



# Bank Street Occasional Paper Series

Occasional  
Paper  
Series

---

Volume 2024  
Number 51 *Reconceptualizing Quality Early  
Care and Education with Equity at the Center*


Article 4

May 2024

## Be A Tree: Reconceptualizing Early Education through the Roots and Fruits Methodology of Teaching and Learning

Virginia Dearani  
*University of Maine, Farmington*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Educational Methods Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dearani, V. (2024). Be a tree: reconceptualizing early education through the Roots & Fruits methodology of teaching and learning. *Occasional Paper Series*, (51). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58295/2375-3668.1507>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Paper Series by an authorized editor of Educate. For more information, please contact [kfreda@bankstreet.edu](mailto:kfreda@bankstreet.edu).

**educate**

# Be a Tree: Reconceptualizing Early Education Through the Roots and Fruits Methodology of Teaching and Learning

Virginia Dearani

*It was Fall 2015 and our annual curriculum design was beginning to take shape organically, as children and teachers came together to explore the dominant themes present in the children's imaginative play in the first six weeks of school. Our Reggio Emilia-inspired projects at Roots and Fruits Preschool evolved from the collective, where children and teachers share observations and ideas on our annual year-long project. Home, family, and community were the dominant words on our newsprint brainstorm as we explored our imaginations and centered in on the play that brought us the most joy.*

*The dramatic play area was very popular this year. All the children, boys, girls, and nonbinary, gathered to create meals, share stories, and dress up in worldly clothing from their linguistically and culturally diverse families. Through investigations on the meaning of "home," we explored the different places we resided—an apartment, a trailer park, a duplex, a white picket-fenced house, the distant homelands that some had fled because of war or natural disasters. Coming together, we shared a collective understanding on the power of home as a place of gathering, storytelling, celebration—and for some, safety, while for others, moments of danger.*

*Over the course of many months, children engaged in stories and artistic re-creations of buildings transformed into homes, creating a communal village that depicted the many sources of support we each experienced inside our humble walls. As we went deeper into our exploration of this topic, a tragic event took place with one of our families. A mom entered the school one morning in tears, and shared the devastating news that a fire had destroyed their house and all of their belongings. The family moved to a hotel while beginning the stages of rebuilding and healing as they looked for a new place to call home. Their focus was on keeping their daughter in a routine during this extraordinary transition and seeking support to meet their basic needs for clothing, furniture, and household goods.*

*As we shared the news with the school community, everyone—young and old—came together, gathering supplies, offering child care, resources, and using their networks to help these members of our community find a new home. Donations were stored in a corner of my office until the family were resettled; children supported their classmate through practices of Radical Love (see Figure 1), where they created many magical moments of hugs, laughter, and hope. We practiced communal meditation, where we envisioned this family in a new home.*

*Our project originated as a topic centered around our homes, their special meaning to each of us as individuals, and was transformed into a Village of Hope as each child and teacher gave a piece of their own home to someone in their community who needed it. As we each came together, in service of our own, we activated the powerful light within the darkness, by putting love into action.*

As the founder and a teacher/leader of the Roots and Fruits Early Childhood Program, I conceptualized our classrooms in relation to lessons we can take from trees, including practicing loving kindness and service within the larger forest of which we are part. This is inspired by Jay Shetty's (2020) assertion:

We are nature, and if we look at and observe nature carefully, nature is always serving. The sun provides heat and light. Trees give oxygen and shade. Water quenches our thirst.... The only way to be one with nature is to serve. It follows that the only way to align properly with the universe is to serve because that's what the universe does. (p. 257)

Through Roots and Fruits, I modeled practices of *being a tree*, providing oxygen and shade so my colleagues could be whole teachers, teaching whole children, all of us cultivating a whole community. This essay is a eulogy to Roots and Fruits, which had to close as a result of the pandemic's impact on Maine's child care system, but its practices continue to live on through alumni in their new schools and former teachers in their new pre-K, elementary, middle, and secondary classrooms.

Roots and Fruits is a place-based (Baker, 2012; Ellis, 2005), post-humanist (Barad, 2014) early childhood curriculum that was my response to American education's humanist, atomized conceptions of *the whole child* (i.e., decontextualized individuals parsed into "developmental domains," defined as a child's social, emotional, physical, mental, and aesthetic parts, that are operationalized by regulatory systems like Maine's Quality Rating System. Post-humanism may not be a familiar term to some, so for this essay's purpose, think of it as a perspective that recontextualizes people as a part of nature's systems, rather than central, separate from, or on top of, them (Barad, 2014, Shetty, 2020). Here, I share how we operationalized an alternative, "more-than-human" view of quality in early childhood education (ECE), in the hope that you, as the reader, can reflect on the applicability of this perspective on your own practice of teaching and learning with young children.

## MORE THAN A METAPHOR

As each child, staff member, and family member entered the Roots and Fruits program, they practiced deepening their own roots to grow strong trunks, branches, and fruits, learning the value of interdependence as the collective forest expanded in love and light through service to one another. How did we activate this approach to wholeness?

Using the tree as a metaphor was passed down to me from my Syrian father, in stories of the olive tree, as well as in the Celtic stories of the Tree of Life shared by my Irish mother. From childhood I was called to be in partnership with the trees in journeys through ancient stories from many lands. The tree's powerful metaphor of wholeness ripened in a rich, culturally and linguistically diverse community and became rooted in the Roots and Fruits methodology.

### **Core Values**

We invited each child, family, and teacher to become a part of a forest of learners, embodying eleven core values foundational to the communal program (Figure 1). These values were rooted in the philosophy of Radical Love, based upon ideas from a range of liberationist thinkers (Barad, 2007; Four Arrows, 2013; Freire, 2018; hooks, 1994, 2009; Kress, et al., 2022; Mika, 2018).

## Roots that Ground Us @ “Roots & Fruits”

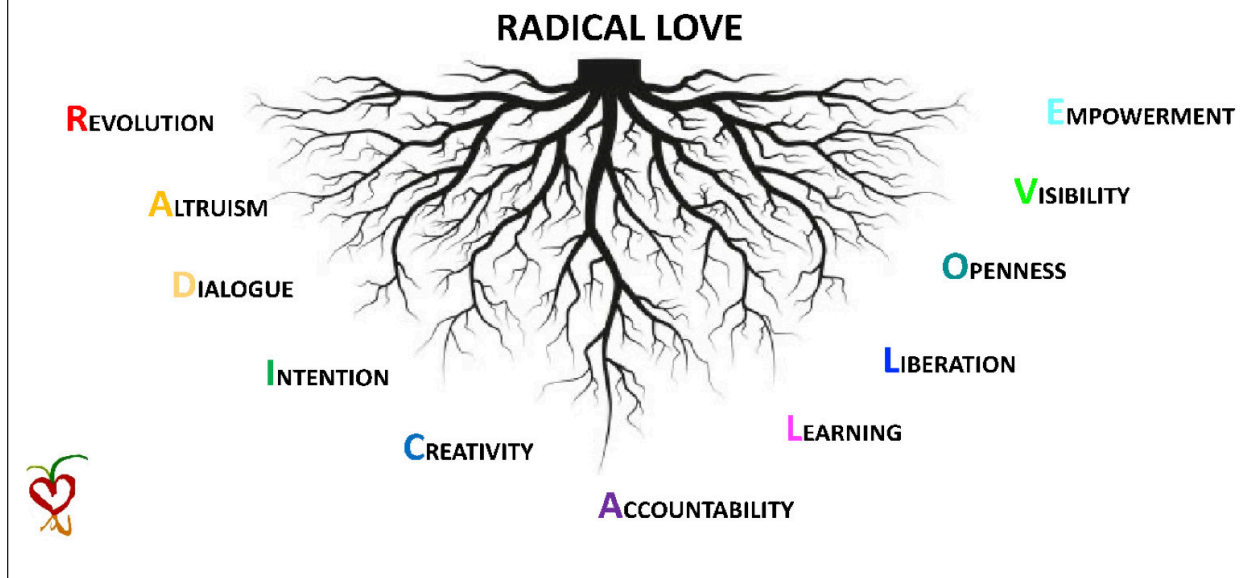


Figure 1. Core values of Radical Love

All members of the community, especially teachers, were encouraged to explore how their personal values contributed to our shared Radical Love values. Everything we did during our year-long project-based curriculum—school-wide policies, practices, family engagement, and leadership structure—was guided by the 11 values named in Figure 1.

This article’s opening vignette captured the Radical Love values in practice as each child’s and family’s roots sprouted into their own tree, serving the collective forest. Figure 2, created by a Roots and Fruits alumni, captures each of the tree’s 11 elements. The elements metaphorically describe the multidimensional and interconnected parts of a whole human and our entanglement (Barad, 2014) with each other’s trees and the natural world; the Radical Love values grounded our forest in our daily collective growth, by flowing through each tree’s elements.

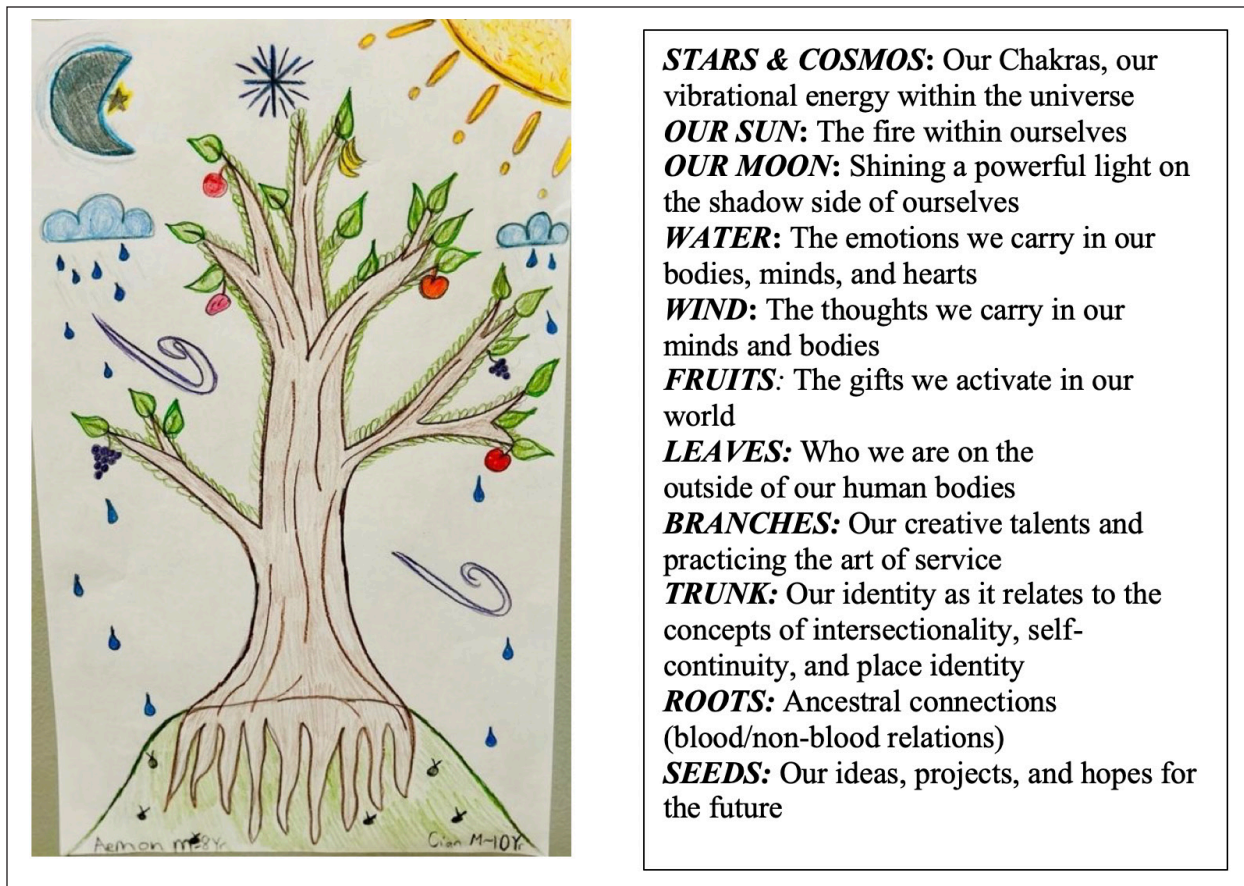


Figure 2. The Elements of Our Tree

As the children engaged in intentional dialogues and imaginative play on the theme of home, we explored ancestral root stories from our families and their homelands, and integrated these stories into our art and play, activating our inner sun. We explored the commonalities and differences across our stories, deepening our understanding of our many-colored *leaves and trunks*. While learning about the darkness one family faced in surviving a house fire, we discovered how to embrace one another's *branches* and extend them to serve and spread new seeds of hope. Throughout the journey, we created healing spaces where we expressed the fears in our minds and hearts when the *wind* shakes us to our core; and through yoga, dance, and song we moved through the *water* of our emotions with grace and care. We honored those who came before us, guiding us from the *cosmos*, and grew our individual *fruits*, while contributing to the larger fruit bowl as one community. This is how one project evolved from a simple "home project" into a Village of Hope. This is one of many projects that helped make Roots and Fruits a forest of learners.

### **A Forest of Learners**

All participants within the classroom—teachers, assistant teachers, students, administrators, and parents—were integral and interconnected parts of an educational system. As the leader, I hired teachers, volunteers, and staff from diverse backgrounds: intersecting gender, racial, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and neurodivergent identities. Teachers worked in teams to nurture organic, project-based curriculum, portfolio assessments, and reflective practices. Parents, teachers, administrators, and children were teachers to one another, in relation to our environment. This collective approach to teaching and learning was the heart of the program.

## THE WHYS OF ROOTS AND FRUITS

The Roots and Fruits methodology organically developed and grew over 17 years, and is a philosophy of teaching and learning created in community with the parents, children, and teachers who moved in and out of our doors over the years. I birthed the methodology in 2003, after navigating identity wounds as a second-generation Arab American, post 9/11. As a violence prevention educator, I witnessed many stories of hate towards members of my community in Portland, Maine. It may surprise some to know that Portland is a destination city for immigrants and refugees from many lands, including Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Congo, Haiti, and Ukraine. As the daughter of a first-generation Syrian man, I listened to my father's childhood stories of systemic racism as he went through the American education system with his Arab friends, avoiding humiliating comments and threats if they spoke Arabic or did not assimilate into White American society. Listening to his story of "othering" helped me to understand the harm from systems that cut apart children into developmental domains, erasing fundamental aspects of their wholeness.

The Roots and Fruits methodology was cultivated through close relationships within the linguistically and culturally diverse communities in Maine, including family and friends whose roots are from the Wabanaki Nations. I dove deep into my own spiritual and racial identity, not just as a Syrian/Irish American woman, but into other layers of myself. In particular, two special teachers collaborated with me for many years: Nadia Seduisante, a medicine woman who shared teachings from her roots from the African tribes of Cameroon and the Arapaho and Blackfoot tribes of North America; and Gina Forbes, who integrated her own multifaceted identity story as a multiethnic, queer woman and somatic healer. Our dialogues, reflections on identities, experiences with families, educational investigations, and daily observations were the source of many ideas in this essay.

## OUR APPROACH

The community used a diverse, shared toolbox, including: mindfulness, decolonized curriculum (Yellowhorn & Lowinger, 2022; Four Arrows, 2013; Cajete, 1994), honoring our historical roots and practicing critical geography (hooks, 2009; Ellis, 2005). Roots and Fruits teachers self-reflected on the topic of whole identities: their pasts, places, people/ancestors, and the role this knowledge played in teaching young children in the classroom (Jarvis, 2022; Moore, 2022). They were expected to think critically about the external world and how it has framed their perceptions and actions. They practiced undoing habits of mind, including implicit and explicit biases (Derman-Sparks, et. al. 2021; Freire, 2018; Gay & Kirkland, 2003), that were harmful to themselves and students. We reflected together on our ancestral journeys, researching family and communal stories of immigration and/or origins on Indigenous land, our tools of survival, and how this land impacted our identities (Aplin, 2021; Baker, 2012; hooks, 2009). These practices created space for dialogue about colonialism, slavery, and genocide.

Acknowledgment of family trauma and how it is passed down through the generations was critical, as many students had experienced war, poverty, domestic violence, natural calamities, and other traumatic events. Being trauma-informed teachers involved being aware of our own traumas, identifying our own pain bodies, and knowing how to keep ourselves safe in order to help create healing-centered classrooms for the children (Ginwright, 2018; Kolk, 2015). As a way of honoring the embodied stories of trauma in the Roots and Fruits community, we enacted "critical pedagogies for healing" and becoming whole (Kress, et al., 2022). This included practicing reiki, yoga, meditation, dance, visual arts, nature walks, and storytelling (both oral and written).

## STORIES TOWARDS WHOLENESS

Throughout our inquiries, both children and adults became more aware of our identities, the impact the social world has upon these identities, and how we continue to grow through relationships with each other and with the planet. Developing new stories of wholeness deepened our knowledge of the powerful role each of us plays in the world (Syed & Fish, 2018; Stryker & Burke, 2000). To illustrate, I share Cat, Mich, and Halim's stories.<sup>1</sup>

### Cat

Cat graduated from the Roots and Fruits Preschool Program in 2017. Their second-grade teacher shared this story with Cat's parents:

*I know you already know what an incredibly compassionate, kind human Cat is, but I wanted to share an amazing story that happened over the last two weeks. On Friday, I was out of the building at a training. From what I understand, a second grader pulled at Cat's friend's hijab, exposing her hair. Cat shielded their friend so that she could fix her hijab, and then Cat immediately went to get help from an adult, advocating for their friend. I was so awed by the cultural sensitivity that Catherine demonstrated, and what amazing leadership they demonstrated.*

Another teacher a year later shared another story with Cat's parents:

*I'm reaching out about the possibility of Catherine joining a small social group. Catherine has made a wonderful connection with a student in our classroom who often feels invisible and isn't always sure how to connect with other peers his age. Catherine greets this student every morning, invites him to join them and their friends during snack, offers support during work time, and just generally spreads joy and kindness to this student. It has been profoundly beautiful to watch Catherine's leadership.*

Cat (Figure 3) is one of many alumni whose parents have contacted the program over the years, remarking on the Radical Love and Peace Leader tools (Figure 4) their children learned.



Figure 3. Cat

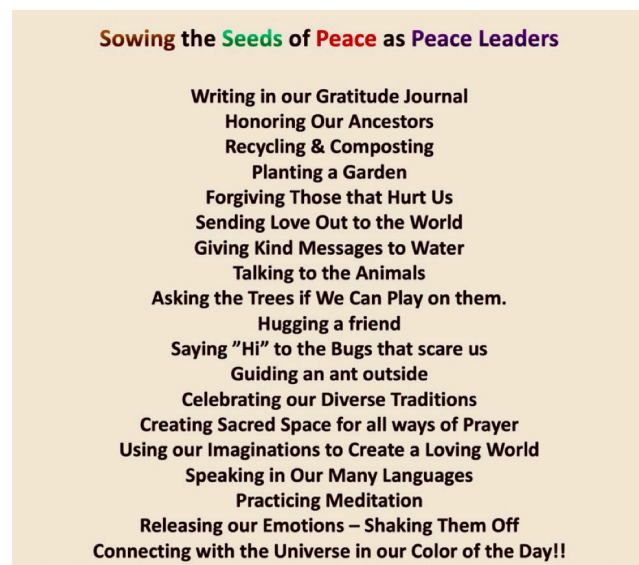


Figure 4. How peace leaders sow the Seeds of Peace

<sup>1</sup> I received permission from Cat and Halim to share their stories. Mich is a pseudonym for a student who graduated in 2005, whom I was unable to locate today, 20 years later.

## Mich

Mich is a student I taught in 2006, in the early years of Roots and Fruits. His story continues to be relevant:

*Mich was a 5-year-old with dark skin. He and his family were refugees from Congo. They arrived in southern Maine in 2003, at a time when it was not a welcoming environment for refugees and immigrants from other countries, especially from Africa and the Middle East. Schools were not prepared to serve linguistically and culturally diverse children and families, especially those fleeing war.<sup>2</sup> When Mich arrived in my pre-K classroom, he had been suspended from a variety of preschools and day cares because of “aggressive behavior.” Every day, he would enter the classroom with a bright beaming smile and shout loudly, “Hello everyone!” He was a brave, challenging student with many deep emotions, mostly anger and frustration, which, at times, resulted in him making unsafe choices in the classroom. We talked to his mom about our willingness to meet her son each day with openness and a belief in him.*

*After Mich had been in my classroom for five months, we had an especially hard day. As we laid down for nap, a time where children tend to share their deepest secrets, he said to me, “You know why I am a bad boy and make bad choices?” I replied, “I don’t see you as a bad boy, but want to understand why you see yourself as a bad boy. Please tell me.” He said, “I am bad because I have dark skin, which means I must have darkness inside of me, and you have light skin and so you must have light inside of you.” I asked, “Who told you this?” He replied, “I see it all the time on television, and in my neighborhood, the Black guys are put into the police officer’s cars. They are bad, so I must be bad.”*

*I knew that it was critical to reply to him, yet, what could I possibly say to counteract the media and lived reality he was bombarded with daily? I replied, “Yes, you are right, TV has lots of images of people with Black skin getting into police cars. Some may have made bad choices, but they are not a ‘bad’ person. Often, the police made the bad choice and identify the wrong person, making a huge mistake. Unfortunately, police are not always trained well, and are taught to go after Black people more than White people. This is a bad choice. All of us, including myself as a teacher, can and have made bad choices, but we all can make good choices too. You have been making fabulous choices, sharing the toys, taking turns playing ball, making new friends, and using your words to share your feelings. You also have a gigantic amount of light in your body as you enter each day with a welcoming message for everyone. Do not think your dark skin means you have darkness inside you! In fact, I believe it is just the opposite—your rich, dark skin radiates your inner beauty and a fire deep and bright just like the sun. Your beautiful Black skin is protecting your precious heart. A heart filled with so much light and love for all of us to see!”*

This story of systemic racism, through the lens of a child, highlights the harm continuing today in our criminal justice and education systems. For example, New York Police Department data for 2022 stated, “According to the data, Black and Hispanic drivers made up 55% of stops, but accounted for 86% of vehicles searched. White drivers made up 24% of stops, but accounted for 7% of arrests and 5% of vehicles searched” (CBS, 2023). School data shows Black preschool-aged children are suspended and disciplined at racially disproportionate rates (USA Facts, 2018). Maine has the second-highest suspension rate for children in early childhood programs (Maine Public, 2022). Mich’s self-perception as a “bad” child reflects of the pervasive messages of “otherness” he experienced. He witnessed the police disproportionately arresting Black men in his neighborhood and on television and was himself suspended and expelled from school. Both systems impacted his sense of Black identity as being bad and

---

<sup>2</sup> ([maine.gov/future/ona](https://maine.gov/future/ona)) 20 years later, Maine is continuing to be challenged in providing equitable and inclusive schooling for New American families. One step to address this issue is the development of the Office of New Americans in Maine State Government, which opened January 19, 2024.



unworthy of love. As his teacher, I was responsible for being a tree, providing oxygen and shade. This “small” naptime interaction illustrates the Roots and Fruits core values, and how my personal healing helped me see and respond to, but not fix, his inner wounds from racial trauma.

### **Halim**

One final story demonstrates this post-human view of children and the potential it provides in creating early childhood classrooms rooted in collective healing, critical and global thinking, and reimagining (Figure 5).

*Halim entered Roots and Fruits at the age of 3 and a half. He grew up in a Lebanese American home with his mom, who was a professional Middle Eastern belly dancer. He demonstrated his connection to the healing sounds of music as his hands rhythmically tapped the classroom tables, trees, and his own body. His love of nature found him always choosing to be outdoors in all the elements, and he would come alive when listening to the leaves sing in the wind or the birds chirp on the branches above. He started to claim music as one of his passionate fruits and at the age of 4 began to study the dombek, the drum of his Lebanese ancestry.*

*Today, at the age of 21, he is studying Hip Hop and R&B at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana. As Halim began his journey into music at a very young age, he was encouraged to be a teacher, showing his classmates the many rhythms he had learned as his mom danced alongside him. This opportunity to embrace and share his ancestry with his community was a gift he carries with him today, as he performs alongside his renowned teacher, Eric LaPerna, of 17+ years, in downtown Portland.*



Fruits We Cultivate @ Roots & Fruits  
Story of Halim

Figure 5. Halim playing drum as a young boy (left) and as a young man (right)

## THE PROBLEMS WITH QUALITY AND THE WHOLE CHILD

These stories indicate how we tried to promote wholeness for ourselves, our curriculum, and the children. This contrasts with observations over my career about how the early childhood field conceptualizes the “whole child” as involving various emphasis on the parts and the whole (Noddings, 2005). For instance, in 2007 the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) convened the Commission on the Whole Child, a collaborative group of leading thinkers, researchers, and practitioners, whose goal was to reframe the definition of a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically active, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond schooling (Garrett, 2006).

Currently, Maine’s Early Childhood Education Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), The Rising Stars for ME, is aligned with the ASCD’s whole child definition. This standards-focused program encourages and supports ECE programs’ engagement in continuous quality improvement efforts. Programs are rated along a five-star continuum, with five stars being the highest level of quality (Rising Stars for ME, 2024). To receive a Star 3 rating, a program’s activities and experiences are guided by a general understanding of the developmental domains: Social/Emotional; Cognitive; Physical (gross and fine motor; self-help skills); Language/Communication Skills; and Approaches to Learning (Rising Stars for ME Standards, 2023, p. 1). While this system seems to rest on an expansive conceptualization of wholeness, it falls short in its manifestation in classrooms, discounting other facets that matter: racial identity, religion, gender identity, visibility, collective consciousness, and interconnectedness.

I argue that separating *the whole child* into areas of development encourages educators to distance themselves from the children around them, from themselves, and from the broader world (Murriss, 2018). Although education appears to be progressing towards wholeness, this is belied by the deep tendency in the US to splinter, as in development, but also in a tendency to think in binaries—mind/body; emotion/cognition; inner/outer; girl/boy; teacher/learner; humans/nature (Murriss, 2016). This dualistic thinking is an instrument for “othering” or separating: boys from girls; minorities from the dominant; and classes from each other, undermining wholeness (Murriss, 2016). Roots and Fruits encouraged educators to undo this “cut-up” dualistic view of children by witnessing with new eyes how all humans are interwoven within the web of the natural world and the cosmos at large.

## THE POWER OF TREES

A poem by philosopher and healer Thich Nhat Hanh (Thich & McLeod, 2012) captures the power of trees on the planet:

*The Cosmos in the Tree by Thich Nhat Hanh*

*Look at the tree. [It] is a wonderful thing, a tree. A tree is very beautiful. A tree to me is as beautiful as a cathedral, even more beautiful. I look[ed] into the tree and I saw the whole cosmos in it.*

*I saw the sunshine in the tree. Can you see the sunshine in the tree? Yes, because without the sunshine, no tree can grow.*

*I see a cloud in the tree. Can you see? Without a cloud, there can be no rain, no tree.*

*I see the earth in the tree.*

*I see everything in the tree.*

*So, the tree is where everything in the cosmos comes into, and the cosmos reveals itself to me through a tree. Therefore, a tree to me is a cathedral, and I can take refuge in the tree, and I can get nourished by the tree ...*

*I can get in touch with the tree only if I go back to the present moment, because the tree can only be found in the present moment.*

This interconnectedness of humans with nature and the cosmos at large is the inspiration and foundation of the Roots and Fruits teaching and learning methodology. In sharing one program's story of wholeness, my goal has been to show how to create post-human classrooms, where children see their oneness with each other and with the planet. This expanded perspective allows all humans, young and old, to see their unique strand in the web of life and the vibrational power we each hold to spread kindness, compassion, and service.

## REFERENCES

- Aplin, G. (2021). Context: The role of place and heritage in genealogy. *Genealogy*, 5(58), 1-10.
- Baker, K. (2012). Identity, memory, and place. *The Word Hoard*, 1, 23-33.
- Barad, K. (2014). Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, 20(3), 168-187.  
[doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623](https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623)
- Cajete, Gregory, Ph.D. (1994). *Look to the Mountain, An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press.
- CBS News (2023). [cbsnews.com/newyork/news/nypd-traffic-stops-racial-disparity/](https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/nypd-traffic-stops-racial-disparity/)
- Ellis, J. (2005). Place and identity for children in classrooms and schools. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 3(2), 55-73.
- Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs) (2013). *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- Freire, Paulo (2018). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 4th Edition*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Garrett, J. (Ed.). (2006). Educating the whole child. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 42(4), 154-155.  
[files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ738078.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ738078.pdf)
- Gay, G., & Kirkland, K. (2003). Developing cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection in preservice teacher education. *Theory into Practice*, 2(3), 181-187.
- Ginwright, S. (2018, May 31). The future of healing: Shifting from trauma-informed care to healing centered engagement. Medium. [ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c](https://ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c)
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2009). *Belonging, a culture of place*. Routledge.
- Jarvis, P. (2022). Ancestral selfie and historical traumas: Who do you feel you are? *Genealogy*, 6(1), 1-11.
- Kolk, B. van der, M. D. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin Publishing Group.
- Kress, Tricia M., Emdin, Christopher, and Lake, Robert (2022). *Critical Pedagogy for Healing*. Bloomsbury Academic
- Maine Public (Associated Press). (2022, April 18). Maine looks to fix its high preschool expulsion rate. Maine Public. [mainepublic.org/politics/2022-04-18/maine-looks-to-fix-its-high-preschool-expulsion-rate](https://mainepublic.org/politics/2022-04-18/maine-looks-to-fix-its-high-preschool-expulsion-rate)

- Mika, Carl (2018). *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy*. Routledge Publishers, Inc.
- Miller, J. (2010). *Whole child education*. University of Toronto Press.
- Moore, S. (2022). How ancestor research affects self-understanding and well-being: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Genealogy*, 6(20), 1-6.
- Murris, K. (2016). *The posthuman child: Educational transformation through philosophy with picture books*. Routledge.
- Murris, K. (2018). Posthuman child and the diffractive teacher: Decolonizing the nature/culture binary. In A. Cutter-Mackenzie (Eds.), *Research handbook on childhood nature*, (pp. 2-22). Springer International Handbooks of Education. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51949-4\_7-2
- Noddings, N. (2005). What does it mean to educate the whole child? *Education Leadership*, 8- 13.
- Rising Stars for ME. (2023). maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Facilities.pdf
- Shetty, J. (2020). *Think like a monk*. Simon and Schuster.
- Stryker, S., & Burke, P. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284-497.
- Syed, M., & Fish, J. (2018). Revisiting Erik Erikson's legacy on culture, race, and ethnicity. *Identity*, 18(4), 274-283.
- Thich, N., & McLeod, M. (Ed.) (2012). *The pocket Thich Nhat Hanh*. Shambhala, 1st edition.
- USA Facts [usafacts.org/articles/black-students-more-likely-to-be-punished-than-white-students/](https://usafacts.org/articles/black-students-more-likely-to-be-punished-than-white-students/)
- Yellowhorn, E., & Lowinger, K. (2022). *Sky Wolf's call: The gift of Indigenous knowledge*. Annick Press.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Virginia Dearani** will be joining Thomas College as an assistant professor of early childhood education in Fall 2024 and is currently an education consultant in the State of Maine. She is a doctoral candidate in Literacy Education from University of Maine, Orono. Throughout the past 25+ years, Virginia has centered her life's work in the areas of wholeness and healing in education for children 3 years old through adulthood. She emphasizes the joy of partnering with children and youth to create communities of belonging needed in our world today.