

BELIEVE, INSPIRE, CREATE, CELEBRATE
FIELDS OF PLAY IN EDUCATION:
BE(COM)ING CURRICULUM WITHIN PEDAGOGY OF PROMISE

by

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to present a reconceptualized perspective of the powers and technologies that play on educational beliefs, inspiration, creativity, and celebrations in schooled practices. I make a proposal for educator-learners to revisit their ethical responsibility to children, themselves, and education through thoughtful and playful opportunities in pedagogy of promise.

The school mission statement *Believe, Inspire, Create, Celebrate* guided a professional community of educator-learners as we honored children, designed spaces that inspired authentic learning activities, and nurtured an inclusive environment. My growing concern with universalizing discourses provoked a curiosity about the powers that determined teaching practices under these tenets, became contested as learning opportunities. I navigate between the contested spaces of my lived experiences within the classroom, and as a member on provincial/district committees, (re)searching connections between intended and actual effects of practices and policy. Are there common grounds, or is this a space in need of negotiation?

This project contains a review of reconceptualist literature, within the narrative wanderings drawn from my lived experience, as I explore intentions, interpretation, and identity that shape educational practice. I highlight promises from provincial curricula documents that support the tenets of emergent curriculum, as practiced through a Reggio Emilia approach.

As I attend to the complexities of complexing learning/curriculum/childhood, I remain open to rhizomatic possibilities that reframe meanings, interrogate views, and

propose pedagogical practices that invite children into the learning process; as people with rights and authentic knowledge. The project invites readers to consider similar opportunities for be(com)ing curriculum with(in) reconceptualized beliefs as learner-researchers.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to all creatures great and small who share in the delights of Cedarbrook Cottage. Your friendship and gift of support is fully appreciated. The frog pond awaits your next visit... the garden and I would be happy to see you.

For the knowing community of Hybirds who chose to live the mission.

For Dunkyn; thank you your help at the computer and for keeping Charlotte settled. I felt your continued support as you chewed on this project.

To Henry for keeping my lap warm.

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A special dedication to my Yorkshire heart; my Auntie Mollie, thank you for thinking about me every single day. XO

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Our mission is to create the premier university environment for our students, faculty and staff in which to learn, work and live.

We will provide an exceptional and transformative education for our students, by encouraging initiative and innovation, unlocking their creative potential. Our graduates will be prepared to make a significant difference - creating opportunities for themselves and for others.

We commit to understanding and solving the problems of today and tomorrow, serving our community and engaging with our alumni, retirees and partners around the world.

(UNB Mission Statement)

With heartfelt gratitude, I acknowledge the significant contributions from friends and faculty at Marshall d'Avray for upholding the tenets of your mission statement.

I am honored by your beliefs, inspiration, creativity, and celebrations. You truly are an amazing team!

To Pam Whitty; thank you for your encouragement, inspiring words, and the belonging communities you nurture. The rose still graces my cottage...the rhizomes are for sharing.

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A visit to my past; why does it matter?

The school mission statement *Believe, Inspire, Create, Celebrate* guided a professional learning community of educators as they co-authored ethical pedagogical decisions for several years. I belonged to the group of educator-learners in this school environment, where we were expected to honor the rights of children and recast our thinking on any affinity with discourses of universalizing ‘truths’ about the nature of teaching and children. This essay begins with a visit to my past, setting the stage for exploring curiosities I have about the mission statement’s tenets and if current educational policies and practices support them or create a ‘mission impossible’. Our school mission statement opened the learning gate for students, rather than corralling and branding children using normative standards and deficit driven models of education. It was a mission focused on challenging and reconstructing the Western ideology of classifications based on “construct[ing] relationships and institutions around what we see as the normal child, the abnormal child and the delayed child” (MacNaughton, 2005, p.29). Educator-learners, including myself, were challenged to reflect on whether our plans and actions upheld the following tenets of the mission, which I have extended with questions that focus my project.

Believe: Do I honor all children as authentic knowledge bearers? Can I learn *with* and *from* children? Do I value playful learning opportunities?

Inspire: Do my plans reflect authentic learning opportunities with meaningful connections to curricula (multimodal, participatory, problem solving)?

Create: Do I create safe, equitable places for learners?

Celebrate: How do I celebrate learning? (Including my own)

Considering the choices I made in the extension questions complexes my thinking, exposing this learner's culpability in perpetuating normative and universalizing discourses. Do 'my plans' respect an emergent curriculum based on children's interests and knowledge, or ignore the child's input? Does my reference to 'all children' contain the following assumption noted by Haas Dyson (2003)?

In literacy education, these concerns about the "all" children are often undergirded by what might be called the "nothing" assumption—the decision to make no assumption that children have any relevant knowledge. The "all" children are in urgent need, so the argument goes, of a tightly scripted, linear, and step-by-step monitored march through proper language awareness, mastery of letters, control of sound/symbol connections, and on up the literacy ladder. (pp 100-101)

Furthermore, regarding the celebration of learning, does placing the words 'including my own' in parentheses support a belief that schools only consider children – not teachers – as learners?

Mission Impossible:

Honoring children, designing spaces that inspired authentic learning activities, and nurturing an inclusive environment within the framework of the four cornerstones of *believe, inspire, create, and celebrate* was not a mission impossible due to the educational environment. The mission's tenets were supported by an administration that nurtured relationships between provincial curricula and the values of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Reggio Emilia is a small town in northern Italy where an educational philosophy, founded by Loris Malaguzzi, guides an approach that values emergent

curriculum and cultivates the ‘hundred languages of children’ – a metaphor for the multimodal representations that children express and explore as they learn. Educators upholding the tenets of the Reggio approach nurture an image of children as competent knowledge bearers, foster dialogue and create spaces for community participation and belonging, invite children and parents into the learning process via documentation, and consider themselves as learner-researchers alongside the children (Moss & Petrie, 2002; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006; Wien, 2008). A Reggio Emilia philosophy cannot be copied or reproduced and is best considered as an approach, not an educational program. Unique to local situations and communities, this philosophy expects educators to commit to pedagogy of listening, co-construction of knowledge through partnering with children, families, and colleagues, and move “beyond the prescriptive transmission of knowledge that we see in images of the educator as expert or technician” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015, p. 66).

Setting the stage for the project: Back to the future:

Lifting the lid of my old schoolmaster’s desk, I got lost for an afternoon in the pictures and paraphernalia of my classroom teachings under the mission of ‘believe, inspire, create, and celebrate’.

Blurring my peaceful nostalgia while viewing the photographs, was my growing concern about the universalizing practices and discourses present in education today. How have beliefs, inspirations, creativity, and celebrations changed throughout my teaching career? What powers determined that teaching



practices under these tenets, became contested as learning opportunities? Are children's constitutional rights honored, as promised, by current educational policies, visions, and missions? What are the fields of play that shape educational beliefs, inspiration, creations, and celebrations?

The project description; Narrative wanderings through intentions, interpretation, & identity:

Phenomenological underpinnings, as per Max van Manen's (2011) research approach, legitimize data drawn from personal experience. As I navigate between the contested spaces of my lived experiences within the classroom and as a member on provincial/district committees, I am invested in searching for connections between intended and actual effects of practices and policy with regard to education. Are there common grounds, or is this a space in need of negotiation; where a reconceptualized perspective within a critically knowing learning community might create new relationships between policy and practice?

For this project, I connect my developing understanding of critical pedagogy with the educational fields of play that I cultivated as a generative teacher, and reflexively place my own ~~knowledge~~ under erasure via the narrative of my experiences and learning. My erasure of the word knowledge comes from a recognition that the meaning is not fixed and the complexities of language and meaning-making act on interpretation. Critical examination of my positionality from, and within a poststructural lens, expects that I remain vigilant to Derrida's (in Tyson, 2006) deconstruction of meaning making from both author and audience; as well as Foucault's (in McNicol Jardine, 2005;

MacNaughton, 2005) message that ‘truth’, or knowledge, is constructed, based solely on the needs of a society that explores it, monitors it, and uses it as a springboard to create new facts (Tyson, 2006; McNicol Jardine, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005).

My definition of a generative teacher reflects “a generative image [which] allows people see the world anew, identify new options, formulate new strategies, even reform their identity” (Bushe, 2013, p. 3). Bushe’s research on generativity is mainly concerned with appreciative inquiry aimed toward building business relationships in order to necessitate transformational change; therefore, I relate his advice to reconceptualize beliefs in building the following relationship with planned outcomes:

work with the complexity, disruption and messiness that emergent change processes entail. Instead of restraining and resisting disturbance, welcome and use disturbance in a creative dance with order. Instead of focusing on outcomes, focus on intentions
and hold outcomes lightly. Instead of following the plan, follow the energy.
(Bushe, 2013, p.12)

Rather than being guided solely by a generative learning theory, based on the idea that learners bring new ideas into their memory in order to enhance their educational experience; such as Franke, Carpenter, Levi, and Fennema’s (2001; in Ball, 2009) research on children’s mathematical thinking that states, “knowledge becomes generative when the learner sees the need to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge and continually reconsiders existing knowledge in light of the new knowledge that they are learning (p.6), I wish to remain open to uncertainty, travelling along complex and multiple pathways so I might flow with thoughtful, layered movement as I become learner/curriculum/(re)searcher.

Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015) and her colleagues explore a range of possibilities through nomadic thinking; a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1987, in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) where pedagogical narration, or documentation, offers “the creation of spaces and ways of thinking that open new routes in practice and resist normalized ways of being and acting. [It] allows for new activations; it allows us to move and experiment to avoid static thinking and the essentialization of children’s meanings” (p.187). My aim is to become a *doing; doing and performing* “in relation to the pedagogical practice where it is produced” (Lenz Taguchi (2009), in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p.188).

Zembylas and Vrasidas (in Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) describe a nomadic approach as “not rooted in an ordered space and time, does not comprise a fixed identity, but instead rides difference...knows no boundaries and wanders across diverse spaces...This circumstance challenges the unitary, binary, and totalizing models of identity in modernist thought” (p.188).

Elements of personal choice in my narrative comes with the recognition that writing one side of a situation brings a potential danger of promoting a “single-story” (Adichie, 2009) about a pedagogy of promise. A critical view also disrupts my own thinking; do my beliefs reify socially constructed truths surrounding educational discourses, or act as a reflexive opportunity?

Becoming curriculum:

I continue to consider myself as a ‘course of study’ – as ‘curriculum’—as I search for the powers that play center stage in the (de)pathologizing and (de)colonizing of childhood and education, my own knowledge, and my shifting identity as an educator-learner. Therefore, I must reconfigure my own assumptions and consider other ways of knowing; of doing things differently that disturb, trouble, and question my own mission of risk, as I am compelled to speak the truth within the Foucauldian notion of parrhesia, to explore and propose alternatives, based on best practices for authentic and playful experiences, that bring the child’s silenced voice back into the educational conversation. Parrhesia, as opposed to rhetoric, is the sort of *truth* characterized as risky business—an ethical sense of duty which functions as a criticism; where the truth teller “puts himself and his relationship with the other at risk” (Foucault, 1984, Lecture). Although risky, parrhesia “allows oneself to act as things demand and to hold in suspense dominant regimes of power and thought” (Vansieleghem, 2011, p. 336). It must seem strange, to some, to consider recasting beliefs or what is held as ~~truth~~, in a different light, however, “as teachers, when we are committed to the doubled-edged task we face the need to inquire critically and creatively into how should we conceive of teaching, learning, the curriculum, schools, and educational policies in order to do both things well” (McNicol Jardine, 2010, p. 78). Cultivating the intellect, and amplifying the voices of the marginalized for social change are the tenets of critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008).

Future implications: Why does it matter?

This project proposes a culturally responsive pedagogy that will inspire and support educator-learners in reifying the beautiful promises of equity and inclusion found in the stated goals and beliefs of provincial curricula (Appendix A). A culturally responsive, critical pedagogy recognizes systems of power that colonize education and pathologize children, and redefines definitions of children's rights. I reconstruct Gay's (2010) term 'culturally responsive pedagogy', stretching the parameters of 'diversity', to include all children with regard to the culture and constitutional rights of 'childhood' (Liebel, 2012; MacNaughton, 2005; Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

Conceptions of childhood are further analyzed by Turner and Matthews (1998, in Liebel, 2012), and ask educators to consider their definition of 'childhood' through the following questions:

1. *What children are:* Are children beings in themselves or merely potential beings? Are they animals of instinct or rationality?
2. *What do they know:* Are children capable of consequential reasoning or are they capable of living only for the moment?
3. Do children merit any of the freedoms or protections adults enjoy, or should they content themselves with obedience and servitude, as well as the vulnerability that belong to the lives of non-human animals? Should their freedoms be drastically limited to protect their vulnerabilities and foster their development? Or do strong protections stunt their development and assault their dignity?

(Turner & Matthews, 1998, as cited in Liebel, 2012, p.65)

Regarding adult obligation to children, as protectors, children's rights "does not empower children through rights, but 'empower[s] ourselves to intervene in their lives'" (Federle, 1994, as cited in Liebel, 2012). Extending the boundaries of the playing field for educators and children's learning holds great potential for building a Critically Knowing Community of educator learners. A Critically Knowing Community, described by MacNaughton (2005), will "seek to honor ethical engagement with children [...and] can fuse research, policy formation, quality improvement and professional learning into a dynamic, mutually informing process" (p.190).

Re-searching literature playgrounds of pedagogy:

I borrow the project title term 'fields of play' from Laurel Richardson (1997) while researching how powers and technologies play on our educational beliefs, inspiration, creativity, and celebrations in schooled practices. I have placed a review of the literature within the context of myself as curriculum to attend to pathologizing practices and discourses that colonize both education and children; and make a proposal to revisit my ethical responsibility to children, myself, and education through playful, aesthetic learning opportunities (Harste, 2014; Janks, 2010; Kincheloe, 2008; Kjørholt, 2013; MacNaughton, 2005; McNicol Jardine, 2010; Moore, 2004; Paley, 2009; Richardson, 1997; Rinaldi, 2006; Siegel, 2012; Strong-Wilson, 2014; Wien, 2008). A search through the literature will provide rhizomatic opportunities that support the following; reframe meaning given to learning, interrogate my views, and propose pedagogical

practices that invite children into the learning process as people with rights and authentic knowledge (MacNaughton, 2005). The complexities of learning deserve attention as I invite readers to consider similar opportunities of reconceptualizing their unique educational selves.

Narratives; volumizing the storylines:

“The narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of [hu]mankind; there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives” (Barthes, 1966, in Richardson, 1997, p. 27).

Are stories valued as possibilities for change? Can we sift out truths and realities, or separate self-centric goals, from the subjectivity of personal narrative? Recognizing that the author determines what to reveal and what to leave out certainly privileges the writer. Additionally, each reader’s unique interpretation of the text creates more and individual meanings based on experience and personal connections. Current academic recognition of narrative, as a valued methodology, brings an important element of lived experience into play. The innumerable, incidental happenings that take place in educational fields of learning –for children and adults –include moments that cannot be measured, observed, or scripted. These moments speak to the process of learning and the messiness of how thoughts are both formed and forced. Recognizing my authoring and authored subjectivity, I rely on Richardson’s (1997) definition of narrative as a valued method of pedagogical research as potential for change, as “narrative displays the goals and intentions of human actors; it makes individuals cultures, societies, and historical epochs

comprehensible as wholes; it humanizes time; and it allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions and to alter the directions of our lives” (Richardson, 1997, p. 27).

Within pedagogy of possibility, the narratives I choose to share are but a few small steps on my own educational pathway. Recognizing, as Polkinghorne (in Richardson, 1997) describes, that “narrative meaning is created by noting that something is a “part” of a whole and that something is a “cause” of something else” (p. 27), I tread carefully, yet honestly, believing that in order “to be faithful to the lived experiences of people [...] then we should value the narrative. Marginalizing narrative may serve the political interests of entrenched sociological elites, but it does not serve sociology or society” (p.35).

I purposely extend the more widely recognized and perhaps more widely accepted written, read, and spoken narratives to include those we view, listen to, and represent in other ways, in order to embrace all components of language arts in the official curriculum document. As stated in the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum: K-3 (1998), “[a]lthough the statements of learning outcomes are organized under the headings Speaking and Listening, Reading and Viewing, and Writing and Other Ways of Representing, it is important to recognize that all these language processes are interrelated and can be developed most effectively as interdependent processes” (p.15). Bringing the second part of each word-pair: Listening, Viewing, and Other Ways of Representing, back to the frontlines allows for a thorough view of expected provincial curricula and supports educational practices that recognize that; “narrative potential lies in everyday objects and

materials, and their embedded cultural associations” (Storylines: Exhibit description, Guggenheim, 2015).

A current Guggenheim exhibit connects visual art to storytelling and the tour begins with an installation of a model of Pinocchio lying face down in a tub of water. With the vast opportunities for meaning making and points of departure that lie within individual interpretation, I relate to the following artist’s renderings of narrative that liberates us from conventional discourses.



Daddy, Daddy (2008). Contemporary art installation, Guggenheim

Artist: Maurizio Cattelan was born in Padua, Italy, in 1960. Cattelan, who has no formal training and considers himself an “art worker” rather than an artist, has often been characterized as the court jester of the art world. This label speaks not only to his taste for irreverence and the absurd, but also his profound interrogation of socially ingrained norms and hierarchies, subjects historically only available to the court fool. (Storylines, 2015)

I wonder if there exists a ‘court jester of the education world’ as I am encouraged to think about educators drowning in their own lies; or rather, socially constructed lies that we so willingly accept as truths. Does interrogation of socially ingrained norms created by dominant ideological discourse allow innovation to be deemed irreverent or absurd? Foucauldian influenced scholar, Popkewitz (1998) notes:

how the different pedagogical knowledges ‘make’ (construct) the teacher who administers the child. [...] Not only do the rules of ‘reasoning’ about teaching and childhood ‘tell us’ what to notice (and not to notice), what things belong together, and what things are not ‘thinkable’ within the rules and standards of the thinking applied: the knowledge systems of teaching also embody a continuum of values whose consequence is to compare children discursively through the distinctions, norms, and divisions linguistically produced in pedagogy. (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 17 as cited in Moss, 2002, p.32).

Complexing Curriculum:

Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water.

-Loris Malaguzzi-

(founder of Reggio Emilia schools, as cited in Krechevsky et al., 2013, p.xiii)

The complexities of defining and navigating curriculum continually evolve for me as I restructure my interpretation and make multiple meanings of what curriculum is, or might be. I seek first to develop my interpretations toward pedagogy of possibilities by exploring and assessing some of the complexities of curriculum, before beginning a journey of *complexing curriculum* as a means to remain constantly becoming as an educator-learner.

Complexing, or complexifying, curriculum attends to reconceptualizing practices and beliefs by valuing uncertainty and becoming comfortable with unsettling of interpretations within a shared learning community (Moss, 2002; Pacini-Ketchabaw et.al, 2015). The action of complexing does not require or follow directives, nor is it in need of a final decisive plan. Embracing the constant shifting of meaning, disruption of comforts, and questioning of practice and beliefs, is necessary in order to move “from

‘understanding practice’ to ‘making our practice more complex’” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et.al, 2015, p.xviii).

Why am I ‘assessing’ curriculum? Wiliam and Black (1996) use the word *function* as they consider assessment; asking educators to reflect on the meanings that are validated by their consequences. The key idea that there must be an ‘action’ to assist the learner will help educators start to reconsider their own definitions of assessment (Wiliam & Black, 1996). Among the goals of my personal assessment of curriculum, is to share the substantial benefits that multiple definitions of curriculum offer to the populace of educational learning communities; namely, children, educators, parents, policy makers, and community members. Assessment – as a verb – turns evidence back to the learner in a cyclical way. Considering the function of assessing as ongoing maintains it as an active investment for all learners, including myself. My purposeful reference to a *community of learners* embraces the curricular promises and responsibilities of all people; as we all affect, and are affected by, schools and schooled practices within and beyond the classroom. Remaining open to possibilities requires complexing, or ‘complexifying’ as described by Pacini-Ketchabaw et.al. (2015), which complicate and respect opportunities for a multiplicity of responses within narratives of education, practice, children, learning, and understanding.

Education and curriculum, whether regarded as identical or mutually exclusive practices, can be confusing and contested terms. People who navigate theories about curriculum often uncover meanings that swirl, collide, and perhaps even narrowly miss each other in their individual interpretations. It is through my complexifying of curriculum that I hope to find a meeting place of sorts, not to settle there, but to pause and

listen. Educator-learners must consider pedagogy of listening and uncertainty by taking a pause that affords conversation, reflection, and offers a space where community members can become comfortable with unsettling our interpretations and embrace the continual functioning of curriculum (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015).

Teachers display their beliefs – whether they contest or reflect hegemonized truths about learning and curriculum – through classroom practices. Tarr (2004) reminds us that “classroom environments are public statements about the educational values of the institution and the teacher” (p. 2), therefore, I propose a reconceptualized perspective by complexifying curriculum as an educator-learner exploring my own desires, contradictions, and collisions through multiple definitions of curriculum. By blending the education and curriculum relationship and blurring the continuum ends of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, I advocate for a volumizing of the linearity of continuum and curriculum within a *pedagogy of possibility*, by extending the tenets of an emergent curriculum beyond early childhood. This goal reflects Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi’s vision beyond a co-operative relationship between school and pre-school, advocating for “co-operation between all forms of education and lifelong learning” (Moss, 2013, p.4). Recognizing that the term ‘pre-school’ privileges school, Moss (2013) opens up the potential for creating children’s spaces through critical examination of the possible and actual relationships between pre-school (for children younger than age 5) and compulsory school (Kindergarten and older), noting that “the values, goals, concepts, understandings and practices of education should extend across the whole field” (p.2).

Finally, as I consider a new role with my school district as the elementary Science support teacher, I research potential for connecting curriculum opportunities with an

educational community of learners, including myself, via Lev Vygotsky's description of "how children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Meier, 2013, as cited in Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, & Wilson, 2013, p. xi). Conscientious educators must ask themselves if the intellectual life in their classroom will honor children's knowledge and interests or stay the course on a predetermined journey. Moss and Petrie (2002) attend to complexities and complexing as they examine perspectives and possibilities, sharing the message to a society of learners "to reflect a particular understanding [...] about the provisions that we, as a society acting through public policy, make for children, putting a stutter into the narratives which speak as if they were the only possible version of events" (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.12).

Defining '*curriculum*' and complexing curriculum making:

A typical definition of curriculum for most teachers reflects the subject specific, grade-leveled documents (paper or electronic) that are 'made curriculum' rather than 'curriculum-making'. These pre-packaged, outcome based documents are provided to educators in New Brunswick by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, with the teaching and learning destination mapped out, and implementation expected via normative procedures. Curricula documents and their supporting programs – including textbooks and professional learning sessions – are universally designed to *do to* children and educators, rather than *for* them. Moss (2002) describes such provisions offered as "technologies for acting upon children [...] to produce specific, pre-determined and adult defined outcomes" (p.9) and recommends a shift in thinking from 'children's services' to 'children's spaces'. Pacini-Ketchabaw

et.al. (2015) further complex such provisions by recognizing how they might act to deskill teachers and silence the voices of educators, children and parents. Knowing that textbooks and prescribed programs come with the assumption that ‘what is deemed appropriate must be predetermined’ and can then “easily be applied by an educator in a classroom, ignores the complexities educators encounter in their daily practices” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p.6). She asks us to consider a resurgence of our professional relationship with education, and partake in professional development as a community of learners where “we engage with educators in asking questions about their own practices, as this is the context in which they make sense of what teaching and learning could become” (p.6).

Under a deficit driven agenda of pre-determined outcomes and leveled grades and children, students are expected to meet existing standards at the same time as classmates. However, moving from working from the document, to a relationship of working with the document as part of an assemblage, opens up possibilities. Educators must consider the potential for curricula documents to become part of what Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in Pacini-Ketchabaw, (2012) describe as *human and non-human assemblages*. The educator-child-document assemblage is “tightly linked to deployment of practices” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2012, p.156). The intra-action of curriculum documents as “entangled agencies” (p.156), affect the education experience of people through emerging relations of power in the “performative aspects [...]in relation to the bodies it encounters” (p.156). When documents are connected parts of such an assemblage, the bodies in a society of learners become “phenomena which Barad (2007) might say, ‘acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics

of intra-activity' [...] 'humans are part of the world-body space in its dynamic structuration'" (p.157).

Here I note my own participation in the perpetuation of such binding phenomena during the restructuring of the New Brunswick Mathematics curriculum. In 2006 and 2007, I was invited to join two small committees for re-structure of the Atlantic Canada Mathematics curriculum for Kindergarten and Grade 2. The 'by invitation only' committee did not include classroom teachers or parents, revealing a politically motivated power and privilege.

Denoting pre-packaged learning and universal standards, the WNCP (Western Northern Canadian Protocol) was our template; the guiding questions, strand names and outcomes of the WNCP remained unchanged and were non-negotiable.

The committee was tasked with filling in each outcome's four-page spread under the categories of Elaboration, Achievement Indicators, Instructional Strategies (Planning), Assessment Strategies (Individual and Whole Class), and Possible Models for each outcome. Under the tyranny of time, the four day task was completed, privileging the document over the children it was being designed for. Highlighting the directive nature of educational practice and curriculum, inspires the question, "How might continual conversations and a return to the documented artifacts challenge and re-author official documents?" (Rose & Whitty, 2012, p.36) is critical when meeting the difficult challenge of disrupting authoritarian directives. My personal experiences of disrupting directives has often been scrutinized and rejected by colleagues who might be fearful, or unaware, that the disciplinary use of time devalues childhood (in fact, all human) rights. As one of the two teachers on the Grade 2 committee who had experience teaching that

grade level, I questioned aloud some of the activities that were being suggested, concerned that they did not reflect meaningful connections to children's experiences and mathematics promised within the goals and beliefs in the front matter of the document. NB Mathematics curricula contain beautiful promises which attest to the value of play, literacy, home experiences, meaningful contexts, and environments that support exploration, risk taking, and critical thinking; however, my question inspired my neighbor to lift the group computer from my part of the table with the comment "well, you're not going to type it in there, so I will." Combined with an anxiety to finish due to time pressure, was a dutiful sense to follow orders and get it finished, and those pressures hung like a cloud over the committee for the entire session.

The Department funded three mandatory professional development sessions for teachers to familiarize and implement the new curriculum document. Day one was an overview of the document itself, day two focused on the expensive supporting resources (Math Makes Sense), and offered a list of topics to teachers for further exploration. The feedback forms contained preselected categories and choices for teachers to select a focus for day three.

Unravelling the complexities of making curriculum documents often placed me in a position of conflict. While I recognized the obvious and hidden agendas behind the re-structure, I held fast to the opportunities for honoring education and children that were promised within the document and floundered to promote these promises against the strength of the hegemonic current flowing from many educators. I was often challenged with comments that perpetuated technologies of power such as the following; "but the department spent all that money on the textbooks and our PD days, so I thought I had to

use Math Makes Sense” or “my Principal says I have to use the text, post the outcomes, use the curriculum map to create my lesson plans”. Relaxing the tensions for some educators was the liberating recognition of ‘permission’ by generating connections between the curriculum document and children’s interests and abilities. Many teachers showed hesitancy toward acting differently than the ‘norm’ and while recognizing a professional courtesy of becoming unbound from the texts, there was a sense of caution, closely linked to a sense of mistrust, when assured the curriculum was always privileged over the supporting resources. Adding to the conflict was disagreement from colleagues when I questioned how scripted textbooks promoted a very narrow view of mathematics. How are the following beautiful promises, offered in the curriculum documents, reified in math class if practiced only from a textbook?

Students are curious, active learners with individual interests, abilities and needs. They come to classrooms with varying knowledge, life experiences and backgrounds. A key component in successfully developing numeracy is making connections to these backgrounds and experiences.

Students develop a variety of mathematical ideas before they enter school. Children make sense of their environment through observations and interactions at home and in the community. Mathematics learning is embedded in everyday activities, such as playing, reading, storytelling and helping around the home. Such activities can contribute to the development of number and spatial sense in children.

(N.B. Mathematics Curriculum (all grade levels), 2007-2011, page 1).

Regardless of the tensions and the conflict, an in-depth awareness of the process of curriculum making, and deep content knowledge, allows teacher-researchers

opportunities to honor the promises for authentic experiences, play, other ways of learning, and children.

The document often becomes privileged over children with its scripted goals and outcomes, yet Pacini-Ketchabaw (2012) proposed an alternative intra-action with the documents; a reshuffling of privilege in the educator/child/document assemblage that allows children and educators to work *with* the document, rather than being acted upon by it. By re-situating the document within our education practices, there is hope that the inclusive promises of education will become reified for educators and children.

Another interpretation of curriculum reflects dictionary definitions as a ‘course of study’. Educators must therefore accept themselves, and their students, as curricula; potential courses of study in the learning processes of education. Self, as curriculum, reflects a growing and shifting identity of educator/learner and therefore reconstructs the notion of ‘professional development’, placing the “teacher as an incomplete project, as unfinished, as in the process of becoming a teacher with others [and, as a critical subject] only emerges when the teacher understands herself or himself as subject to uncertainty” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, et.al; as cited in Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p.87). Greene (1973, in Iannacci & Whitty, 2009) positions the teacher as ‘stranger’, as a professional who is developing, and as a learner who is becoming. In this sense, educators as curriculum, reshapes our thinking about curriculum makers. Educators then, are not pre-packaged or finished in their learning; poised along a scope and sequence continuum, ready to pour pre-determined knowledge into students, or be given instructions on how to do so efficiently at professional development sessions –which privilege the messengers and

policy makers. Instead, we are redefined from “ontology of being [to] ontology of becoming” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2009, in Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p.92).

Dominant discourses claiming that ‘professional development’ is a neutral event where the aim “is on changing the educators and their practices by implementing a specific source of change, such as a program” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p.67) perpetuates a normative view of professional development I have experienced as both receiver and presenter at district and department sessions. The gift(ing)/present(ing) binary of professional learning highlights a communication need that goes beyond bringing teachers into the conversation through ‘discussion times’ planned throughout the sessions, usually with pre-determined outcomes.

The idea of *relational* professional development goes deeper by “engage[ing] with educators in asking questions about their own practices, as this is the context in which they make sense of what teaching and learning could become” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p.6).

What we can hope for from a critical standpoint, is that educators – as courses of self-study, engage in conversations with other educator-learner curricula in what Carla Rinaldi calls “a pedagogy of listening [...] emphasizing responsive and reciprocal relationships and co-constructed curriculum [including themselves] that emerges out of educators’ conversations and careful observations of their own knowledge and interests and those of the children they teach” (Whitty, 2009, in Iannacci & Whitty, 2009, p.37). Conversations within pedagogy of listening opens up a multitude of possibilities for the learner-educator and include the possibility of children as curriculum (Rinaldi, 2001;

Iannacci & Whitty, 2009; Wien, 2014; Moss, 2013; Pinar, 2008, as cited in Wien, 2014).

Rinaldi (2001) maintains that school should be:

first and foremost, a context of multiple listening. This context of multiple listening, involving the teachers but also the group of children and each child, all of whom can listen to others and listen to themselves, overturns the teaching-learning relationship. This overturning shifts the focus to learning; that is, to children's self-learning and the learning achieved by the group of children and adults together. (Rinaldi, 2001, p.82)

Considering the actual, rather than intended effects of policy demands placed on educators and children, insists that educator-researchers have the potential to create equitable and meaningful educational practices for children. A reconceptualist perspective not only honors the educator as curriculum, but also the children. Bringing the children into the educational conversation creates a relationship within a society of learners that affords children agency in the design and implementation of the learning process. Children, as curriculum, are seen as "competent and strong –a child who has the right to hope and the right to be valued [...] an active subject with us to explore, to try day by day to understand something, to find a meaning, a piece of life" (Rinaldi, 2001, p.79). Children's existing and future curriculum vitae are worth knowing and developing. Critically knowing educators regard children's life stories purposefully and believe that "the child is a constructor of culture and knowledge [...] competent and curious –a child who is filled with a desire to learn, to research and develop as a human being in an interactive relationship with other people" (Moss, 2013, p.24). How can pre-constructed, outcome-based documents honor children as curricula and pay attention to their existing knowledge? From a poststructural perspective, reconceptualizing our thinking and recognizing the power and privilege that pervade educational discourses

about curriculum can transform our notions of curriculum, children, and the learning-teaching relationship. As Foucault reminds us, “as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult, and quite possible” (Moss, 2013, p.36).

Beyond documents and the people I have re-defined as curricula, is a third consideration of curriculum as “what happens in the classroom” (Jones, 2012, p.67). Curiosity inspires me to wonder if curriculum can be separated from the space itself when the classroom becomes an integral part of the curriculum of the learners. The tenets of emergent curriculum include designing the environment as it functions to engage children as a safe learning space and contribute to learner’s sense of belonging (Wien, 2014). A carefully designed classroom-curriculum includes careful attention to creating spaces where “children learn they have good ideas—and they can make those ideas real” (p. 34). Cultivating children’s curriculum by creating an aesthetic learning space that embraces culture and stimulates imagination, works to “coalesce into a matrix of experiences that hold children safe during the day –safe to investigate , collaborate, generate ideas, make things and friends, and fall in love with the world and its possibilities” (p.33).

Merging emergent curriculum – becoming- a new role/responsibility:

Reading through the New Brunswick K-Grade 2 *You and Your World* curriculum document, in preparation for my new support role for Anglophone School District West, I find possibilities within and propose a merging of emergent curriculum for the reification of the following promises for learning that considers “curriculum as living and lived experience with/in which learners-teachers are embodied” (Sellers, 2013, p.32):

- The *You and Your World Curriculum* reflects an integrated approach to learning. As many experiences in students' lives are multi-faceted and interdisciplinary, it is important this phenomenon is supported in the education system.
- Through an integrated approach, students are engaged in rich learning experiences and have access to a range of materials and opportunities that enable them to gain knowledge and skills across curricular areas in such a way they are not required to analyze or separate aspects of their learning. Integrated curricula help students appreciate the connections between and across the various subject areas, as well as the connections between school learning and the world beyond school.
- Teachers may also choose during the literacy block to use the focus of a unit from the *You and Your World Curriculum* as the topic for writing in a shared writing or independent writing situation. Several English language arts outcomes at the K-2 level focus on skills and strategies involved in the research process.
- Other curriculum outcomes can be developed within the units of study from the *You and Your World Curriculum* and the topics of the units can be used in literacy and numeracy blocks as the context for introducing and developing particular skills and concepts. (Department of Education, 2005, p. 2-3).

While these words from the document hold promise for honoring and illuminating children's theories and interests, several points do need critical attention. I am curious about the obvious othering of children, singly named in the title as "you" removing any community essence and focuses only on an adult view of 'them' which silences students. If it is truly a document designed for children, is there any opportunity for them to become co-creators of curriculum? Would a title of "Me and My World" be more suitable, or would it further remove the possibility of community by promoting a singular discourse? Just who should be included in a world where science seems to have been postponed until grade three, which is when the title contains any reference to 'Science'. I am also curious how the relationship between literacy and numeracy and science might be connected within the outcome driven standards.

Perhaps reflecting similar concerns to my own, additional resources were developed in 2011 for Kindergarten and Grade Two. They do mention Science in the title, are based on the Pan Canadian program and have cross references to literacy and numeracy outcomes. Posted on the portal under a separate section than the Atlantic science curricula, my future duties include sharing these documents, highlighting the following possibility for teachers; "Science education strives for scientific literacy. It engages students in asking and answering meaningful questions" (You and Your World: Alternate unit, 2011, p.1). Knowing that children are capable researchers and literate beings allows me to recognize that scientific inquiry, problem solving, and decision making is not beyond the grasp of young children.

Each You and Your World document is grade leveled with specific foci, as per the following overview (appendix A):

Kindergarten: Connections (*Students as Individuals, Healthy Lifestyles, Our Senses, Place and Community*)

Grade One: Interactions (*Groups, Our Environment, Healthy Lifestyles, Community*)

Grade Two: Change (*Growth and Development, Technology and Community, Work, Healthy Lifestyles*)

Complexing these choices, I struggle to find circumstances at all ages that don't embrace connections, interactions, and change, and am curious why they are separated and supported at different grade levels. The common topic for all three grades is promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Is a healthy *learning* lifestyle included under that label?

Returning to the value of narrative, I am inspired by the following declarations with potential for liberating plans that lessen children's experiences:

As has been true of our ancestors, we all develop "explanations" about what we observe which may or may not be valid. Once ideas are established, they are **remarkably tenacious** and an alternate explanation rarely causes a shift in thinking. To address these **misconceptions** or alternate conceptions, students must be challenged with carefully selected experiences and discussion.

(Department of Education and Early Childhood, You and Your World –Math-Science resource package, 2011, Grade 2, p. 1)

The choices we make with our 'carefully selected experiences and discussion' open up myriad of paths for learner-educators. Do we choose the beaten path or follow the path of least resistance? Resisting the resistance narrative is imperative in building relationships within a community of learners, untying the knots that "dialogically tie ourselves to that which we oppose" (Richardson, 1997, p.78). Reconceptualizing our

intentions while acting within a document/child/educator assemblage lets us think differently about discourses of resistance, singularity (*'the'* curriculum), and educational experiences/experiencing education, which leads to learnings of “curriculum as a milieu of curricular performativity” (Sellers, 2013, p.32).

Do the tenets of an emergent curriculum, which include aesthetic responsiveness containing the qualities of authenticity, attentiveness, appreciation, and empathy, have anything to offer a healthy learning lifestyle (Wien, 2014)? A search through the You and Your World document uncovers the following aesthetic opportunity for children and educators:

Children are exposed to artistic processes and products in a variety of genres and cultures. They are provided opportunities to create, perceive and communicate through the arts. Critical thinking, analysis and problem-solving skills are developed and applied in practical learning experiences. An appreciation for and experience in those things which constitute the arts adds to a child’s understanding of the world, their culture and community. Children, with an aesthetic sensibility, value culture, environment and personal surroundings. (Department of Education, You and Your World, 2005, p. 7)

An emergent curriculum is possible for learners and can “bridge teaching levels and subject matter” (Krechevsky, et al., 2013). When educators follow the tenets of an emergent curriculum as researchers and learners, they may reconceptualise the pre-school—school relationship in order to privilege the curricula of the child and the learning space over the curriculum document. Emergent curriculum hold potential for blurring and blending an outcome driven agenda if we do the following:

- create invitations for learning (Curtis, 2004; Tarr, 2004) that engage children and honor them as co-creators of curriculum

- develop a cultural climate within the environment, integrate play and work with social, emotional, moral, and intellectual development (DeVries, 2002)
- make learning visible (Krechevsky, et al., 2013; Wien, 2014) inclusive of everyone in the society of learners
- engage in a pedagogy of listening, including visible listening (documentation) (Rinaldi, 2001)
- prepare an aesthetic environment (Wien, 2014; Tarr, 2004)
- re-define curriculum, teaching, and learning (Krechevsky, et al., 2013)
- view children as competent knowledge holders, researchers, and co-constructors of culture and curriculum (Moss, 2013; Wien, 2014)
- engage in pedagogical conversations (Iannacci & Whitty, 2009)

The cross-curricular expectations authorized by the provincial documents lead me to the following possibilities of fluid and multiple means and meanings of what curriculum is, or might become:

Teachers adapt classroom organization and environment, teaching strategies, assessment practices, time, and resources to address students' needs and build on their strengths.

Three tenets of universal design inform this curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to follow these principles as they plan and evaluate learning experiences for their students:

- **Multiple means of representation:** provide diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge
- **Multiple means of action and expression:** provide learners options for demonstrating what they know

- **Multiple means of engagement:** tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation

(NB Visual Arts Curriculum, Alternate Unit (3) – Kindergarten, 2014, p.vi)

Becoming curriculum in a community of learners:

Belonging to a community of learners does not mean that individual thoughts and identities must become dissolved in a homogeneous solution. Our solubility remains suspended as we create safe spaces for dialogue, for learning, for becoming curriculum. My understanding of a ‘safe space’ borrows the following convictions from Richardson’s (1997) “desire to speak outside the discourse” (p.184):

where, minimally, four things happen:

- (1) people feel “safe” within it, safe to be and experiment with who they are and who they are becoming;
- (2) people feel “connected” – perhaps to each other, or a community, or nature, or the world they are constructing on their word processors;
- (3) people feel passionate about what they are doing, believing that their activity “makes a difference”; and
- (4) people recognize, honor, and are grateful for the safe communion (Richardson, 1997, p.185).

Educational encounters in becoming-curriculum must invite children back into the conversation by “disrupting the pervasive scientific orientation of developmental influences [in order to offer spaces that open up...] possibilities for presenting young children as equitably power-full players in curricular performativity, as equitably knowledgeable theorists of adult conceptions of curriculum” (Sellers, 2013, p.23).

The fields of play that shape educational beliefs, inspiration, creations, and celebrations within our self/schooled literacies are powerful reminders that curriculum can privilege/disqualify/support/hurt/include/silence/embrace/marginalize as we complex the complexities of curriculum-making-becoming. Pinar (1974), Grumet and Stone (2000), and Sellers (2008), in Sellers, (2013) delineate curriculum as *currere* with regard to lived experience:

inextricably entwined relationships of living and learning –‘curriculum *is* everyday life. It is a gathering of social practices, of relationships, events, coming and goings, inscriptions and erasures. It is politics, funding, certifications, and social mobility’ [...] Sellers (2008) invents *c u r a* to explicate this contextual inclusiveness in a performative merging of living and learning. (p.31)

Highlighting power-plays of the literacy game:

When considering hierarchies of power that determine/permit/interrupt/inspire/delay learning, Sellers (2013) recognizes the complexity of curricular performativity “[a]s children perform their understandings of curriculum they open up possibilities for enhancing adult views of curriculum, for re(con)ceiving children in curriculum” (p.49). What powers clog this opening of possibilities, perpetuating discourses that turn other ways of thinking/acting/doing/becoming into contested learning opportunities?

The literacy games educators play speak volumes to many technologies of power that pervade educational thoughts and spaces. The following happenings from my classroom are shared as multitude of possibilities for learning; for thinking other-ways about adult views of literacy, curriculum, children, and education. While I follow my

ethical duty to record the narratives to preserve anonymity, there will be recognition from reader-participants.

As I perform nomadic thinking, I remain alert as I wander through wonderings, knowing that

[t]here is no limit to what can be thought, at least for those willing to ‘put their imaginations to work’ (Gough, 2006a: xiv) as thoughts roam freely, wander, flow, outside familiarity towards generating ever-expanding territories of difference and passages of thinking, opening (to) sites of emergence.

(Sellers, 2013, p. 16)

Earlier, Tarr (2004) reminded educator-learners to consider choices for displays on classroom walls. In a desire to create an appealing/acceptable/recognizable “classroom look”, educators using a reconceptualized perspective discover what their classroom designs reveal and what they cover up. As an educator-learner considering how word walls privileged and silenced children and educators, I drew on curriculum expectations to honor the literacy opportunities a word wall could offer when reconstructed as ‘wall talk’; making high frequency words accessible within a print rich environment based on children’s meaningful experiences. Each student had a file folder containing high frequency words and the power to add print of their choosing. Often the choices exceeded grade level expectations, but were based on ability level and interests. I was completely unaware of how this action would play out in my becoming-curriculum. It was refreshing to know my professional responsibilities of completing running records, parent communication, and gathering and turning evidence of learning back to the learner, were supported and completed by staying true to the promises in the documents and the values I held for and of children. When answering the common parent question

“how’s she doing?” in relation to literacy, my answers always stretched beyond defining a child as a letter grade.

The following expectations from the provincial document guided my ethical choices for literacy learning, as skills and concepts must

be taught in an integrated manner so that the interrelationship between and among the language processes will be understood and applied by students. This integrated approach should be based on students’ prior experiences with language and on meaningful activities involving speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, and other ways of representing.

(Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p.2)

Keeping pedagogy of promise in mind, educators researching meaningful literacy practices find the document recognizes that “[l]anguage is an active process of constructing meaning, drawing on all sources and ways of knowing” (Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p.2). Educators wanting to create meaningful literacy opportunities discover the following:

Through the English language arts curriculum, the students described must find their own voice. The learning environment must be structured in such a way that these students, alongside their peers, develop confidence and gain access to information, and to community, and develop competence with using language for real purposes.

(Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p.9)

Students become competent language users by using language. They learn to talk, read, and write by talking, reading, and writing. Providing the time and opportunities for students to practise using language in authentic ways is critical.

(Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p.14)

Acting our parts:

Scene: a conversation between two adults in my classroom. It was the first year literacy leads were placed in schools. Our assigned lead is hesitant as she walks into my room.

Adult lead: (handing me a small bundle of colored papers with one word printed on each paper) I'm supposed to give all the K-2 teachers these sight words, so here you go.

Me: (taking the bundle of colored words) Oh...thanks, what for?

Adult lead: Some teachers put them on their word walls, but I don't care what you do with them (chuckles to herself), you can shove them up your ass for all I care. (laughs out loud and leaves the room).

Scene Two: At the end of that same day, a ~~conversation~~ between two adults in my classroom. Actors: Myself and the parent of a child I had previously taught in Kindergarten who was receiving literacy intervention. The parent does not hesitate as she storms into the classroom.

Parent: (visibly shaken, frowning, and not quite shouting – but with a raised voice) I want (child's name) to get leveled books for homework! She needs two every day and I want her to bring them home every night!

Me: (surprised, as I considered this parent supportive of the learning environment)

Parent: She needs to learn to read at Grade level – she's got to get better and she needs the leveled books (voice getting louder), she has to bring home two every day and practice! (I started to ask her where this was coming from but she stormed out)

The scenes above are set within my own sites of knowing and being, my own shifting identity as educator\learner, and they are minute parts of a much more complex narrative. It is not my intent to present one brief moment as the whole story. Empowered as author to disadvantage my privilege, I remain vigilant to the disproportionate influence that “power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Adichie, 2009).

Within the scene(s), I have juxtaposed literacies of the actors based on the Atlantic Language Arts curriculum content. There are obvious contradictions, therefore, reflexivity demands I consider Harste’s (2014) implications for becoming curriculum with the following message; it’s time to “unpack what they have written in terms of the social, historical, and cultural factors that have been at play to position their voices in certain ways. While no one can write from nowhere, similarly no writing is innocent. We grow by interrogating and understanding our own positionality” (p.98).

Freire reminds us of the liberating factors of combining the word with the world in that “to be literate, in addition to decoding words, one needed also to see how these words operated in the world” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.36). Interpreting phenomena reflects Habermas’ hermeneutically grounded “necessity of seeing reading and writing as practices within larger socio-cultural frames” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.36), and shares the following understanding of how children learn:

- children’s agency is significant and will affect curriculum
- children learn amongst themselves and with the support of more knowledgeable others
- children are subjects with whom teachers need to negotiate

- reading and writing are situated practices involving a complexity of physical, cognitive, affective, and discursive factors (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.36)

Identifying prevented and present effects of power asks educators to think beyond the negative effects, beyond the cause of expectations from the educational regime of power, and identify “*what they prevent, or make unthinkable*” (McNicol Jardine, 2005, p.33). Considering that our practices are “an integral and logical outcome of the social network to which it belongs” (p.33), implores us to ask; who is the beneficiary of education? Are practices serving the needs of politics, society, parents, administrators, or children? What, and who, is left out of the conversation?

Privileging brain research:

“Reading is best regarded as something done by people rather than brains”
(Smith, 2003, as cited in Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.44)

I taught through a period of several years that some colleagues nicknamed the ‘brain-drain decade’; as the majority of professional learning sessions and policy revisions promoted pathologized educational discourse under the authority of brain research. Attention to a single paradigm of learning creates privilege by ignoring all other pedagogical research. Smith (in Heydon & Iannacci, 2008) contests this privileged, biomedical discourse by revealing that “[t]o say the brain ‘looks’, ‘thinks’, or ‘remembers’ is about as appropriate as saying that the stomach enjoys a good meal” (p.44) speaks to the orientation of educational discourse that “constructs difference as a pathology within the child (or parent) and does not acknowledge the role and

responsibilities of social structures or institutions themselves in children's struggles" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.155).

There are many elements in attending to literacy; namely, "the plethora of linguistic, cultural, social, economic, and political factors that greatly influence students' literacy achievements" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.44), which have been silenced under a single, biomedical theory. Blending psychological and socio-cultural approaches to literacies, a "biomedical approach to literacy is a reworking of psychological reading with its insistence on behavioral, prescriptive curricula, and literacy as perceptually based decoding,...the brain as an independent entity for scrutiny" (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.37).

I recognize many schooled practices in our current environment that deserve such scrutiny. Should educators become more focused on learning about organs or learning with people? An injection of medical rationale for teaching and learning is contained in the following curricula:

Brain research establishes and confirms that multiple complex and concrete experiences are essential for meaningful learning and teaching (Caine and Caine, 1991, p. 5).

(NB Mathematics Curriculum, 2007-2011, p. 7)

Research into the links between learning styles and preferences and the physiology and function of the brain has provided educators with useful concepts on the nature of learning.

(Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum, 1998, p. 8)

Complexing my understanding of methodologies that seem to honor children's rights and value informal learning, I connect the documented science-based terms to meaningful

learning I propose in this project. Of course, this renders my previous concern with privileging brain research for policy problematic. The intent is not to declare a winner, as I remain open to possibilities of complexing which complicate “our ways of knowing and doing with children” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p.20) and move beyond a ‘one best practice’ approach, respecting opportunities for varied and changing responses. It is a complication that serves to unsettle singular narratives of education, practice, children, learning, and understanding. Moss and Petrie (2002) further complex policy, highlighting an ethical analysis on how documents program educators to ‘know’ what is best and right for children by “establishing narrative conventions, [...] they confer power upon preferred modes of speaking and judging” (Sevenhuijsen, 1999, in Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 81). Uncovering the hidden curriculum in documents, Moss and Petrie (2002) support “more visible understandings about children and children’s services embedded in these texts. [In order] to ‘develop discursive space’, that is we hope to question the givenness of the dominant discourse, to [...] allow alternative constructions to be considered” (p.81).

Following Foucault’s method of analysis, educators must demand specific descriptions of the “actual, not intended, effects of power; consider that new and different understandings are always possible; identify the prevented, as well as the present, effects of power; and avoid being blinded by theoretical expectations (McNicol Jardine, 2005). I wonder how educators construct and maintain even more pathologizing discourses about children as they prescribe daily interventions to boost the status of academically weak students, or stabilize behaviorally strong ones; often described as being ‘off the chart’.

Moss (2007) proposes “meeting across the paradigmatic divide” where opportunities for dialogue exist, because “[r]ather than such a discourse being regarded as a perspective privileging certain interests, it comes to be regarded as the only true account, the only questions being about the most effective methods of implementation” (p.233), indicating how hegemonic discourses are accepted as truth, and to blur the binaries of methodological either-or, asking instead that the focus shifts to the children.

Do our curriculum documents hold promise for a dialogue that proposes change? The following promise from ‘You and Your World (1998) holds potential for collaboration:

Children participate in decision making every day, even though many decisions are made for them by adults. Explain to children that learning to making good decisions is an important skill in life and that to bring about change a process of decision making is involved.

Introduce students to the relationship between decision making and change by asking questions [...] Explain to children that change often requires developing new rules or changing existing ones. (p. 124)

A new ‘normal’:

A symptom of using a pathologizing rationale for education is the deficit model of classifications that marginalize students. These ‘othered’ children don’t fit within the political ‘norms’ of grade level expectations, and are diagnosed as ‘below’ level, ‘struggling’ learners, or in need of ‘intervention’ to meet the Stepford-style standards of sameness. What messages about learning and knowledge does this language send to children? How does it shape their identity? Foucault identifies techniques used to classify, such as norms, normal curves, and techniques of control such as competition,

rewards, and training in the daily exercises and disciplinary use of time and space in schools (McNicol Jardine, 2005). As educational discourses build about ‘normal’, typical, or average, academic standards, behaviors, and development of students, we need to question who, if anyone, benefits from practices based on fixing ‘sick’ children and conceptualize a new normal.

Truly inclusionary practices do not privilege one over another, whether we are talking about theory or people. A new normal, in critical pedagogy, celebrates ways of knowing that reposition educators’ responsibilities *for* children, to a consideration of responsibilities *to* children (Liebel, 2012, MacNaughton, 2005; Heydon & Iannacci, 2008).

Children’s rights – creating belonging communities:

Education discourses are fraught with rhetoric about children’s rights, experiences, and future potential; yet policy and practices continue to devalue informal learning, existing knowledge, and childhood rights (Kjørholt, 2013; MacNaughton, 2005; Liebel, 2012). Kjørholt (2013) proposes educators “move the focus from children as objects of investments to a ‘politics of recognition’, in ways that value individual dignity and knowledge as constructed by children and adults within local ‘belonging communities’”. Colonizing and pathologizing experiences\programs\exclusions in schools can be reframed when educators (re)define existing notions about ‘children’s rights’ (MacNaughton, 2005; Liebel, 2012).

Reassessing children from targets needing to be developed, to valuing each child as an existing being, is necessary for building critically knowing communities in which

learning becomes transformative (MacNaughton, 2005). Discourses of children being “‘malleable’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘needing protection’” (Millei & Cliff, 2012, p.245), may trouble the *limits* of institutional expectations with regard to children’s rights. Regarding our obligation to children’s rights as protectors “does not empower children through rights, but ‘empower[s] ourselves to intervene in their lives’” (Federle, as cited in Liebel, 2012). Consider the following samples from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child): When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

(UNICEF Summary sheet, CRC)

This doesn’t mean they can tell adults what to do. It reminds educators to listen to the children’s opinions and offer a critical pedagogy.

Article 29 (Goals of education): Children’s education should develop each child’s personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

(UNICEF Summary sheet, CRC)

How much talent and knowledge is filtered out through time managed, scripted programming. How do we respect the culture of childhood? Individual perspectives, intertextuality, and points of enunciation provide endless opportunities for meaning making and interpretation. MacNaughton (2005) reminds us of Foucault’s understanding that “knowledge about the world is inherently and inevitably contradictory, rather than

rational; and consequently, that many different truths about the world are possible” (p.22).

The trouble with children:

Thoughtful inquiry should trouble existing paradigms and reconstruct our assumptions about children and children’s rights. No longer should educators be content with the idea that children, in a minority world, are any less of a person, or not quite fully human (Liebel, 2012; MacNaughton, 2005; Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, Taylor, 2103). Taylor (2013) offers consideration of ‘naturecultures’ and reconstructs the notions of childhood from ‘innocent’ to ‘messy and complex’. Taylor (2013) urges educators to consider the dangers of categorizing and normalizing, and instead, “attend to children’s relations with others when designing inclusive, ethical and useful common-worlds pedagogies” (p. xi).

In this regard, it is not only education that deserves to be decolonized, but children also. Battiste’s (2013) commitment to decolonizing education, while focused on renewing Aboriginal voices, holds meaning for all educators. While I respectfully acknowledge Eve Tuck’s stance that any reference to ‘decolonization’ belongs to Indigenous peoples, I borrow a quotation from Battiste (2013), that holds significant consideration for all educators; “all peoples have knowledge...education is a culturally and socially constructed institution for an imagined context with purposes defined by those who are privileged to be the deciders” (Battiste, 2103, p.159).

Learning from and with ‘others’:

“What is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?” Foucault (as cited in MacNaughton, 2005, p.188).

Lather’s (2007) Deleuzean practices position differences as opportunities “outside binaries...without opposition and hierarchy; it is about community [...where] difference [is seen...] as the very richness of meaning-making and the hope of whatever justice we might work toward” (p.115). All sights and sounds are ‘*texts*’ to be read and have the power to promote dominant ideologies within the institution of education. Considering that many educational texts perpetuate discursive ideas about children as learners, an alternative would be creating an adhocracy, “an organizational structure that relies on ‘innovation’ (Skrtic, 1991, p.182) not standardization. This dependence is based on the adhocracy’s recognition of the mercurial nature of human endeavors such as education” (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008, p.97). An adhocracy honors all voices and offers educators collaborative agency under the expectation of accountability. Perhaps most significant of adhocracy, is the feature of “discursive coupling” (p.97), which offers opportunities for change through common interests when professionals form judgments and reflect “on those judgments in the daily, embodied experiences of its professionals” (p.97). Through critical praxis, an adhocracy allows educator-learners to “make explicit and binding links between theories and practices in actual educational contexts” (p.97). An adhocracy merits consideration from educators interested in building a ‘community of belonging’.

Thinking about learning with, rather than about, children recasts pedagogical purpose. If educators accept stewardship of children with integrity, a shift in understanding ‘responsibility’ will occur. Wien (2008) repositions educators as learners with children, as she supports ‘pedagogy of listening’, via Reggio Emilia philosophy, that honors children as authentic knowledge bearers and theorists, and values play as learning. Vansieleghem (2011) uses Foucault’s analytical tool, care or self, “as an affirmation of one’s existence” (p.322) in her parrhesia (truth-telling); “philosophy with children is not to be understood as something that orients us towards the making of valid knowledge claims, but as an act of becoming present in the present” (p. 322). While difficult to place ourselves in a place of not knowing, educators must focus on how they might also become learners. Vansieleghem (2011) describes how she became a “stranger ...who brought them into a position in which they no longer recognised or knew themselves as learners, but at the same time someone who no longer recognised herself as an expert...For a moment, roles or positions (with their familiar signifiers) no longer had a meaning... this became more important than who we were and what might happen” (p. 325).

Kincheloe, in a Freire Project Interview (uploaded in 2013), described the world of education in terms of its involvement in a “recovery movement”, meaning the recovery of power by the dominant forces, whether it be colonial, gendered, racial, or class power, and how education supports the exclusionary role that such ‘power-wielders’ control.

A recovery movement:

As an educator-learner I must recognize that new and different understandings are always possible and ask myself:

Do I belong to a community that creates constraints or offers fields of play “in which diversity flourishes, ruptures, reshoots, and produces desires to transform the disrespectful, the inequitable and the joyless in children’s lives?”

(MacNaughton, 2005, p. 203)

Recognizing pedagogical practices that follow Foucault’s (1971) hypothesis; “the universality of our knowledge has been acquired at the cost of exclusions, bans, denials, rejections, at the price of a kind of cruelty with regard to reality”, should inspire educators to develop culturally responsive pedagogy. A culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes systems of power that have colonized education, pathologized children, and redefines definitions of children’s rights. Educators must also honor their own learning and responsibility by researching the beautiful promises of curricula, that offer opportunity and hope for shaping a learning environment that will “value and respect all students’ experiences and ways of thinking, so that learners are comfortable taking intellectual risks, asking questions and posing conjectures. Students need to explore problem-solving situations in order to develop personal strategies and become mathematically literate. Learners must realize that it is acceptable to solve problems in different ways and that solutions may vary” (NB Mathematics curriculum, 2007, p. 3).

(Re)searching learning play grounds:

“BELL!!....Run...”

To the playground! There is an undeniable elation from children when educators announce “*it’s time for recess*”.

“If you’re finished your work you can go out and play.”

Considered, by some, as a break from learning, educator-learners researching literacy may complement learning opportunities by incorporating the opportunities the school playground has to offer, as “students’ literacy is shaped by many factors including gender, social and cultural backgrounds, and the extent to which individual needs are met. In designing learning experiences for students, teachers should consider the learning needs, experiences, interests, and values of all students” (Atlantic Canada English Language Arts, 1998, p.4).

It’s a common sight: children (re)straining to get to the school doors not wanting to waste a precious second of recess time before bursting forth into an environment of ~~freedom~~: placed under erasure as reference to the panopticism principle, described by Foucault as a feeling of constantly being watched, used to monitor and subjectify students (McNicol Jardine, 2010). First used in prisons, the urgent, produced need for surveillance, via panoptic and gaze techniques of disciplinary power have been transferred to the institution of schooling.

Under careful scrutiny children have scheduled play time; they explore, communicate, negotiate stumps and rocks, and experiment with traction, speed and friction. Children are free to choose best practices and find the right fit on the playground; to explore

estimating, counting, and measurement as they navigate leaps and puddles; as they build structures and test tensions.

“Get away from the puddles!” ... “out of the water!” ... “put that stick down!”

Students check the strength of various supports, and explore forces of flight.

“time-out for throwing rocks!”

Some children play *nicely* with others; *they stay clean and don’t argue*, while some are privileged with a turn on the costly equipment until their turn is up. They return to the rocks, the dirt, the mud, the snow, twigs and leaves of learning. At recess, children become Batman, and Robin, puppies and kittens, and soldiers and kings. For a moment, they get to be the boss and make the rules. They lie down in the grass and become philosophical about clouds and make up stories. Children invent musical instruments, whisper secrets and study the crawl of a caterpillar, the hurried line of an ant, and blink at the sun.

The limitless playground texts nurture children as problem solvers, inventors, mediators, experts and language learners, keeping a promise that “[t]his curriculum is inclusive and is designed to help all learners reach their potential through a wide variety of learning experiences. The curriculum seeks to provide all students with equal entitlements to learning opportunities” (Atlantic Canada English Language Arts, 1998, p.4)

Playgrounds allow children to be *present in the present* as they participate in a culture of their own doing, of their own making.

“BELL!!....Run...”

There’s always a race to be first in line...even when the door to the playground closes.

Educators must recognize the implications of Paley's message that determines:

There is no downside to a serious consideration of play as the central motivating and learning tool of young children. When teachers say to young children, "Finish your work and then you can play," they diminish respect for the signature characteristic of their students. When teachers pretend that a phonics game is a fair substitute for free, imaginative play, it further dims the differences between "original research" and "applied technology. (Paley, 2009, p.123)

Why are some educators unwilling to take advantage of the playground as a learning space, or so hesitant to incorporate play into their classrooms? What powers prevent the opportunities in play-full activity? Paley (2009) reminds us that "play is, in fact, a complex occupation, requiring practice in dialogue, exposition, detailed imagery, social engineering, literary allusion, and abstract thinking" (p.123). Yet, many educational discourses silence the value of play, a reminder of Harste's (2014) caution that "literacy can be thought of as a particular set of social practices that a particular set of people value. In order to change anyone's definition of literacy, the social practices that keep a particular definition of literacy in place have to change" (p.90). In the playscapes of radical literacy, we must blur the lines between work and play, and focus on suggestions by Jenkins (2014): "on 'meaningful participation' as a central element in the agenda of cultural studies in the twenty-first century" (p.268).

Complexing middle grounds: Rhizomatic lines of flight:

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate

in the transformation of their world” (Shaull, 1970, as cited in Jenkins, 2014, p.268).

When educator\learners reexamine universalizing practices through a participatory culture the focus turns from individualized literacy into a community involvement (Jenkins, 2014). Furthermore, Kjørholt proposes educators “move the focus from children as objects of investments to a ‘politics of recognition’, in ways that value individual dignity and knowledge as constructed by children and adults within local ‘belonging communities’” (2013, p.245).

Play-grounds of inclusive education create communities of belonging; safe spaces where the potential for art and inquiry based learning allow a “curriculum [with] lots and lots of opportunities for students to explore their own inquiry questions using reading, writing, and other sign systems as tools and toys for learning” (Harste, 2014, p. 93). Educational contradictions and possibilities make lines of flight imperative in ways of thinking and acting toward possibilities for students based on ‘what if’, rather than ‘how to’ (Kincheloe, 2008). Knowing that literacy identities are malleable empower learners through play. Becoming curriculum will “cross borders and build links between gaps and nodes that are typically separated by categories and orders of segmented thinking, acting, and being” (Sellers, 2013, p.201). Lines of flight inspire an energy beyond “a formula to ‘fix’ the problems of struggling readers and writers” in becoming educator-learners who “examining the learner’s strengths inherent in his or her personal literacy” (Moore, 2004). A pedagogy of promise remains connected yet separate within the ‘beautiful promises’ of curriculum as human/non-human and remain fluid; a suspension of meaning-making in

(re)shaping identity. A promise, defined as an agreement to do something and with a future of undetermined potential. I complex my notion of ‘promise’ while be(com)ing curriculum through Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) movements of rhizomatic thinking/acting/ being, due to their explanation that “ ‘a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*,... proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing”” (Sellers, 2013, p.11).

Understanding that rhizo-thinking is not finished, as it is best described as continual and uncharted, therefore ‘and...and....and...’ describes rhizo thought as a productive interruption and opens up “endless possibilities for approaching any thought, activity or concept, toward generating and assembling many and various ways of being and operating in the world...rhizo thought is concerned with flow and movement rather than with linearity, fixed endpoints or stable, specific conclusions” (Sellers, 2013, p.12).

Possibilities—generating plateaus:

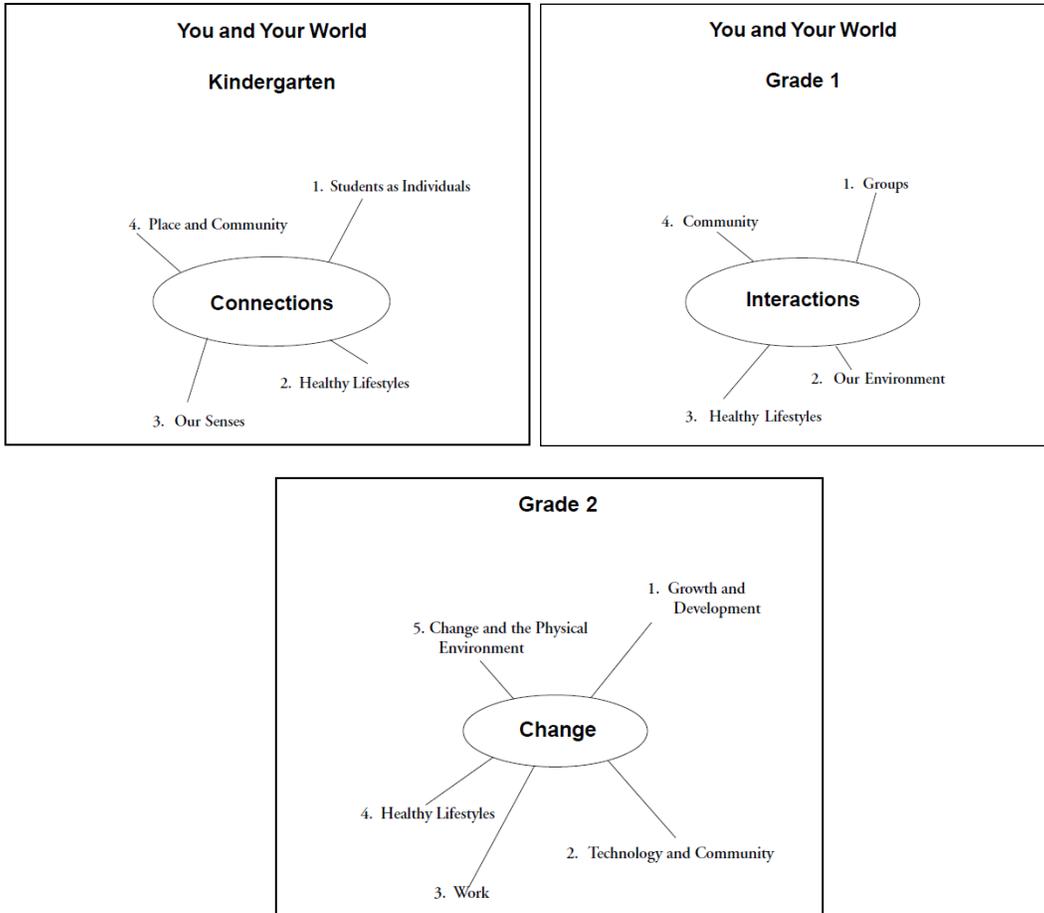
What matters is connectivity, the in-between-ness of flow and movement, rather than points of connection or positions of their location. Recording this somewhat elusive flow calls on amassing of open(ing) of imaginaries, which in themselves defy discrete explanations; how they are understood is very much the reader’s prerogative. (Sellers, 2013, p.12)

As I pause in the journey of be(com)ing, I (re)search many fields of play that shape educational beliefs, inspiration, creations, and celebrations. Working with(in) curriculum, I recognize that rhizomatic connectivity contains elements of disconnected ‘happenings’; unfettered circumstances, thoughts, or actions that may influence and affect

the very nature of one's learning beyond any apparent goal or expectation. Educator-learners upholding the tenets of a Reggio approach find possibilities to privilege educational discourses that nurture an image of children as competent knowledge bearers, foster communication and create spaces for community participation and belonging with pedagogy of listening, invite children and parents into the learning process via documentation, as educators be(come) learner-researchers alongside the children (Moss & Petrie, 2002; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006; Wien, 2008).

Moving beyond binaries, I often mention the necessity of blurring the points on a learning continuum. Certain linearity is implied by my use of the term continuum, therefore, I must reconsider my own collusion in perpetuating the linear thinking/learning discourse. How can we bring another dimension to the volumizing of the educational storylines, where “the collective desires of children are accepted as an important contribution to the classroom and the school system” (Olsson, 2009, in Sellers, 2013, p.23)?...*and* where “Students will need to become designers of meaning with facility in the full range of design elements or modes of meaning making—including visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal meanings—in order to successfully navigate the diversities of texts, practices, and social relations that are part of working lives, public lives, and personal lives in “new times” “ (Siegel, 2012, p. 672)?...*and* where an organic, reconceptualized view of practices/promises/policy/pedagogy bring significant gifts of learning-possibilities for/about/with children.

Overview: *You and Your World Curriculum* Kindergarten - Grade 2



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