this condition of the mind that the school sets out to induce. (p. 16)

Pratt’s Continuing Relevance

During her lifetime, Caroline Pratt’s work was discussed and debated in popular newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. From the time that she founded the Play School in 1913, her work gained a lasting influence on progressive and mainstream educators. Her Unit Blocks have been in widespread use in early childhood classrooms since the 1920s. Unrecognized in earlier

Pratt biographies (Carlton, 1986; Hauser, 2006; Hirsch, 1978; Semel, 2014) were her theoretical writings from the 1901-1908 Hartley House period and her work on play and toys from 1908 to 1914. It is these previously unrecognized contributions to the field that I have highlighted here.

Between 1896 and 1908, Pratt developed her early progressive pedagogy, expressing an appreciation for the necessity of choice, child agency, and meaningful work. As a result, she criticized the kind of manual training being practiced in public schools. In 1908, Pratt began designing and selling toys and building blocks that demonstrated her theories about play. Her 1911-1914 writings explained that her innovative materials encouraged children's constructive ability and resourcefulness, stimulated their imaginations, and helped them to dramatize their experiences.

Pratt's early progressive pedagogy continues to be relevant. She found a way to address problems of reduced or suppressed motivation to learn, a major quandary in education today. Furthermore, her teaching guidelines supported increasing the self-esteem of her students while giving priority to their sense of agency. She fervently advocated student choice, stressing the usefulness of their work without presenting a "do-as-you-please" pedagogy. Her stance – with choice comes responsibility – is a message for our time.

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An Inquiry into the Pedagogical Implications of Dewey's Ecological Thinking

By Simon Jorgenson

Recent educational scholarship provides evidence that John Dewey remains relevant to central issues in teaching and learning (Biesta, 2007; Boyles, 2012; Rodgers, 2002). If, as Doll (2002) suggests, Dewey continues to haunt curriculum studies with an unfinished project, we might use Dewey's vision to meet all of today's educational challenges. As such, new questions emerge linking Dewey's philosophy with today's ecological and environmental approaches to education. What can Dewey teach us about education and the environment? How does he theorize the role of nature in educational experiences? What implications do these ideas have for today's classroom practice?

In this paper, I work to answer these questions, adding to a growing body of literature on Dewey's ecological thought (Boyles, 2012; Browne, 2007; Colwell, 1985; Morgan, 1996; Watras, 2011). My primary purpose is to (re)examine Dewey in the context of contemporary conceptions of ecology and environmental education. With this in mind, I will focus primarily on what Dewey has to say about the natural world, beginning with his general philosophy and moving through several of his educational works.

Now is a good time to address these questions. The fields of science education and environmental education are converging in exciting ways around issues of sustainability (Wals, Brody, Dillon, & Stevenson, 2014), and an increasing number of teachers are looking to incorporate outdoor experiences and environmental projects into their pedagogy. For these teachers—and potentially many others—Dewey offers a theoretical foundation and practical suggestions, and those who inquire into Dewey's thinking will find much in common with today's experiential and place-based approaches (Kraft & Kielsmeier, 1995; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Weston, 2004).

Dewey's Ecological Perspective

Ecology is both a biological science and a political movement—a “politics born of a science” (Dobson, 1991, p. 18). As a biological science, ecology studies the interactions of organisms with their physical environments. As a political movement, ecology leverages the findings of ecological science toward social change. Interestingly, the power and flexibility of key ecological concepts such as the ecosystem has led to a curious phenomenon: ecological discourses that make little mention of the natural world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goodlad, 1987; Lee, 2010). Although these discourses have helped foreground the influence of social context on human development and learning, they have also backgrounded the role of natural environments in these same processes. I hear philosopher of education Madhu Prakash's (1995) call to bring ecology and education “down

to earth” (p. 325) as an attempt to reintegrate social and natural ecologies in educational settings. This seems to be the shared project of diverse streams in contemporary environmental education (Gruenewald, 2003; Kahn, 2010; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011). It also happens to be work that Dewey undertook nearly a century ago. In Dewey’s synthetic vision, inner and outer ecologies, human and material nature, the moral and the physical, are always already linked.

A number of scholars have been struck by Dewey’s ecological thought, including Colwell (1985), who lamented that scholars have largely ignored Dewey’s ideas about nature and education, preferring to focus “almost exclusively on social experience” (p. 255). More recently, in a critical analysis of the literature on Dewey, ecology, and education, Boyles (2012) identified Dewey’s perspective as “transactional realism” (p. 153)—the idea that experience emerges from ongoing exchanges between human organisms and their environment. This simple idea has had profound implications for the design of classrooms and experiences, as noted by educators working within a Deweyan framework (Cuffaro, 1995; Vascellaro, 2011).

Dewey’s ecological perspective is similar to the grassroots perspectives offered by Prakash (1995), who argues that modern ecological science has become disconnected from concrete problems, the natural world, and local initiatives. Dewey’s ecological perspective supports Prakash’s (1995) efforts to make ecology a “people’s science” (p. 325) once again. Dewey’s theory of experience and nature can help educate a new generation of ecological thinkers—students who feel deeply, are committed to particular places and communities, and resist the abstractions of modern life.

Dewey’s Naturalistic Theory of Experience

Several years ago, I happened upon Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* in a used bookstore. Until then, I had been familiar only with Dewey’s educational works and was surprised to learn how deeply Dewey incorporated nature into his theory of experience, a theory which undergirds and illuminates his writings on education. I have since learned that these same ideas are central to Dewey’s (1934) aesthetic theory.

In the first chapter of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey outlined his philosophic method, which he described as an attempt to “frame a theory of experience in naturalistic terms” (p. 1a). Dewey grounded his method in an expansive understanding of nature, and he would have us test our theories, conclusions, and reflections against the empirical events and concrete objects of our experience. For Dewey, this process of testing, which he believed science had refined, led back and even into nature. He argued, quite radically, that “[t]he very existence of science is evidence that experience is such an occurrence that it penetrates into nature and expands without limit through it” (p. 1). Dewey set all aspects of human experience—scientific, aesthetic, moral, religious—in this naturalistic context.

What sort of world does our experience point to? Dewey’s answer is both historical and anthropological. He takes the cultural practices and technologies of various social groups as

evidence that human existence is remarkably precarious. If this were not the case, he argued, things like magic, myth, religious ceremonies, and idealist philosophies would not be so common across cultures. Dewey (1958) takes the ubiquity of these things as evidence that

[t]he world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons. Although persistent, they are sporadic, episodic. (p. 41)

Dewey believed that these facts were confirmed for each of us by our experience of the world. This was, for him, the nature of existence. He believed that even the most abstract of human behaviors were adaptations to empirical conditions—akin to building a fire. For example, he writes that

[t]hinking is no different in kind from the use of natural materials and energies, say fire and tools, to refine, re-order, and shape other natural materials, say ore. In both cases, there are matters which as they stand are unsatisfactory and there are also adequate agencies for dealing with them and connecting them. At no point or place is there any jump outside empirical, natural objects and their relations. (Dewey, 1958, p. 67)

Dewey thought the same about human affect. Fear, he writes, “whether an instinct or an acquisition, is a function of the environment. Man fears because he exists in a fearful, an awful world. The world is precarious and perilous” (Dewey, 1958, p. 41). Although Dewey recognized that this sounded “pessimistic” (p. 45), he insisted that our experience proved the world to be just exactly so. This, I would argue, is still the case.

Similarly, Dewey (1934) infused Art as Experience with strong ecological statements. For example, his description of humans as “living creatures” leads to the following statement regarding “experience in its elemental form” (p. 12):

The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defense but also by conquest. (Dewey, 1934, p. 12)

From one perspective, writing about human beings in this way is an understandable move for those, like Dewey, who had learned (from Darwin) to interpret human behavior in terms of organisms and environments. Using these ecological terms does not necessarily mean that Dewey cared more for the natural environment than he did for human purposes, as Bowers (1995, 2001)

has noted in critiquing Dewey's ecological credentials. Considering this, what should we make of Dewey's ecological perspective? How is this perspective useful today?

One of Dewey's most important contributions has to do with the idea of risk. Like Dewey, today's scientists and citizens believe that we live in precarious times. What is climate change, after all, but an increasing (and increasingly random) distribution of risk? If the ecological crisis is real, we must create new beliefs and practices, or revive old ones, before it is too late. This imperative extends to education and schooling, although there is no consensus as to how to proceed. Within education, for example, intersecting ideologies reveal a variety of possible responses, including socially critical pedagogies, pedagogies that conserve traditional environmental values, and pedagogies that focus on technological solutions (Fien, 2004). To make matters even more complex, a variety of "myths" of nature suggest that nature can be anything from ephemeral to forgiving depending on what social group a person belongs to (Schwarz & Thompson, 2004).

In their discussion about the myths of nature, Schwarz and Thompson (2004) recognize that the world retains the power to choose among social constructions of nature. They write:

Though this approach is saying that knowledge is socially constructed, it is not saying that the world can be any way we want it to be. It is not saying that we can know nothing; only that we cannot know everything and that within that uncertain and inchoate region, it is our institutions—our social involvements—that lead us to grant credibility to one possible state of affairs rather than another. (Schwarz & Thompson, 2004, p. 8)

Dewey can help teachers sort through this conceptual and ideological confusion, I think.

He would appreciate the authors' recognition of the sociality and contingency of knowledge, but he would insist upon returning the insights of social groups back to the "evidence...of empirical things" (Dewey, 1958, p. 42)—the world as experienced by individual persons, including students.

As such, Dewey offers a way of thinking that recognizes the social construction of environmental knowledge while maintaining the empirical grounds for assessing environmental risk. If, as Dewey (1958) suggests, the "world is a scene of risk" (p. 41) this knowledge will become social as an increasing number of individuals reflect on their experiences of things like chemical pollution, climate events, or resource scarcity. This is where we currently stand, I believe, socially and environmentally speaking. According to Beck (2004),

The latency phase of risk threats is coming to an end. The invisible hazards are becoming visible. Damage to and destruction of nature no longer occurs outside our experience in the sphere of chemical, physical or biological chains

of effects; instead, they strike more and more clearly our eyes, ears and noses. (p. 13)

The “risk society” that Beck describes above calls for collective action, although he is quite pessimistic about humans’ ability to combat the risks he describes.

By contrast, Dewey frames this process as an educational one, a process by which human beings are progressively learning to adjust and to address the environmental risks they experience. This is a hopeful and empowering position for teachers troubled by environmental decline, a position that supports environmental projects having an experiential focus.

Further Afield & Out of Doors

The section above serves as an introduction to Dewey’s general philosophy. Dewey’s ideas about experience, nature, and the environment provide a context for (re)examining his educational works, where he has much to say about nature and the school curriculum. As a progressive educator, Dewey traced his lineage to Rousseau, although he revised Rousseau’s ideas about nature and education considerably in *Democracy and Education*. In Dewey’s estimation, Rousseau put too much trust in nature and natural development. About Rousseau, Dewey (1916/1966) writes, “He thinks that this [natural] development can go on irrespective of the uses to which they are put” (p. 113). Dewey believed that nature, understood here as native potential, was unable to provide aims or ends for education in and of itself. He writes that “natural, or native, powers furnish the initiating and limiting forces in all education; they do not furnish its ends or aims” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 114). Social and physical environments were integral to the educative process, argued Dewey, because they helped organize the development of children’s “original powers” (p. 114). For Dewey, these original powers included a deep engagement with the natural world. In contemporary terms, we would call this power “ecophilia” or “children’s biological tendency to bond with the natural world” (Sobel, 1996, p. 6). Today, providing experiences that promote ecophilia is a primary objective of place-based education, particularly in the elementary grades.

Although Dewey believed that nature was an unsuitable source of the aims for education, he did think natural development important because it called attention to the needs of the human organisms in educational settings, including the needs for health, mobility, and the freedom to express natural temperaments, preferences, and tendencies. He writes:

The aim of natural development says to parents and teachers: Make health an aim; normal development cannot be had without regard to the vigor of the body—an obvious enough fact and yet one whose due recognition in practice would almost automatically revolutionize many of our educational practices. (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 115)

Here again, Dewey is closely aligned with contemporary thinking. New pedagogies in environmental education, for example, focus on the body, corporeality, and embodied experience (Payne & Wattchow, 2009).

Most ecologists are materialists, with a concern for how things look and feel. Dewey was no exception. He translated Rousseau's "aim of following nature" to mean the "regard for the actual part played by the use of the bodily organs in explorations, in handling of materials, in plays and games" (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 115). For Dewey (1958), the objects of primary experience were "things had before they are things cognized" (p. 21). As such, materials were an important part of Dewey's educational philosophy, and this brings us to the role of the natural world in that philosophy.

Dewey had much to say about the role of the natural world in education. As in his general philosophy, Dewey took the integration of experience and nature for granted. For example, in *The School and Society*, Dewey writes, "What is wanted...is not to fix up a connection of child mind and nature, but to give free and effective play to the connection already operating" (p. 142). He argued that children had an "original open and free attitude of the mind for nature" and that this attitude could be "destroyed" by the "meaningless details" of the traditional science curriculum, which relied on facts about nature rather than natural experiences (p. 141). Dewey was also critical of nature study advocates, many of whom treated nature as a context for literary studies or sentimentalism (Kohlstedt, 2010). Although Dewey saw value in these approaches as "reinforcements" and "idealizations," he was clear that he preferred the "straightforward road from mind...to object" (p. 142).

In addition, Dewey (1900/1990) suggested that the study of "physical facts and forces" (p. 141) should address the association of these things—facts, forces, energies, processes—with social and environmental histories. In *The School and Society*, he argued for a natural history or field ecology curriculum in which students engaged in the "observation of seeds and their growth, of plants, woods, stones, animals" (p. 141). He insisted that the powers of observation students developed through this curriculum—and the facts that they learned—become humanized and socialized (p. 142).

Absolutely no separation is made between the "social" side of the work, its concern with people's activities and their mutual dependencies, and the "science," regard for physical facts and forces—because the conscious distinction between man and nature is the result of later reflection and abstraction, and to force it upon this child here is not only to fail to engage his whole mental energy, but to confuse and distract him. (p. 141)

For Dewey, “[t]he environment is always that in which life is situated and through which it is circumstanced; and to isolate it, to make it with little children an object of observation and remark by itself, is to treat human nature inconsiderately” (p. 141).

In Dewey’s general philosophy, nature was the testing ground for all theories and hypotheses, the place where our experiments in thinking and action were confirmed or denied. This idea took several different forms in his writings about curriculum. For example, Dewey (1900/1990), would have students engaged in a number of “occupations” such as cooking, sewing, and weaving, through which they experienced the “actual world of hard conditions” (p. 38), a world to which they would have to accommodate their desires and impulses. As children grew and matured, these experiences would provide a foundation for their study of geography and history, subjects which addressed how different groups of people had wrested security and enrichment from earthly environments. For Dewey, geography

presents the earth as the enduring home of the occupations of man. The world without its relationship to human activity is less than a world. Human industry and achievement, apart from their roots in the earth, are not even a sentiment, hardly a name. (p. 19)

As such, a student’s elementary experience of nature through occupations and observation provided a road leading out to a wider world of meaning (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 218).

Although Dewey was a progressive thinker and educator, his rationale for incorporating occupations into the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago demonstrate his conservative, even nostalgic, side. In *The School and Society*, Dewey noted that the center of industry in America had moved from the household to the factory quite rapidly, in “one, two, or at most three generations” (p. 10). Concerned with what had been lost, Dewey tried to conserve the educative benefits of household and farm activities through occupations in school. According to Dewey (1900/1990), these occupations involved “the close and intimate acquaintance got with nature at first hand, with real things and materials” (p. 11) as well as building “discipline” and “character” (p. 10). Although Dewey recognized that industrialism had brought many material advantages, he framed these as “consolations” (p. 12) for what had been lost. In the middle of these sweeping social changes, Dewey designed a school and curriculum in which the “actual world of hard conditions” still played a leading role. Dewey’s attempt to conserve rural ways of life remains a central concern within green movements in culture and politics (Dobson, 2007; Marx, 1964/2000).

Conclusion

Today, human societies face a number of complex environmental challenges, including climate change and resource scarcity. In the United States, policymakers and their advisors frame these problems as keys to economic security, and environmental content appears in new educational

standards (Bybee, 2011; Friedman, 2008). The trend is clear—environmental and sustainability content is coming to a classroom near you, often through the discourse of STEM education (Bybee, 2010).

Given this situation, what would Dewey have to say? First, Dewey’s written work indicates his unique sensitivity to natural materials, events, and processes. It is clear that these things held great existential and educational value for him. For this reason, I believe that Dewey would encourage today’s teachers to take students into the field more often, for work and for play, but not in a sentimental way. If, as Dewey suggested, experience and nature are inseparable, then children deserve to venture outside and experience the difficulties of “making a living” from the earth. As live creatures, this is their birthright and a critical part of their geographic and historical education. I can imagine Dewey arguing along these lines.

I also believe that Dewey would speak about science education as it relates to contemporary environmental issues. Like many in the ecology movement today, Dewey would have abhorred the idea that ecological knowledge is the privilege of a specially trained corps of scientists or engineers. He would equally have abhorred the idea of science without nature or science without social purpose. For Dewey, science—similar to thinking or building a fire—was simply the name for a particular kind of human experience, one of many problem-solving enterprises, a social practice grounded in the natural world. For these reasons, I believe that Dewey would urge today’s teachers to incorporate more “citizen science” (Bonney, et al., 2014) into their classroom practice, designing projects where students go outside of the school building, using portable technologies to create and exchange environmental knowledge with professional scientists, local policymakers, and concerned citizens. Through such projects, the school and society connect in ways that Dewey could never have imagined.

For teachers not interested in outdoor or environmental education, Dewey still expects a high level of environmental intelligence. For example, Dewey (1916/1966) writes:

the only way in which adults consciously control the kind of education which the immature get is by controlling the environment in which they act, and hence think and feel. We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference.
(pp. 18–19)

As such, all teachers might be considered environmental educators in the sense that each is involved in environmental design. In classrooms, microcosms of Dewey’s contingent world, chance environments can have mis-educative effects. For this reason, the design of classroom environments is an important pedagogical act. Dewey urges us to incorporate natural materials and experiences into this process.

In closing, I was struck in my research by the following quote from Mitchell's (1934) *Young Geographers*, in which she is describing the need for teachers to inquire into their own geographies:

It becomes the task of a teacher who would base her program with young children on an exploration of the environment to explore the environment herself. She must know how her community keeps house—how it gets its water, its coal, its electric power, its food, and who are the workers that make the community function. She must know where the pipes in her room lead to, where the coal is kept in the school, where the meters are read and by whom, she must know the geographic features which characterize her particular environment and strive constantly to see how they have conditioned the work of which she is a part and how they have been changed by that work. (p. 25)

This task is still before us, although even more difficult to accomplish now that the forces and processes at work are so removed from our primary experience. Where does the water and heat in our schools come from? What energy and whose labor is involved in these processes? Uncovering these facts involves a level of ecological intelligence rarely addressed in teacher education programs, not to mention traditional schools. Dewey's ghost invites us to dig into these processes, and to build more sustainable forms of culture and society from what we learn.

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Doing Dewey

By Carol Rodgers

In this article I describe and analyze my experience as a teacher of, and a teacher who does, Dewey. In the process I hope to draw a picture of what it means to strive for integrity between theory and practice. I talk about why it matters to work from a theory of education, especially in an age where “clinical practice” is vaunted and theory is viewed as expendable, even as a slightly shameful waste of time. I focus on particular Deweyan principles, primarily the principle of reflection, and illustrate how that theory manifests itself in my practice. I argue that “doing Dewey” is an enactment of philosophy. Finally, I hold that a theory of teaching cannot be separated from the self who practices it.

I do not mean to provide a blueprint for how everyone should teach. Rather, I want to share the principles that have shaped my practice: reflection, experience, interaction, continuity, the logical and psychological, care, community, an end-in-view, and democracy, and hope that it speaks to others.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part describes my practice in two graduate courses, one an introduction to Dewey and the other a course on learning and teaching (a.k.a. “621”). I try to avoid a “how to” description of each course, and instead speak across courses, focusing on Deweyan principles in play. In the second part, I consider my efforts to do Dewey from a place that feels deeply rooted not only in his work, but in myself. I see my teaching as nested: Dewey writes about reflection; students reflect on subject matter and on their learning; and I reflect on their reflections, and, in turn, on my teaching. Reflection is the golden thread.

Description of Practice

Although the Dewey seminar is a face-to-face course, and Understanding Learning and Teaching an online course, they adhere to a similar structure: 1) a grounding experience; 2) sharing of the experience; 3) readings and discussion; 4) a lecture that integrates student discussion with my understanding of the readings; and 5) a reflection on the activities and learning.

First, however, I do several community-building activities. I need a group to work as a community that takes responsibility not only for their individual learning, but for each other’s learning. In Chapter 4 of Dewey’s *Experience and Education*, he speaks of “social control.” By social control Dewey (1938) does not mean mind control or social engineering. Rather, he speaks in terms of individual freedom within the context of a democratic community: “[I]t is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the whole group” (p. 54). He goes on to say that “education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group” of which, he points out, the teacher is a part (p.

58). Success depends on a concerted effort to achieve a community, but it also depends on the individual efforts of each member.

I do a variety of things to build this initial sense of community and the “moving spirit of the whole group.” Like many teachers, I ask for introductions but try to have them connect to the course. For example, I ask students share a time in their lives when they learned something that caused them to feel “bigger,” more powerful and competent, or “wiser.” We then dissect the stories to see what they tell us about what it means to learn something. Interestingly, few of the stories come out of an experience at school. This raises the question, why, which is something we pursue for the rest of the course.

I also do theater games, like the “cocktail party” of self-introductions (accompanied by food). In this game students introduce themselves from several different angles – as a teacher, a student, a learner, a family member, an athlete, a reader, then more complex categories, like a person of color, of faith, of an ethnic group. It ends with students talking about the origins of their names. This serves as a vehicle for students to get to know each other and each other’s names (which I insist they memorize). But it also raises fundamental questions and assumptions around identity, reminding them of the complexities of themselves and their classmates, as well as of their own students.

Another activity vital to the group’s sense of ownership is the creation of group norms. Each student is invited to contribute, as each has been in both functional and dysfunctional groups and comes with the lived knowledge of what works and doesn’t in a group. Usually the exercise is all that is necessary to keep students mindful of our stated parameters of civility and responsibility. In all these ways I am adhering to a commitment to a democratic process where “the school itself shall be made a genuine active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons” (Dewey, 1915, p. 10).

Experience

Students tell me over and over again that it is the experiences I offer them that most help them to make sense of the course ideas, and relate these ideas to “real life.” It matters to me that students see their learning as critical to their growth as human beings, their participation in a national and global democracy, and their place in the natural world. When Dewey wrote *School and Society* (1915) and *Democracy and Education* (1916), I believe it is this connection that he was referring to.

In the Dewey course we engage in an extended study of the habits of the moon. We explore the movements of the earth, moon, and sun through observations, which are recorded in a “Moon Journal”, and in-class discussions. In the *Understanding Learning and Teaching* course, I offer learners six different but connected experiences that they engage in with others in their lives, and describe and analyze online. The experiences include reading a poem, drawing a leaf, looking

at student work, doing descriptive feedback, and observing and describing a learner (descriptive review) over an extended period of time. Each of these experiences serves as ground – rich soil – in which the ideas of the course might take root, be felt, and be tested.

Some of these experiences (the moon, poetry, the leaf) allow students to participate in learning something “from school.” All of them ask students (most of whom are teachers) to slow down and see the world, their students, their students’ work, and their own prejudices and assumptions. All of the experiences connect directly to the readings, allowing students to read with questions of their own already ignited rather than with a list of questions that I want them to answer. As Dewey (1915) writes in *School and Society*, owning one’s questions is key to the whole endeavor in inquiry:

True, reflective attention ... always involves judging, reasoning, deliberation; it means that the child [or the adult] has a question of his own and is actively engaged in seeking and selecting relevant material with which to answer it, considering the bearing and relations of this material – the kind of solution it calls for. (p. 94)

This kind of engagement gives students something to say, and as Dewey says, “There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something” (p. 35).

Thus the starting point in my teaching is always an experience. It grounds learners, generates questions, makes them “itch” to see what the “experts” have to say (in the readings), and gives them evidence with which to test their interpretations. They can test their ideas and those of the experts not only in reference to their own experiences, but to those of their classmates.

Experience is the starting point for learning and teaching, which is another way of saying it is the beginning of reflection. The structure of the course experiences, of the courses themselves, and of my whole theory of teaching and learning, is shaped by my understanding of Dewey’s notion of reflection.

Reflection

Reflection is bookended by, and inseparable from, experience. Reflection begins with experience (both immediate and recollected) and it ends with some new action taken. This action, in turn, comprises the next experience. But Dewey’s notion of experience is complex and bears further explanation.

Dewey contends that an experience, no matter how educative it might potentially be, is essentially inert, without value, unless it is reflected upon, that is, unless it is turned over and over again, looked at from above and below, taken apart and reconstructed, in search of meaning. This whole enterprise is enriched if done with others. The process of reflection, which can also be

understood as inquiry, involves several steps: experience, description, interpretation and analysis, and intelligent action (Rodgers, 2002; Rodgers, 2006a; Rodgers, 2006b; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

Interaction & Continuity

Dewey's (1938) criteria for experience are two: there must be interaction and continuity. Interaction is the transaction that takes place "between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, from people to objects to ideas" (p. 43). It is in interaction that the internal aspects of who we are combine with the external, "objective" factors of experience or what David Hawkins (1974/2002) would term the "it," or "the stuff of the world." It is in this interaction ("Thou-It," Thou connoting the learner) that we engage in becoming human. Interaction engages and extends our humanness.

Although students cannot touch the moon, or manipulate it in any way, they interact with it through observation and documentation. They actively search for the moon, trying to figure out where to look; they look for "moon schedules" of its rising and setting on the internet; they draw it, noticing its angle above the horizon, what part of the sky it is in, its shape and whether or not it is upright or tipped; they note the time of day or night. In short, the "facts" – the data – they gather are the fruits of their interactions with the "it." In class there is further interaction. Data are shared on the board, in the telling, in the acting out – with their bodies, with small planets of Styrofoam, and through drawing – of what they have seen and of their assumptions. They interact with and interrogate their assumptions, testing them against others' and against newly gathered observations and hypotheses. They also, of course, interact with each other and with me. It is a constant back and forth among all these elements and it feels very alive, or, as Maxine Greene (1978) might say, "wide awake." Interaction also serves literally to keep students awake, as they actively construct meaning, becoming agents of their own learning, rather than passively absorbing facts.

Alongside interaction is continuity. Dewey notes that continuity, the other aspect of experience, results, first, when a problem

grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and ... is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly [when] it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process is a continuous spiral. (1938, p. 79)

The series of unfolding questions that result from students' inquiries into their perceived reality and the reality that they are piecing together through their observations is evidence of continuity.

An example comes from the leaf activity in 621. Students gather a pile of fallen autumn leaves from outside and are instructed to spend at least half an hour drawing one leaf. (They also read Scudder’s account of “The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz,” 1879.) As they do, they begin to notice things they had never noticed – veins, holes, color variation. They notice how hard it is to render a particular color or to accurately portray the shape they perceive but can’t quite capture. They note that even as they draw, the leaf changes – it curls or tears, or simply changes as their perception of it changes. After drawing, they are instructed to put their leaf back in a pile of similar leaves to see if they can find theirs, which they invariably do. Immediately they begin to make connections to their students and what it means to really see their students and their learning. They also make connections to math and to science, even to poetry. Their perception grows and, even years later, former students tell me that they never look at a tree full of leaves in quite the same way. It is this kind of altered perception of the world—a wider awareness—that I am aiming for.

When both interaction and continuity are present in experience, then we can refer to it as an “educative” experience. The job of the teacher is to create these series of experiences for students, what Dewey calls “situations.” He writes, “The immediate and direct concern of an educator is . . . with the situations in which interaction takes place” (1938, p. 45). A situation promises something like a chemical reaction between learner and the world. For students, interaction with the “it” and each other generates a series of questions that must be pursued, not because we have to “cover” it in our curriculum, but because students yearn to know. For me it matters that I am excited about the situation and look forward to the interaction, eager to see what will happen. The excitement

I feel at students’ discoveries helps me to resist the temptation to tell them the answers as they struggle, for example, to work out the complex motions of the moon.

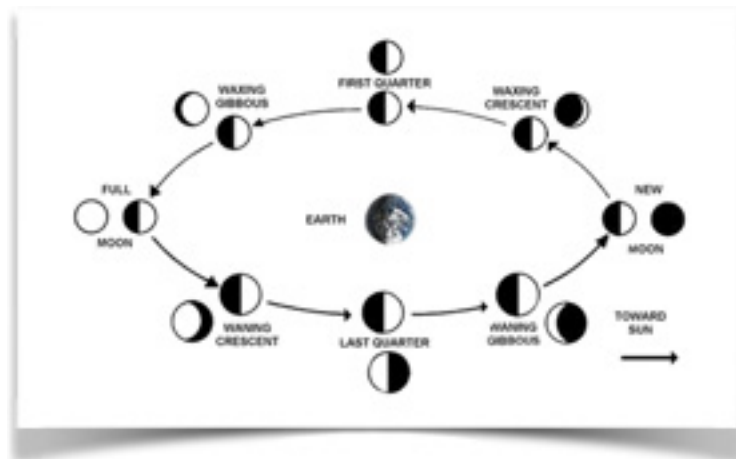
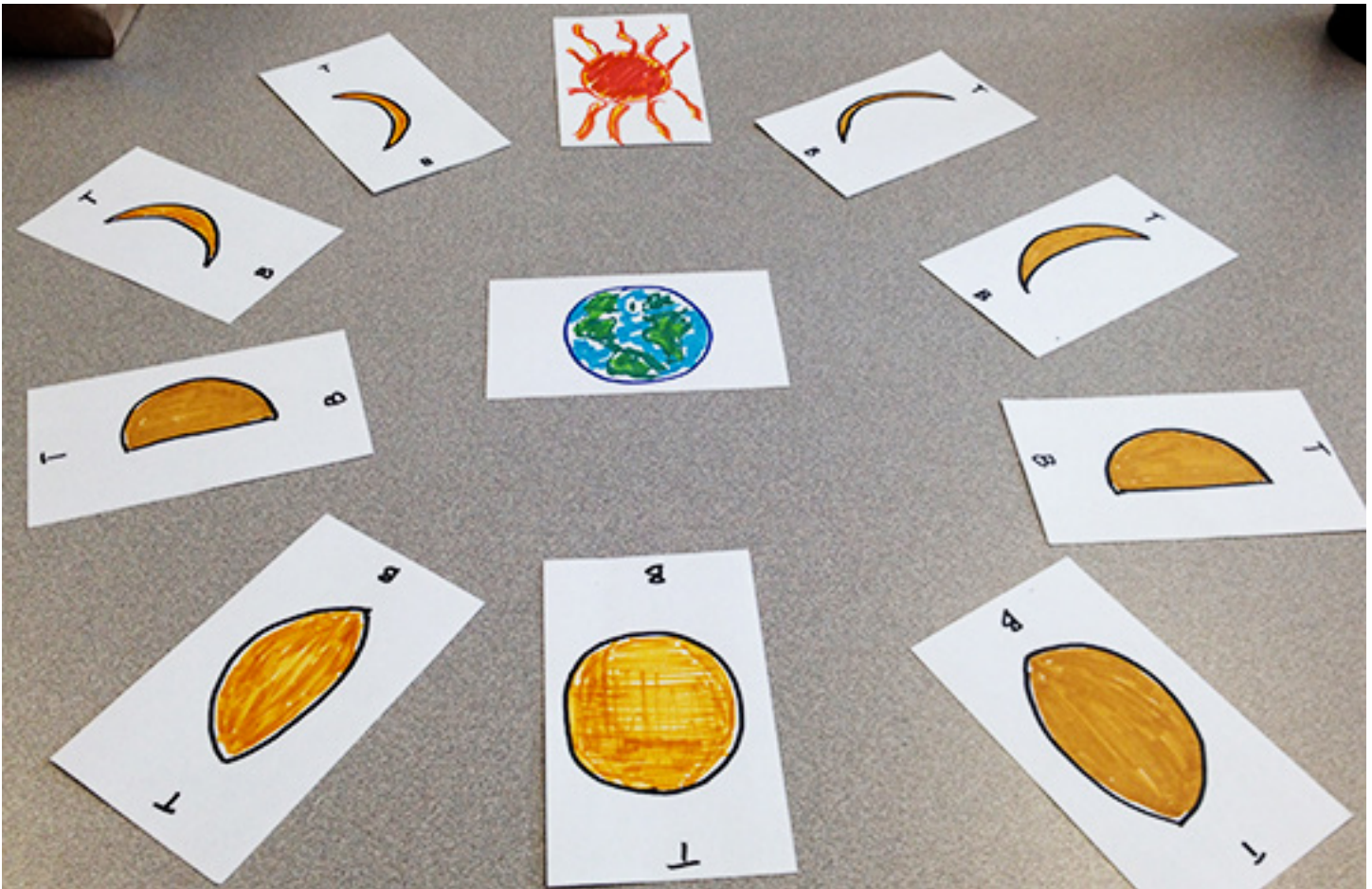


Figure 1. The phases of the moon as they are often portrayed in textbooks (retrieved from the internet; source unidentified).

In our study of the moon, students often go to the internet for answers. However, this often stymies interaction. Students can’t yet make sense of what they find. And yet diagrams like Figure 1 are what many of us memorized as children in school. Dewey has written extensively about how subject matter in its organized and codified forms, detached from experience, is the wrong place to begin. A drawing like the one below represents the end of a process of sense-making (which he

called the “logical”) rather than a beginning. Again, learning begins with experience, or with what Dewey called the psychological.

Figure 2. Students’ own “logical” arrangement of the moon’s phases.



Description

Description follows experience, and takes place in class as students share their stories of the experiences they have engaged in. The phase of description happens on two levels: within the experience and after. Within the experience includes, for example, drawing the moon and noting location, angle, direction, and time; or drawing the leaf (see Figures 3 and 4). After the experience involves the pooling of the data of experience with others. The first is reflection-in-action and the second reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Description is iterative in nature, and moves seamlessly into analysis and interpretation and back again, as more data are required for a more refined analysis.

It is description – staying with the object of our attention (the moon, the leaf) – that is often so hard both for learners and teachers, whose modus operandi is to keep moving, to “cover.” To stay with the unknown, writes Dewey (1933), is often uncomfortable: “To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found” (p. 16). Description disciplines the mind to stay with. This is what we do with the moon, with the leaf, with a child’s work, with a child, pacing ourselves to their rhythms rather than rushing, artificially, through to an answer, a grade, or a label. We have to sit with the discomfort of not knowing.



Figure 3. Moon observations.

Description can be a richly humanizing enterprise, as it is often in the act of describing one's experience that connections are made – those Aha! moments of insight. As a teacher, staying with a person through their description can be difficult, especially when their thinking seems flawed or tortuous or stumbling. Staying with their thinking means not rescuing them with answers, and it means learning about them as learners. This is when the teacher's experience diverges from the learners'. They are learning, say, a poem while she is learning them, or as Dewey (1938) puts



Figure 4. Leaves from the 621 Leaf Album, 2014

it, “The problem of the pupils is found in the subject matter; the problem of teachers is what the minds of the pupils are doing with the subject matter” (p. 275).

Once enough evidence has accumulated from the descriptive turn, the third phase of reflection, analysis (organizing information) and interpretation (deriving and ascribing meaning), naturally follow. This toggling between description and analysis is a sign of ongoing inquiry. It is in the analysis phase of reflection that reference sources – textbooks, the internet, maps, diagrams, graphs, and tables – become useful, both to be consulted and constructed. When students have questions, they want answers, and so these references suddenly become useful.

Taken together, the sequences described above comprise reflection, which can also be thought of as a continuous experiment in coming to understand subject matter, transforming it in ways that help broaden perception and awareness and “more conscious living,” as Dewey says. It is a dynamic, and very human, process.

An end-in-view

Contrary to what opponents of progressive education, and those who misunderstand Dewey’s views, believe, allowing student learning to guide teaching does not mean allowing students to determine the curriculum. It is a point that Dewey made over and over again. Education is a “both/and” proposition: both the child and the curriculum, society and school, democracy and education, experience and education. It is the teacher’s job to determine the end point, what Dewey (1938) refers to as the “end-in-view,” and how to get there. She uses students’ learning as the guide for her decisions, but she does not abandon the curriculum. In determining the experiences (situations) students will engage in, she discerns the beginning of their knowing (their “edge”), but also the projected endpoint.

In the Dewey class, for example, with our study of the moon, my ends-in-view are clear: an understanding of rising and setting, day and night, the seasons, the phases of the moon, the rotation and revolution of the Earth and the moon, the “tipping” of the moon, its height in the sky according to season, and eclipses. These are my moon “standards” (exactly the same as those in the Common Core standards). In addition, I wish to engender a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world, and to create a relationship of familiarity, awe, and affection with it. Finally, I wish to put learners in touch with the power of their own ideas (Meier, 2002; Schneier, 2001). I keep these ends clearly in view and they help me to decide what is important to pursue and what is not.

So doing Dewey, as Dewey himself would emphasize, is neither a matter of teacher-centered teaching nor student-centered teaching. It is both of these together, and neither of these alone. I have found it helpful to think metaphorically of learners as a river and the teacher as its banks. The river is where the energy is. It is a moving force, under its own power. The banks of the river give shape to its direction and are necessary to its ability to move. No banks, no flow. But the

banks are also shaped by the river. While the banks lead toward a particular destination, the river may also take unanticipated diversions, spend time spinning in unseen whirlpools, carve whole new paths through the landscape. Still it is always headed toward the ocean – the “end-in-view.” It is also my aim that by the end of the course students will have their own, new oceans in mind.

The role of the teacher is to create situations that move learners from interaction with the world (experience, emotion, the psychological) to an intellectual reconstruction and reorganization of it (the logical), in a way that opens up new questions (continuity). This trajectory also describes the journey of reflection – from raw experience, to examination of it in description, to discerning its meaning through analysis and interpretation, to intelligent action based on new (always tentative) understandings. The situation must be infused with intellectual tensions that are challenging and exciting enough to spur inquiry (“I can figure this out!”), but not so overwhelming that they debilitate (“I’ll never figure this out!”).

Other Activities

Several other activities are effective in “doing Dewey.” Close readings, pervading ideas, and descriptive feedback – each grounded in Dewey’s notion of reflection and each a shared, communal enterprise – provide avenues for bringing learning to conscious awareness in the company of others. In *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey writes,

What [the individual] gets and gives as a human being, a being with desires, emotions, and ideas, is not external possessions, but a widening and deepening of conscious life – a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings. (p. 369)

A “more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings” is what these activities are meant to provide.

Close Reading

One of the most effective practices in making sense of Dewey’s words is to do the disciplined work of close reading. My technique for close reading comes from the work of Margaret Himley, Patricia Carini, and their colleagues at the former Prospect School and Center (2011), where they started with close readings of children’s writing. The process I use attends to words, phrases, and sentences, their possible meanings, and connections to other ideas and works of the author. It is embedded in the larger picture of reflection. Beginning with the description of an author’s words, close reading commits to seeing (describing) what is there before deciding what the text means (analysis and interpretation). In order to perceive fully all that is there, it helps immensely to describe what one sees. And I have learned, in reading Dewey in particular, that I always “see only a little and partially” (Carini, 2001), but also see more each time. Inevitably, once one starts this process, one bumps up against assumptions that are not always borne out by the text. This

is when students begin to grapple with the meaning of the text. I tell them I want grappling. I have found that students often gloss over the readings, missing entirely both the words and the meaning. They often leap to accounts of their own experiences with just a hint of Dewey's ideas. While I seek to have students make sense of the readings in reference to experience, it is quite another thing to twist the words of readings to fit one's pre-existing assumptions.

My students sometimes bristle under the discipline that close reading demands. They initially find sticking so closely to the words of the text tedious and time-consuming. They want to "get on with it!" – or at least have me tell them what they should understand. But it is not long before they begin to see that in the act of looking closely and then constructing meaning from close looking that they begin to grasp what a writer is saying. And, in the building of meaning themselves, they come to own it. They begin to see the benefits of staying with the text and their questions, their "unsettledness," and I observe that they soon begin to impose this discipline on themselves.

Pervading Ideas

In *The School and Society*, Dewey (1915) briefly mentions learners' "pervading ideas" in the context of a discussion on imagination. "Imagination," he writes, "is not a matter of an impossible subject-matter, but a constructive way of dealing with any subject-matter under the influence of a pervading idea" (p. 91). As I understand it, a "pervading idea" is one that has grabbed a learner and won't let her or him go. It is a necessary precursor to "reflective attention" where "the child entertains results in the form of problems or questions, the solution of which he is to seek for himself" (emphasis added, p. 92). After reading each book, I have students construct a visual depiction of the reading's main ideas, the connections among these ideas, and especially the connection to their own "pervading ideas." The aim is not to drill the readings into students, but to give them a way of interacting with them that both engages their own questions, intelligence, and imagination, and consolidates the concepts found in the readings. Each student draws a very different picture – sometimes a concept map, but just as often a metaphor, or even a three-dimensional construction of their understanding.

One student – a quilter – whose pervading idea was the literal and metaphorical "stitch and the hand," crafted a book of images gathered from her childhood school exercise books in Italy. She traced her own learning history – its continuity – making sense of it in the context of Dewey's notions of making and doing (1915). The class stood around the table as she shared her drawings and stitched images and described her insights, visibly moved by the connections she was making – the literal stitching together of her identity as a learner.

In the final pages of *How We Think*, Dewey (1916) writes of the "heightened intensity of value" when the learner and her subject matter "seem to come together and unite." He goes on to explain the emotional dimension to this union: "There is ... a definite opposition between an idea or a fact grasped merely intellectually and the idea or fact which is emotionally colored because it is felt to be connected with the needs and satisfactions of the whole personality" (p. 277). Pervading ideas

have this quality of connection to the whole personality, its emotions, its quests, and its questions. Like close reading, the exploration of pervading ideas is a “widening and deepening of conscious life – a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings” (1916, p. 369).

Descriptive Feedback

The final activity of most classes is descriptive feedback. Descriptive feedback is “a reflective conversation between teacher and students wherein students describe their experiences as learners, with the goals of improving learning, deepening trust between teacher and student, and establishing a vibrant, creative community on a daily basis” (Rodgers, 2006a, p. 209). As an act of description, it fits into reflection as a form of gathering evidence of what and how we are learning and teaching. What matters is that we are in it together, jointly trying to figure out how to do it better.

I tell students that I cannot gather all I need to know about their learning through my observations; they also need to tell me what is working for them and what they need that they are not getting. This dialogue helps me to know what next steps to take, but it also gives students a sense of their responsibility for their own and each other’s learning. While it is not an evaluation of my teaching, my teaching is certainly implicated. Feedback also provides time and space and regard for each voice and, if I am to believe students’ feedback, a sense of agency and empowerment within a democratic community.

Embodying Philosophy

I have described my efforts to bring Dewey to life, and teach in a way that students will not merely read about his ideas, but feel them in their bones. However, if someone were to read this essay and try to do what I do, I am not at all sure that they would experience what I experience or that their students would learn what mine do. One might be tempted to extract from this description a list of “best practices,” but as disembodied “best practices” they are empty of me. That is, practices are hollow unless they are imbued with the unique humanity of the teacher and students who inhabit them. In addition, practices alone, empty of the values from which they spring – the larger ideas of the purposes of education, or a notion of what it means to be human – can become fads that come and go according to the whims of others, from school committees to superintendents to textbook developers.

Dewey scholar David Hansen (2004), in his essay, “A Poetics of Teaching,” writes that the difference between a teacher and a layperson is greater than knowledge and skill alone. “Rather,” he writes, “the difference comes down to vision, to a sense of the significance of what it means to undertake educational work, and to a sense that it is the person in the role of teacher, not the role itself, that educates” (p. 131). In a similar vein, Dewey (1916), in *Democracy and Education*, writes of the fusion of interest and self. He distinguishes between work that is done for “ulterior selfish end(s)” (money, reputation, or virtue) and work in which the self is present:

The moment we recognize that the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action, the whole situation clears up. A [person's] interest in keeping at his [or her] work in spite of danger to life means that his [or her] self is found in that work.

He goes on to say that, “In fact, self and interest are two names for the same fact; the kind and amount of interest actively taken in a thing reveals and measures the quality of selfhood which exists” (pp. 361-362). I am passionate about Dewey because I discover my self in his words. While I do not face “danger to life” in my work, many of my students who are teachers fear for their professional lives if they teach from themselves, or they teach in environments that stifle those selves or, over time, deaden them.

A fusion of self and interest can be understood as “philosophy.” “[T]he source from which philosophies spring,” writes Patricia Carini (2012) “is a burning human desire” (p. 155). My own burning human desire is to understand what makes us human, and to understand how to teach and live in ways that best extend that humanness, both my students’ and my own. Without such a philosophical commitment, Carini argues, I would “suffer the pain of being without anchor, adrift, bereft, a plaything of fate” (p. 156), trying this technique and that to see what might “engage” students, make them happy, without a clear vision of why it matters in the first place that they be engaged.

Philosophy, Dewey (1916) points out, can be understood as “thinking which has become conscious of itself” (p. 336). It is, as he says, that “widening and deepening of conscious life” (p. 369), an expansion of awareness. As such, for me, this work we call teaching can be understood as work of the spirit – what inspires – that which breathes life into my practice. It is, I believe, the essence of reflection and why “reflective practice” cannot and should not be reduced to a marketing term or a bullet point for teacher education or professional development.

David Hansen (2004), explicating Dewey, writes, “World and objects, which include the self, are coterminous” (p. 171). This means that if the situations that I construct in my classroom are right, human beings are in the making, right before my eyes. I find this a thrilling and moving thought, and an even more thrilling experience. Still, I often get it wrong. I miscalculate where students are, where the edge of their learning is, I begin at the wrong place, or I see the edge and they are not ready to go there. Or I miss the strengths they bring and I respond inappropriately. But the point was never to be “completed” as a teacher. I, too, am always in the making.

I close with the story of Peter, a student in my Dewey seminar, whose work embodied what Dewey sought to realize. Peter is a jazz pianist, math teacher, and band teacher in a high school in western Canada. For his final project, he wrote a four-part choral piece that mimics a full cycle of the moon. The words to the piece (see Appendix) trace the history of our conception of the moon, from the experience of early humankind, to the meanings of myth, to the discoveries of science.

As Peter wrote in his reflection, “Our current experience is not an end in itself, but only sets the stage for our next experience, propelling our knowledge ever forward in a continuous cycle” (Sicotte, 2014, p. 4). The words, score, and music were accompanied by a written reflection, entitled “An Experience of the Moon: Dewey Sings.” In the introduction Peter writes,

While our modern understanding and study of music has used an increasingly theoretical framework, it is at its heart, something that one listens to and experiences. Understanding may be deepened through theory and dialogue, but only when first based on a foundation of experience in listening and performing. Much profound music has been created, performed and improvised without a theoretical framework. And yet, truly great musicians not only remain connected to their embodied experiences with music, they also study its patterns and complexities in the hope of more fully understanding how and why it works. (2014, p.1)

As I listened to Peter’s project, I sat back in my chair in tears, in awe of the human capacity to literally make sense, to create, to communicate, to add joy and beauty and value to the world, and to be deeply moved by it.

To teach well requires an intentionality that is born of thinking, inquiring, talking, discussing, experimenting, reading, crying, laughing, screaming, giving up, and resolving to carry on anyway. For me this is all contained in a word – reflection. To teach is a deeply human activity, perhaps the most human. It is an organic Mobius strip of theory/philosophy and practice, two edges, two sides that are continuous, that are one. Dewey more than anyone has been my guide and companion on this journey. He has been the banks to my river, and I am grateful to be fully engaged in that journey.

Appendix

Whispers on the Moon

I am a great light
Beacon of the night
Glowing, gleaming bright

I am Selene, beauty of the dark sky
Unlit before, now glowing,
With the light of my golden crown,
My radiance lights the path of my gleaming chariot across the sky.

I am Lordly Khonsu, traveller of the night,
Patiently marking the time while the sun hides.
My shapes divine the wisdom of the stars
And bring meaning to the seasons.

I am Soma, ambrosia of heaven, nectar of gods
From my cup spills courage and life
As the gods drink deeply of my wisdom I wane away
Only to fill myself again, triumphant.

Luna, Celestial rock, hurtling through the sky at breakneck pace
Twenty-seven days mark your phase from new to full and back
Mwezi, reflector of the sun's radiance
Puller of tides, your gravity bulges the seas.

Qamar, beaten and pummeled by meteors, scorched by sun and frozen by space
You hide your dark side from us as you slowly revolve
Fengari, from our lonely place of watching, you rise through the sky
And sink back to the horizon each day as we rotate relentlessly through space

You are the Moon, we know you well and yet not at all.

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Presence in Double Vision

by Miriam Raider-Roth

In acknowledging our participating in and contribution to the direction of growth, what we also accept is our responsibility to be vitally present in the moment of teaching as well as being conscious of the consequences of our actions, which cannot be left to chance or be mechanical or routine. (Cuffaro, 1995, p. 31).

Early childhood offers us the opportunity to view humanity in its rawest form – the joys, sorrows, desires are expressed through words, body, play, and creative expression. Cuffaro (1995) teaches us that in early childhood classrooms, we begin to learn to live in community, practice democratic living, and experience, enact and build essential understandings of the social world. In early childhood classrooms where play is encouraged, facilitated, and observed, the essential tensions of our culture are played out. These spaces offer perceptive observers an opportunity to understand how gender identity, development, and relationship shape teaching and learning (Chu, 2014; Katch, 2002; Paley, 1986). The inquiry described in this article stems from the observations of an astute, wise, kindergarten teacher named Eric, who was dedicated to being “vitally present” in relationship to his students and whose capacity for presence was challenged by a young boy named TJ.

To set the stage for this inquiry, how I came to know Eric and follow his story, I begin with the questions that led me to him. Rooted in a relational/cultural psychological orientation (Gilligan, 2003; Miller & Stiver, 1997), my earliest research with elementary school-aged children found that children perceived robust trustworthy knowledge to be predicated on strong trustworthy classroom relationships, especially relationships between teachers and students (Raider-Roth, 2005). Building on this finding, I began to think about the relational world of boys in schools because of what appeared to be an inherent paradox faced by boys.

In the last decade, psychological research has demonstrated that early childhood is a tumultuous and vulnerable time for boys, as they experience profound cultural pressure to separate from nurturing relationships (Chu, 2014; Dooley & Fidele, 2004; Gilligan, 2003; Way, 2011). Such separation is above and beyond the individuation that is part of healthy development at this age, and is, rather, an accommodation to the norms of masculinity, which “often implies a willingness on the part of boys to stand alone and forgo relationships” (Gilligan, 2003, p.16). In contrast, research has found that girls are at higher psychological risk later in development. As they approach adolescence, they face intensive cultural pressures to be a “good girl” – including a relational paradox of forgoing an authentic sense of self to maintain relationships with others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 2011; Tolman, 2005).

If trustworthy relationships are the cornerstone of learning, what happens for early childhood boys who face the cultural pressures of masculinity, and thus may move away from relationships? If humans need relationships they can connect with and build upon in order to learn, but some boys feel pressure to separate from others, what happens to their learning in schools? I became interested in this paradox and teachers' relational dynamics with the boys in their classrooms.

I examined this question with a group of teachers from Pre-K to high school in an ongoing study group. When faced with direct resistance from boys in the classroom – boys who challenged them personally, challenged the teacher's power and authority, or challenged classroom routines – these teachers often experienced an intense questioning of their own competence and pedagogical values. In order to reduce the corrosive effect of such questioning, the teachers in our study group reported stepping back or “letting go” of their relationships with the boys. They knew that this relinquishing of relationship might compromise the boys' learning, thereby compromising their efficacy as a teachers – the very aspect of their teaching identity they were trying to protect (Raider-Roth, Albert, Bircann-Barkey, Gidseg & Murray, 2008). Yet, if teachers engaged with the boys' resistance and stayed in the relationship, they often suffered under the resulting corrosive self-questioning (Raider-Roth, Albert, Bircann-Barkey, Gidseg & Murray, 2012). How then do teachers emerge from this paradox in a way that allows them to maintain their integrity as teachers, hold on to their sense of self as competent and true to their values, and, at the same time, maintain a relationship with boys that supports their learning? Essentially, how do teachers become and remain present to the boys in their classrooms?

The following portrait introduces one teacher, Eric, and presents his journey through this paradox. His honest self-interrogation of his emotions, pedagogical values, gender identity, and relational stance assisted him in constructing a path through what felt like a quagmire. He teaches us that his primary relationships with self and colleagues were central in his capacity to be present to one young boy. He teaches us that presence to his students requires presence to self and presence to forces of culture, such as gender – a presence in double vision. His journey offers a possible road-map through the complex relational and cultural terrain of presence.

Theoretical Context

The analysis of Eric's experience is rooted in the following definition of presence:

a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266).

Rodgers and I suggest that the key dimensions of presence include a unified teaching self, authentic relationships between teachers and students, a strong command of subject matter, and a healthy responsive context. Offering a complementary perspective, Way and Chu (2009) argue that “presence in relationship expand[s] upon the construct of voice or genuine expression and reflect[s] in addition the extent to which individuals feel connected to self and to others, and confident in their interpersonal relationships” (p. 56).

As these constructs of presence suggest, a central aspect of presence in teaching involves teachers’ presence to self. Yet becoming present to self can be a complex process, especially when life in the classroom can provoke a teacher to disconnect from self – for fear of emotions such as anger, shame, or disappointment (Raider-Roth, 2003). Additionally, like all humans, teachers carry relational images from past relationships and culturally pervasive assumptions that can shape their current interactions (Gilligan, 1982/1993; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Reichert & Hawley, 2014). This is one form of the psychotherapeutic notion of transference (Hannifin & Apple, 2000). Teachers may unconsciously invoke relational dynamics that stem from old wounds, loves, and needs into current relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Understanding that the relational images we carry – whether from our past or from our cultural socialization – can shape our current teaching/learning relationships, requires us to become aware of the personal, psychological, and cultural forces that shape our work. Without such self-awareness, our capacity to be present is diminished.

Also informing this inquiry is research that focused on teachers’ relational understandings of their adolescent girl students. In Brown & Gilligan’s (1992) research on adolescent girls’ development at the Laurel School in Cleveland, teachers explored the question, “What does it mean to be a woman teaching girls?” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 155). Like Eric, the women teachers were “faced with intricate dilemmas of relationship” (p. 158). A breakthrough in understanding these dilemmas occurred when teachers were “remembering their own adolescence and recalling their own experiences of disconnection or dissociation at this time” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 224). To reconnect with the girl or boy self of the teacher is to remember how coming of age in our culture is nourished and complicated by the society with which we interact. Just as the Laurel teachers remembered their own adolescence as a time of girls’ relational loss, Eric confronts his own world of early childhood, a time we now understand where boys also struggle with connection and loss (Gilligan, 2003; Chu, 2014).

The portrait of Eric’s experience with TJ – a child who reminds Eric so much of himself – expands our relational-cultural understandings of presence by examining the ways that cultural constructions of gender shape a teacher’s capacity to be present to his students and their learning.

Methodology

Eric, a European-American kindergarten teacher, was one of eleven Pre-K-12 teachers from the mid-Hudson Valley and upstate New York regions who participated in a Teaching Boys Study Group, a teacher-research group dedicated to the study of teachers, boys and relationship.(1)

The group also included a college instructor, a research assistant, and myself as facilitator. Of the fourteen group members, two were male and twelve were female; one was Asian-American and thirteen were European-American. The teachers came from independent and public schools (urban, rural and suburban) and taught mainstream, special education, and gifted/talented students. The group met once a month during an academic year for three hours. It culminated in a two-day summer retreat.

The group employed two kinds of processes to investigate their relationships with boys in their classrooms. The first process was that of Descriptive Review (Himley & Carini, 2000), which asked the teachers to closely observe one boy during the year and then offer a detailed description of his physical stance and gesture, disposition and temperament, interests, connections with others, and modes of thinking and learning. These descriptions were offered in the full group setting through a structured process, eliciting from the larger group clarifying questions and suggestions for supporting the teacher's practice and the boys' learning.(2) This process was used to support the teachers in viewing and re-viewing a boy in their class, so as to see him in as multi-dimensional and complex a way as possible, and diminish the inclination to stereotype, generalize or otherwise obscure their vision of the individual boy learner. During the retreat the group analyzed the Descriptive Review transcripts, looked for prevailing themes and implications for action.

The second process was that of Associative Processes (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Harris, 1988) which asked the teachers to locate their own connections, associations, and responses to the boys they teach, in order to locate the ways that their own selves, gender identity, histories, values, and pedagogies shaped their relationships. Through free writing, open discussions, small group and paired conversations, these processes invited teachers to view the cultural pressures exerted on both themselves and the boys.

As a facilitator of this teacher research group, and a research partner with Eric, I became fascinated by his story and my own responses to Eric. With Eric's permission, I began an inquiry process to closely understand the tensions he articulated. This process was guided by two analytic approaches: the portraiture method (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), an ethnographic, aesthetic method that attends to a complex, multi-dimensional rendering of another person's experience; and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003), a voice-centered, psychological methodology that attends to the ways in which a person articulates his/her self in relation to the prevailing experiences, memories, narratives, and tensions that surface from the inquiry.

Introducing Eric

A veteran teacher of twenty-five years, Eric embodies the definition of master teacher. Committed to a child-centered, experience-based pedagogy, Eric is dedicated to eliciting the self-expression of each child and to constructing a community in which each child holds a vital space. He runs his kindergarten classroom with a "learning centers" approach, offering reading, writing,

mathematical, computer, artistic, and musical opportunities throughout the day. A teacher with guitar in hand, he regularly leads his class and the other kindergarten classes in song and builds a sense of group and voice for the children and teachers. Eric brings a rich teaching history to his current position, with experiences in both public and private schools, traditional settings and progressive ones, including a formative experience in a Waldorf School.

Eric held an unusual position in the Teaching Boys study group – as the only male early childhood teacher (and one of two men in the group), and one of two doctoral students. His position in the group became more distinctive when, during the third year of the project, he decided to join a research group I convened, which conducted a secondary analysis of the data. In this interpretive community (Tappan, 2001), he held an insider/outsider position.

Eric was deliberate and intentional about choosing to observe TJ, a five-year-old European American boy. In a reflective essay written during the study group year, he explained that he chose TJ because TJ “was already, at that early part of the year, challenging my authority, making life difficult for his classmates, and was engendering in me feelings of anger and frustration.” Eric’s intentions for the study were clear. He wrote that he had “two distinct though interrelated focuses.” Not only did he want to understand the boy more clearly, he “was determined to explore my own emotional responses to this child in order to inform my own inner work for the good of the hundreds of children that I will help educate during the rest of my career.” Eric perceived a “mismatch” between TJ and his classroom and was determined to try to understand the ensuing dynamics.

Early on, Eric recognized that he was “drawn to ‘naughty’ children” and he wondered if his personal experience shaped this attraction. “I was every teacher’s nightmare from kindergarten on, with few exceptions. It was those exceptions, two years where I felt ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ that have helped to give form and meaning to my teaching.” While Eric wrote these sentences in the first year of the project, his own experience as a student was initially unexplored. Coming across most clearly in his rationale for choosing TJ was Eric’s commitment to being present to his students’ learning and the centrality of seeing and hearing his students. He understood that he was not always present with TJ, and that his own emotional turmoil with this boy was a significant factor in preventing a [present stance](#).

Describing TJ

In the winter, assisted by two colleagues from the group who served as the “chairs” of his session, Eric launched an ambitious Descriptive Review of TJ. Not only did he want to describe TJ fully, he also wanted to describe his own experience of using Descriptive Process to understand TJ.

In the first part of the Descriptive Review, Eric described TJ as having a “passionate nature,” “impatience,” and a “lack of impulse control,” which made “him into a highly visible child in

this class of twenty-one children.” TJ often entered the classroom dramatically and made “his presence known “in one of a variety of ways”:

He can burst through the door in a fit of hysteria, and he can be yelling out something about his “stupid mommy” not giving him the snack that he wanted or some such thing. Or his backpack did something that he didn’t want it to do and he’s cursing at it and throwing it down on the floor. Or he can slink through the door as though he had the weight of the world upon his shoulders. Or he can walk in as the happiest child you have ever seen in your life, bubbling, enthusiastic, with stories to tell. Whatever TJ is feeling is highly visible.

Eric described TJ as an expressive and dramatic child who acted out and told stories, painted, and sang. He was a child who made connections with ease, linking new experiences with memories, bringing “divergent elements together in remarkable ways.”

TJ engaged in complicated relationships with his classmates. Eric observed that TJ “has a way of stepping into the personal space of other children, touches them and their possessions as well without warning. Many children are very taken aback by this behavior as you can imagine, especially kindergarten children.” Eric’s relationship with TJ was complicated. One the one hand, TJ was clearly attached to Eric, as evidenced by his vocal expressions of love for Eric. Eric recounted how TJ would

hug my leg and, and uh, and call out in a loud voice how much he loves me. Um, this can happen in the middle of reading a story, it can happen while we’re reciting a poem and again, TJ’s got this voice that’s, it’s expressive and loud and when he tells me he loves me it’s been broadcast all over the room.

On the other hand, TJ challenged Eric’s classroom rules and norms for behavior. When Eric sang with the group, he recounted:

if TJ happens to notice that ah, that I sing a word wrong or I leave a word out, um, he’ll, he’ll start just yelling out at the top of his lungs that, “that’s not the way the song goes” and he may stand up and sing the song totally somehow able to screen out the fact, my singing. I mean if you’ve ever tried to sing a different song while somebody’s singing [laughter] a song it’s not an easy thing to do. But he belts out the right way to do the song even though he’s in a different part of the song than I am. [laughter] It’s an extraordinary thing.

When Eric retold this story during a debriefing interview, he expressed “awe” for TJ’s capacity to put himself in front of the group in such a confident manner.

Obstacles to Presence

As Eric described TJ with generosity and loving detail, he also described his intense struggle to become present to TJ’s learning and to connect fully with TJ as a boy in school. Eric identified three impediments to his capacity to be present.

A Divided Self

The issue that made TJ so compelling for Eric was the very strong negative emotions that he called up in Eric. As we listened to Eric describe these emotions we could hear how they led to a strong disconnection with himself and with TJ. Eric described TJ as:

a child who defied my years of competence as an educator, engendering all kinds of feelings in me... TJ has put me through an emotional wringer... How do you deal with those antipathies especially? I mean there’s, there are things in TJ that piss me off, they really piss me off.

In a reflective essay, Eric articulately described the feelings of shame that accompanied his anger and feelings of incompetence in his work with TJ:

There is an element of shame for me as I confront my ability to fully bring this child into the “fold” of the class.... The educational establishment and my peers see me as a highly competent and gifted educator. They have no idea! I see that I can’t reach this child, I can’t nurture this child, I can’t provide the structure that this one needs, I can’t figure out this other child. What they see is an illusion that I provide for the rest of the world. I see the real me and the real me is tremendously flawed and inadequate.

As Hargreaves (1998) argues (citing Scheff 1990, 1994a,b) in his study of emotions and teachers, the feeling of shame in teaching is particularly painful, because in falling “morally short of our own or others’ moral standards in a fundamental way ... we feel our integrity and our selves have been placed in question” (p. 840). Zembylas (2003) adds that shame

has been a profound affective attunement in teachers’ careers because teachers are constantly exposed as having some kind of flaws.... What are perceived as their deficiencies are paraded, and an internalized audience with the capacity to judge them is created. (p. 228)

How did the anger and shame that Eric articulates shape his ability to be present with TJ? Zembylas (2003) argues that shame leads teachers to “hide,” feel unable to “get away,” and experience “silence and isolation” (p. 228). Eric was keenly aware that “other than my own reflective work, there is no venue within my profession that allows for airing these feelings and sharing weaknesses and anxieties on my part.” Eric believed that these feelings kept him one step removed from TJ and one step removed from himself:

Certainly my reactions to TJ made me unhappy with my own responses, unhappy with whom I had become in my interactions with this little boy. I needed to repair not only my relationship to TJ, but also my relationship with my own self and my own personal values.

In listening to Eric, we can hear the voice of a “divided self,” a teaching self that is yearning for its wholeness between belief and action (Dewey, 1938; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). We can hear how the divided self is an obstacle to Eric’s capacity to be present with TJ.

Feeling Unseen

A second obstacle to Eric’s capacity to be present to TJ was Eric’s strong sense that the depth and intensity of the negative emotion he held for TJ was not visible to his study group colleagues. One way Eric expressed this invisibility concerned his frustration with the Descriptive Process. He felt it constrained him in unnatural ways, and did not allow him to attend to the wellspring of emotion that surged for him in regard to TJ. As the facilitator of the group, I believed the process invited this very kind of self-reflection in the preparation of the review, and especially in the relationship with the chairs. Eric, however, did not feel that his needs were being met. Eric also felt that the review framework did not allow him to explore his relationship with TJ. My perspective differed and I believed that there was ample opportunity. In the Descriptive Review itself, the section called “connections with others” invited such description. Additionally, the group had decided to create an intentional space in the review to attend specifically to the dynamics of relationship between the teacher and the boy. We left it up to the chair and the presenting teacher to decide how to incorporate this into each review. Eric felt, however, that these opportunities were not sufficient. In consultation with his chairs, Eric decided to add a section at the end of the review to describe his own emotional stance and his feelings about the Descriptive Process.

As I observed Eric in this struggle and attempted to assist him with the difficulties he was experiencing, I found myself annoyed by his resistance. Eric already had experience of the Descriptive Process from his doctoral course work. It seemed to me that he had known what the experience would be like. So why, I wondered, did he choose to participate in this group and then resist it with such intensity? My margin notes to him on his writing reflect our struggle. In one instance, I ask him to try to play the “believing game” (quoting an essay by Peter Elbow, 1973) and suspend disbelief in order to see what possibilities for learning were open to him.

The longer our struggle ensued, the more confused I was by it. I began to wonder if we were engaged in a parallel process of sorts. That is, were we engaged in a struggle that resembled Eric's struggle with TJ? What could I learn from what appeared to be a reenactment of resistance? As the group began to plan our retreat, and we struggled with the ways we were talking about boys and gender, there seemed to be a collective dissociation of sorts. We were having difficulty articulating our understandings of the boys we had described in such depth. Now, Eric's questions began to ring loud. I became embarrassed by my resistance to Eric because what I came to understand from the group was the need to attend to our own responses to this powerful set of descriptions of boys. This parallel process of reenactment allowed me to feel something akin to what Eric experienced with TJ, helping me understand Eric's (and other teachers') needs. My journal from May of that year reflected this turn in my thinking: "We have spent a lot of time looking at the boys, and very little time looking at us. This is what Eric has said all along. I need to listen to this carefully." Rereading his description, I was able to finally take in his message. Together with two members in the group, we crafted a set of experiences that attended to the teachers' emotions and reactions which were evoked by their close attention to these boys (such as associative writing exercises, and hiking and talking about their responses to the Descriptive Reviews).

As the teachers came to see the boys more clearly, and became more present to them, they needed others to become present to their own experiences of teaching, gender, and relationship. They needed to feel seen, especially the complex set of emotions that surfaced in this inquiry. This finding resonates with prior research that investigated how school context and the connection with other faculty supported the capacity to be present (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006; Stieha & Raider-Roth, 2012). Eric's resistance to the Descriptive Review process was a strong message that in order for him to be present to a boy who "pushed his buttons," he needed others to be present to his own emotional turmoil provoked by TJ and their relationship. Eric's message also taught me that teachers' presence to boys required a strong connection to self, and that to have a connection to self, teachers needed to feel seen by caring and compassionate colleagues.

Resisting Gender

A third impediment to Eric's ability to be present to TJ concerned his struggle to recognize the ways that issues of gender shaped his students. As a participant in the Study Group, Eric wrestled with suggestions to look at the children in his class as gendered cohorts. In response to one study group session Eric wrote,

I find it so challenging to look at gender issues in kindergarteners. I make an attempt to level the playing field and think in non-gendered ways. Discussing differences makes me uncomfortable in some ways because it makes me suddenly look for differences.

Eric yearned for an openness in his view of young children and did not want assumptions or stereotyped images to cloud how he looked and interacted with his students. In reflecting on his own classroom at the close of the Study Group year, Eric wrote, “In terms of gender, it is made clear from the outset that we are all children in this classroom, equal in all ways. I reject any notion of ‘the boys’ or ‘the girls.’ We are ‘the children.’”

What was the impact of Eric rejecting gender difference on his relationship with TJ? Three years later, as a member of the research group, Eric examined his relationship with TJ, using his own writing about TJ over the course of the project as data. In a final paper Eric wrote:

My resistance to ‘seeing the boy’ is clear in my responses to many of the readings from the Teaching Boys group... In revisiting my journal entries about these writings, I universally rejected the notions that are often put forth that attribute behavioral characteristics to one gender or another... [I began to wonder,] have my own experiences put me into a mindset that will not allow me to see boys as boys?... Looking at [my] responses and precepts through the lens of a researcher causes me to question whether such notions have caused me to not see what is before me.

While Eric had assumed a teacher-researcher stance in the Study Group, taking an insider-outsider perspective in the subsequent research group afforded him a new understanding of gender as he recognized the power TJ wielded over him. Somehow, this small person was “causing me to ask whether I was maintaining my ideals as a teacher, whether my methods had become outdated, whether or not I had turned my back on this child.” As Eric questioned how TJ held so much power, he discovered that “I don’t yet know this boy. I don’t yet know how to give him what he needs. Nor am I able to figure out what he really needs.”

Eric discovered that his view of TJ was reactive and that his efforts to “contain” TJ so that he did not “affect the class in some negative way that I can’t get them back together again” did not reflect his fundamental values as a teacher: “My sense of my teaching is based on hearing my children, connecting with them and finding ways to help them grow.” Eric wanted to be present to students, and yet he could not assume this stance with TJ, and he perceived TJ as holding the power to prevent connection.

In trying to understand how this tension developed, Eric wondered if he had “inadvertently put myself out of relationship with this child in order to further my goal to have him behave in acceptable ways.” While Eric did not apply a gender lens to explain his actions, his comment begs the question of what defines “acceptable ways.” Was Eric trying to make TJ be a “good boy”? And what does a “good boy” look like? The question of acceptable behavior became the lynchpin to understanding how gender was shaping Eric’s capacity to see himself and TJ, and Eric began to look carefully at his own experience as a boy in school.

In an articulate and moving essay, Eric described himself as a wiggly, smart, impulsive boy, who often could not contain his enthusiasm and who provoked punitive, angry teachers. He recalled his interactions with Mrs. A, his second grade teacher, who made him sit under tables when he broke rules, and who placed him in the corner of the room to write out “I will not speak in class” fifty times. Eric described his resistance as with rich clarity:

After she stormed away to resume her work with the rest of the class I wrote the words on the first line and then carefully placed ditto marks on the next forty-nine lines beneath each words. When Mrs. A saw my papers complete with ditto marks she was furious – though she was usually furious when she directed her attention towards me. She tore up the papers and told me, “You will now write the same sentence one hundred times WITHOUT ditto marks.” I did so ... on the wall next to my little desk. The next thing I knew I was in the school’s office looking up at the high counter (over which I could not yet see), waiting for the principal to come and talk with me.

Eric’s resistance to the punishment, to the edict of silence, was clear. And he embraced teachers who released him from the classroom corners. These compassionate and connected teachers shaped Eric’s passion to teach:

Prepared for the worst as I entered third grade, I was amazed to see a smile on my new teacher’s face as she asked me what I would like her to call me. I answered with my nickname, Ricky, which was the name used only by my friends and relatives. “Hello Ricky, she responded, “Welcome to third grade.” I felt like I had gone to heaven. Mrs. H, my third grade teacher, seemed to welcome everything that I had to say. She often took me aside to ask me how I was doing. I remember thinking that this was the first person in school who had ever listened to me or cared to ask questions about who or how I was.

As Eric recalled the stories of his own boyhood in school, he began to see the evolution of his own gender identity. In recognizing his childhood suffering, he wondered:

Was I placing TJ into such a paradoxical situation? I was asking TJ to be able to sit still, to be quiet (or at least quieter). Was I seeing myself in the mirror of this young, noisy, impulsive, spontaneous little boy? His life in the classroom was, in many ways a parallel life to my own in my early years. Was I seeing him as a boy or was I incapable of confronting the boy TJ and forming a relationship with him? ... Was I becoming one of my early teachers and squashing this little boy’s independence for the sake of maintaining control

over the classroom? Was this the threat that I had posed for my teachers as a young boy?

In this incisive reflection, Eric actively examined how his own expectations of masculinity were shaping his behavior and teaching practices. Moreover, he was asking if his expectations of appropriate boy behavior were clouding his capacity to form a relationship with TJ. As Eric became present to the forces of gender that shaped him as a man and teacher and that were also shaping TJ, he began to forge an identification with TJ. In recognizing his own expectations for TJ's behavior, Eric came to see his own trajectory of boyhood as well as his adult definitions and performances of masculinity. With this vision, or presence to self and culture, he was then able to become present to TJ and the forces of gender and culture that were exerting themselves on this small boy.

Presence in Relationship

As I reflect on Eric's journey through the Teaching Boys Study Group, the subsequent research group, his relationship with TJ, and his relationship with his own teaching and gender identity, I am struck by his deep intellectual and emotional work. What is most striking is the disconnect between Eric's beliefs about presence and his experience with TJ.

Eric has the disposition and experience of a teacher who knows how to be present with his students. This stance is a cornerstone of his teaching identity – it is conscious and intentional. Not surprisingly, what led him to fundamentally question his own capacities as a teacher was a boy with whom he could not be present. He found himself in a state of disconnection, a state of being out of relationship with TJ and detached from himself. He experienced anger, shame, and guilt in response to this disconnected state. He could not see TJ and TJ could not see him and there was little trust, intersubjectivity, or mutuality – all necessary components of presence (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

For Eric to become present to TJ, he required opportunities to reconnect with his own teaching self, beliefs, and values. Becoming present also meant becoming conscious of his own history, definitions, and constructions of gender as a boy, man, and teacher. In so doing, he began to see TJ and the myriad forces with which TJ wrestled more completely. Being able to see himself as a boy, and to see TJ as a boy were central paving stones on the road to presence.

Eric also urgently wanted to have colleagues who could become present to his own struggle – who could see him in all his distress, identify with the struggle, and help him build a road back to a more connected sense of self as a teacher. This kind of learning community, built on mutuality, trust, and shared inquiry was a cornerstone to becoming “vitaly present” (Cuffaro, 1995). Quoting Dewey, Cuffaro teaches us that community requires a genuine form of communication, one that is “a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession” (Dewey, 1966, p. 9, in Cuffaro, 2000, p. 8). Unpacking Dewey's meaning Cuffaro explains, “It is in discussion, in

conversation, in the exchange of ideas, in the sharing of our thoughts and feelings, that community achieves its strength and meaning” (p. 8). Cuffaro helps us understand that it is in community, where we can bring our wholeness as human beings – where we can share all our thoughts, ideas, and feelings – that our capacity to be present to ourselves and our students is cultivated. Becoming present to self, our students, and the cultural forces that influence our identities and relationships requires intensive reflective and intellectual energy, and a community that can nourish and sustain this crucial work of teachers.

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Miriam Raider-Roth

Miriam B. Raider-Roth is an associate professor of educational studies and educational and community-based action research and the director of the Center for Studies in Jewish Education and Culture at the University of Cincinnati. Her research focuses on the relational context of teaching and learning, children's and teachers' conceptions of their relationships in school, practitioner action research, and feminist qualitative research methods. She is the author of *Trusting What You Know: The High Stakes of Classroom Relationships* (2005) and "Bridges to New Knowledge: Culture, Religion and Identity in Teacher Professional Development" (in press). She currently studies how relational learning communities contribute to teachers' transformative learning in professional development settings.



Harriet Cuffaro

Dr. Harriet K. Cuffaro is an internationally renowned early childhood educator and scholar of John Dewey. Dr. Cuffaro began her lifelong commitment to children, teachers, and progressive education as an early childhood teacher at the Child Development Center and later at the City and Country School in New York City.

She joined the faculty of Bank Street College of Education in 1968, where she taught courses on curriculum, philosophy of education, and blocks and mentored scores of students for 30 years. In 1998 Dr. Cuffaro returned to City and Country as a staff developer and advisor, a role she continues to this day.

Dr. Cuffaro's numerous publications have foregrounded the voices of young children, the importance of open-ended materials for facilitating children's play, and the role of social studies in early childhood curriculum. She completed her master's degree at Bank Street in 1969 and her doctorate at Teachers College in 1982. Her landmark book *Experimenting with the World: John Dewey and the Early Childhood Classroom* was published in 1995.



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