Seeking Companionship in the Playful Making: Reclaiming Pedagogy

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Abstract

A Beginning Stitch

It may be the case that anything is potentially art, but in order to be art, there is a requirement, first, of aesthetic intention or regard and secondly, of fashioning in some way—actively making special or imaginatively treating as special. (Dissanayake, 1995, 58-59)
As far back as I can remember I have loved words: reading words, listening to words, looking up words in the dictionary, writing poems, making up stories, that sort of thing. I have also loved making things: crafts, costumes, cards, gifts, music, art, whatever, anything! Regardless of whether I, or others, deem myself to be doing a “good” or “clever” job of it hasn’t mattered to me. (Well, maybe on the surface, but not deep down inside my heart.)

What has mattered is that peace, escape, and happiness can come from complete immersion into this kind of creative process—of playing around with words and things all the while imagining everything as special. It’s like paying a heartfelt tribute to life’s offerings. I believe it is very important to pay homage to the people I have had the fortune to know or meet, and to life’s unfolding events. The act of paying homage—making personally meaningful special things—therefore documents significant pedagogical moments: reflections of my lived experience, beliefs, understandings, wishes and thanks.

I would like to continue by making several things clear. First, within this poetic essay and virtual quilt that I have imagined myself sewing together, I am only just beginning to thread my needle into the outermost surface of some very deep and varied fabrics of thought by many writers and educational theorists. I know that I have not read it all, and that there may very well be some threadbare spots as a result.

Second, the impetus to begin stitching together various works of text and art was shaped by insight gained while reading John Dewey’s “My Pedagogic Creed,” written in 1897. Using Dewey’s experiential perspective on education as the underlay for this virtual piece of cloth, I have also included pedagogically oriented human science approach to lived experience and arts-based research theories and methodologies.

Third, the creed Text/ure that emerges from the process of weaving words and images together is a morphing record of awareness: one that is in a constant cycle of unfinishedness. As well, the virtual quilt (which you will find at the end of this writing) is a sign of thanks paying homage to the highly memorable conversations shared by the cohort group of students and instructors with whom I studied over these last few years.

Fourth, more important than recording and explicating my newly found or rediscovered beliefs in a succinctly prescriptive manner is the opportunity to unmask and even honour the contradictions in my teaching practice—dissonance between what I think, say and do—that have emerged as a result of a self-study action research project. To ignore the contradictory struggle, is to prevent myself the chance to grow, to improve my teaching (the reason why I began action research in the first place).
Whitehead understands the incentive for beginning a personal study to come from experiencing oneself as a 'living contradiction'; that is, feeling dissonance when we are not acting in accordance with our values and beliefs. (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996, 59)

Every word and image herein has been shaped by an interest in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry—interpreting experience—with an appreciation for Van Manen’s point of view:

So a post-modern perspective alerts us to the mistaken tendency to confuse pedagogy with text or its reference, with process or content, with its medium or its end. Pedagogy is neither one nor the other; rather it constantly and powerfully operates in between. (1990, 146).

Arts-based research for the artist/researcher/teacher—a/r/tography—has also strongly directed the representations of my understandings in this creation: ...the integration of text and image is an act of borderland pedagogy, a way of sharing a third space between knowing and ignorance. (Irwin, 2004, 33)

The entire construction of this writing has equally been inspired by Dissayanake’s soulful theme of “making special”: In my view, the biological core of art, the stain that is deeply dyed in the behavioral marrow of humans everywhere, is something...called “making special” (2003, 42).” To me, the addition of making special unearths an ecological and primordial nature in meaning making and expression without Artist/non artist labels. It also helps, for me anyhow, to explicate how we are driven to molding our experiences with our bodies as a way of expressing and recording, subjectively, our values and feelings. So, to this end, I have also included poetic writing as an essential and sensual component of meaning making:

...it [poetic writing] is experimental, consciously manipulating semiotica in speech and writing for meaningful effects in an effort to say new things, old things in new ways, special things about Being-in-the-World.
(Brady, 2004, 628)

Combined, these processes—hermeneutic phenomenology, a/r/tography, making special, and poetic writing—all appear to effortlessly overlap, attract and interact with each other. They seem to meet quite happily in a cozy in-between space by teasing out each other’s inter/textual and inter/textural tendencies into a tension-filled dialogue. They also appreciate reflective
living inquiry into meaning, utilize a linguistic and semiotic orientation by relying on the arts to reveal what text alone cannot—and vice versa—and an experiential in nature.

As well, the act of stitching seems to seamlessly weave its way through and bind them all together. In other words, where I am at a loss for words in traditional paragraph style, I am relying on the visuals and poetry to speak for me. At least, this is the notion I am hoping will be humoured as I proceed.

... a/r/tography is about each of us living a life of deep meaning enhanced through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what we hope to achieve. (Irwin, 2004, 36)

My Pedagogic Creed: Text/ure

I have chosen to play with the word texture as my creed’s title for many reasons. There is the literal purpose that the definition supplies, but also I believe that pedagogy—specifically that of companionship—revolves around the capacity to play. And, I believe that the informal experience of ‘quilting’ with others (reading and responding to the authors’ works cited within this space) relies on play in order to make varied pieces (thoughts and experiences) part of a greater whole. Therefore, I see an ornamental border in the shape of a quilting frame enclosing this space: a frame made from a kind of wood that is solid and deeply rooted in etymological curiosities and yet pliable to new rings of growth, understandings and change.

My etymological reading of “text” includes the Latin word “textus,” meaning “thing woven,” and the Proto-Indo-European language base of “tek” meaning “to make.” Combined with the definition of the suffix “ure,” meaning “the act of,” “text/ure” then means, for me, the act of making something woven and encourages both the weaving of text (thought into words) and textures (experience into artifacts). Overall, the title represents the metaphorical sense I had embraced in the making of Text/ure, my pedagogic creed:
An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns—but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a textus, which means cloth.1

Why bother about pedagogy? Why have I spent this time making my own creed?

Few educators have developed a written philosophy of education the likes of John Dewey’s philosophical treatise ‘My Pedagogic Creed,’ written around the turn of the century...Yet it can be quite helpful to our research and development to record our beliefs...

John Dewey, an American educational reformer and a psychologist, has written many documents that have had a large and long-term impact on the education system of today. The experiential perspective—education is based on the life experiences of the child—was founded on his philosophical and progressive educational beliefs. I have chosen to take a look at “My Pedagogic Creed,” first published in 1897, because an embodied dissension of sorts signaled to me that it was imperative to revisit my pedagogical philosophy from an historical view point.

Reading Dewey’s creed felt like the invitation my heart and soul had been desperately waiting for, and provided the impetus to start looking more closely at the yarns of thought I had spun during the past fifteen years of teaching.

Most of us function with an implicit philosophy/making this explicit enables us to bring the past into congruence with our current understandings and commitments. (Arhar, Holly, and Kasten, 2001, 67)

As I read Dewey’s creed, I found myself imagining that he had passed to me, whilst in conversation from the other side of a patchwork quilt, a seam ripper. As I read, I felt myself slowly loosening the old threads of my practice, and cutting away those twisted fibers that were either too tight or no longer useful. As I read, I felt Dewey’s supportive nod: “Go on,” he said, “take it all apart.”

Somehow, the experience of reading his creed supplied me a quiet dialogic support and a creative source of energy. No longer hemmed in I found my...
emerging from the midst of my praxis in appreciation of the old and new understandings, despite the dissonance between life lived and ideal action. And just when I was ready to throw it all away and start anew, my body cried out asking for some of the scraps to be reclaimed. It was then that I realize that I had to intertwine the old with the new, in the making of my quilted creed, in order to honour the richness of experience. That, my body told me, is life, in all its guts and glory.

In self-study, recognizing the dissonance between beliefs and practice is fundamental to action. (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, 7)

Dewey outlines within “My Pedagogic Creed” his viewpoint that the individual and the school are part of a larger unified community life that is controlled by societal situations and conditions. Within that structure, education has moral and ethical implications and is a process of continual participation in life experience based on the child’s interests. Social life, progress, reform, reconstruction, service, and growth are all a part of a greater social consciousness. The teacher’s role is to interpret and translate the experiences of the child in order to determine how a child can receive the best help and be of greatest service to the community. Dewey then concludes by stating that the duty of the teacher is to display right or godly character—a special servant set apart from the rest of society.

Most importantly, though, from out of all these points he makes throughout his document, one thing stands out to me: I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living... As a result, I have organized my thoughts and experiences around a pedagogical process—a pattern I have noticed—that is based on the natural rhythms in a twenty-four hour period living: dawn, day, dusk, dark, and dream. Each phase begins with inspiring quotes that represent “stops” in my habits of thought—a spiritual presence being in the between and noticing that I am nowhere except where I am—brief narrative, and a research poem that helps to shed light onto my growing understandings throughout my action research.

Sleep—Quilt image by Christine Schaufert
Pedagogical Dawn

I believe that interests are the signs and symptoms of growing power. I believe that they represent dawning capacities. Accordingly the constant and careful observation of interests is of the utmost importance for the educator.3

Really, it has not yet dawned on us that education is something that women and men discovered experimentally, in the course of history. If it were clear to us that our capacity to teach arose from our capacity to learn, we would easily have understood the importance of informal experiences in the street, in the square, in the workplace, in the classroom, in the playground, among the school staff...” (Freire, 2001, 47)

The birth of my only child two summers ago, physically and spiritually, was a significant pedagogical dawning: an early morning awakening that marked the beginning of a necessary conversation. What had once been quiet playful questions during the pre-natal months reshaped into a unique opening of lived dialogic and artful inquiry: does becoming a parent make one a better teacher? What is it like to be a teacher or a parent? Is there something vital to the experience of mothering? Time away from the school setting while on maternity leave fortuned me the chance to seriously reflect as I lived through the experience of these queries.

Between the lived experiences of mothering, remembered experiences of teaching, and re-entry into the workplace last fall two more things dawned on me. First, I had always been interested in the informal process of making, that I was encircled by a special assortment of things all somehow related to each other: handmade items and my new family. Second, having the capacity to be an understanding person underlines my capacity to be a loving wife, mother, teacher and colleague: a lesson learned from my baby.

less than two weeks to go…
there’s a baby in there? holy cow, eh?
hands roam the bulging belly like a foreign landscape.
this is it. oh my god…who are you?
we can hardly wait to meet you,
even though we’re a tad bit nervous.
Dad said you’re going to teach the world a lesson.
I said no, just your parents.
what do you think?
can you help us to understand?
Pedagogical Day

"Spirituality gained is no different than the ball game you play, the work you do, the car you drive, the love you make. If you constantly regard Tao as extraordinary, then it remains unknown and outside yourself—a myth, a fantasy, an unnameable quantity. But once you know it, it is yours and part of your daily life." (Ming-Dao, 1992, 16)

"...foundation of a good community is a daily life that is joyful and happy." (Hanh, 1991, 89)

I enjoy those days that just seem to take care of themselves. Nothing extraordinary can be said of the day—just that it seemed to happily carry on like any other day in the midst of family, friends and colleagues. No major complications, and yet somehow simply amazing that it happened at all. I believe that pedagogy is like that, like an ordinary day in the company of others. But even so, pedagogy is a process that cannot really be defined as this or that kind of a day or experience, as van Manen indicates, (1990, 145) but rather as an experience that lives between the worlds of duality and dichotomy. More so, pedagogy is a process of becoming, and of coming together in the sharing of those experiences, which includes a dialogue, an exchange of ideas, and the capacity to listen to those with whom we spend our time. I have come to realize that pedagogy requires daily practice and focused attention towards what I say, write, believe in, and practice in my life.

"...from the pedagogic point of view, Lives were not a bad idea at all...Although serious, creative literary work had been frowned upon...In these Lives, which were often elaborated into small novels, it found a permissible means of expression. ...while writing these Lives some of the authors took their first steps into the land of self knowledge..." (Hesse, 2002, 115)

The etymology of pedagogy comes from Latin’s paedagogus and Greek’s
paidagogos. Both of these words include the concept of an adult—slave—who spent their time in the company of children before, during and/or after school. Therefore, I have chosen to capture my understanding and experience of pedagogy to include that essential notion of companionship, which Smith succinctly states in this way:

To find myself I have to lose myself, otherwise death comes in the most vainglorious guise, death by a thousand Self achievements that leave me isolated in the cage of my own subjectivity, bereft indeed of pedagogy, which means, basically, companionship.

(Smith, 1996, 11)

In other words, to be pedagogically oriented in this world is to acknowledge, listen to, and have compassion for those in our midst. Another lesson learned from my daughter whose company is a gift.

i wrote again today
in my head
while I was
vacuuming.
the drone is conducive
to focus for me
and nap time,
in the baby back-pack,
for her.

in my head
i typed,
“are my poems
really poems?
do i dare share them
with others?”
whatever...
they're for me.

whack, whack,
babble, babble.
awakened sounds coming from
my back-pack baby.

as she chews on my
sweat-top hood,
kicks, burps and pretend coughs,
i reckon she's writing
her own kind of poem.
i think it's called,
"eeeeeeeeeeeee!"
but i don't think she cares
what i think it's called
because now she's telling me
it's time to
get off my back,
time to set her free.
for me, that's what
writing does.

Web—Quilt image by Christine Schaufert

Pedagogical Dusk

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.4

If one's shadow goes unexamined, one does not uncover the real nature of one's projections. If I reflect on my thinking, feelings, or behavior toward others, however, I may uncover the contents of my shadow. (Uhrmacher, 1997, 319)

As daylight draws to a close, an interesting light flutters into the space between day and night: twilight. Twilight smiles and fills herself with shadows, little one. Twilight smiles and fills herself with shadows. (James, 1999, no pg. number) Twilight feels like butterfly kisses, warms the cockles of my heart, and gives everything a kind of golden glow. This cue that the evening is nigh is a reminder for my body to unwind, relax, and return to the freshness of an earlier life. I am slowly learning to step back and put the day's events in perspective during this special time and take stock in what is important—my relationships and my health. And during this setting of the
sun an imagined conversation of sorts comes into play, a private dialogue, with the voice of my shadow.

I used to think that my shadow’s purpose was to hide the poison: secret thoughts about others, or so I had myself convinced. I have come to realize upon closer inspection—and by living in the shadow for awhile—that many my feelings were not about an absence of light in others, but a reflection of my own lightlessness. Honouring this insight has fortuned me a new perspective: to see the light and potential in everything—the light that outlines the shores of where I want to be. In the shadow is the smile—a shady place of refuge, contemplation, and hope—an inseparable dialogic support and a critical companion. Therefore, I have also borrowed Stanley Aronowitz’s comments about Freire’s dialogic pedagogy that adds a layer of critical theory to my pedagogical interpretations:

...both participants [learners] bring knowledge to the relationship, and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each knows and what they can teach each other. A second object is to foster reflection on the self as actor in the world in consequence of knowing. (Freire, 1998, 8)

My Shadow

my shadow spoke to me today
from the nearby corner where it lurks
odd, though, because it was shining
or reflecting light from some other place

my shadow smokes sweet smelling cigars
and drinks scotch faster than ice can melt
suspicious cock-eyed vision and whimsical horns,
the burly eyebrows dare me

with a poignant mole and stained teeth,
sloppy lips spittle the poison
venomous words that have no direction
steering my ghost ship that’s longing for the shore
Pedagogical Dark

Night. You are mother of all. You existed before all. You are the background, the fabric, the whole underpinning of the universe. In you is abstruse mystery, darker than the deepest water, blacker than the sleep of sleeps. (Ming-Dao, 1992, 363)

In a dark time, the mind begins to see.

Having difficulty sleeping can be the result of many things. Dehydration, eating too late, not exercising enough, the mattress being uncomfortable, bringing thoughts of work to bed, and worry can all manifest themselves in physical ways and disrupt my rest. But, when I eliminate these stress factors in my life, there is still something else lingering in disaccord. I have come to realize that my body has another voice beyond the shadow, the voice of my night mother. She has been whispering to me for ages, but I am not ready to listen.

One black night, though, she is finally able to reach my dulled consciousness and tell me what I already know, deep down, but just wasn’t ready to admit:

I do not practice what I preach, sometimes I pretend to be what I am not, fight a battle of expectations versus reality. Discovery: contradiction:

...for someone interested in transforming his or her own teaching practices, then, the critical element is not a well-articulated position statement, but capacities to notice contradictions in one’s own actions and to interrogate the origins of conflicting impulses. (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000, 42-43).

Even within previous drafts for this writing, I catch myself writing that I happily embrace and live in the between space and then I turn around and realize that I have been struggling to do so:

I perceive myself to be neither permanently here nor there, but somewhere in between and living in the creative tension of shifting eclectic possibilities.

I used to be comfortably situated in the between space. Gratefully, reflection has afforded me a certain insight. I have been struggling to live peacefully in such a story, a holistic world, these many years.
Cringe. No wonder there is no peace at night in such a story.

Recognizing that my body has been searching for the whole, and that my attempts to control my life prevent me from doing so, has helped my mind begin to see anew. A space for healing opens—a space which welcomes happiness and honours the struggle of the human spirit. I hope that I will able to make good use of such a gifted opportunity as my family and I grow together. *I feel as if I spent all my years here asleep, happy enough, to be sure, but unconscious. Now I feel awake and see everything sharply and clearly, indubitable reality.* (Hesse, 2002, 181)

**My Grade Ten Annual Quote**

> “Wherever I am, I am there, So wherever there is, That’s the place.”

I didn’t get it then, but I didn’t need to. Now I understand. Certain strength comes from this kind of awakening.

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**Recursion—Quilt image by Christine Schaufert**

Pedagogical Dream

> *When you sleep, some insist that the world as you know it ceases to exist. The world exists because something inside of you asserts that it is so. When awake, are you then no longer dreaming? Or are you just dreaming another dream?* (Ming-Dao, 1992, 152)

> “Should we be mindful of dreams,” Joseph asked. “Can we
interpret them?” The Master looked into his eyes and said tersely: “We should be mindful of everything, for we can interpret everything.” (Hesse, 2003, 80)

I have learned so much over these last few years of study. What has intrigued me is the recursive nature that comes with the testing—or putting into practice—those new understandings. At first, it annoyed me that I am back where I used to be, learning the same old thing, again: a struggle with feeling powerless, but more a game with perfectionism (such wasted energy). I know that if I want to teach my daughter well, I will have to let go of some old habits that will get in the way of her ability to be mindfully present—my habits of worry, control, and negative interpretations about life events. I call these habits my “nightmares of analytical thinking,” which surface out of inadequate sleep.

Although I want share my curiosity of the world in all its biological, aesthetic and interpretive nature, I am wary of teaching my daughter how to be analytical in an unproductive way. I want her to be able to dream her dreams, live her own her life, be malleable to experience, develop her voice and make a difference.

When we are deeply in touch with the present moment, we can see that all our ancestors and all future generations are present in us. Seeing this, we will know what to do and what not to do—for ourselves, our ancestors, our children, and their children. (Hanh, 1991, 73)

I know that I, too, will have to practice with her if I want us both to be able think forward in a new way while happily living in the space between.

In/re/flections

the space between...
and s p a c e
between the inbetween.
that third space—a thirdness
a third telling—the third way forward
shorthand for between is /b/

in/re/flections...
thoughts mirrored
a flicker or the lingering sensation after it,
synaptic rapid firings, continuous streams,
serene escapades into deep past and future wells,
full and emerging buckets that pour
the lived world’s experiences
into present time or escape time.
this time, that time, some time, upon a time.
a 3rd:00 time when

perception imagination judgment memory language ←merge

simultaneous happenings
of thought, decision and learning
within real time (tick tock)

in/re/flections...
a little made up word,
a mind-tool that helps to
see beyond vision,
   bend away, inward, forward
the spiraling reflection of cognition

a reverberating state of awareness,
a backwards flexing of coming closer,
a recursive straying from lineality,
a fractal biological process...
   ...we cannot escape.

Ying Yang — Quilt image by Christine Schaufert

An Endless Stitch

But, really, who cares about pedagogy? Well, I do, I have to: my choice to teach demands that I must care for children, and escort them along their life paths; my choice to teach begs me to explore, share, and honour the process of living with students; my family reminds me that the relationship between us, and others around us, is what matters. My sense of pedagogy, therefore, involves celebrating life in its making, in all its possibility and uncertainty, and embodies a cycle of awareness which comes from being escorted through my waking hours of light and dark dreams of sleep by soi greater force that be.
Making things, special things, then, is the most he/artfelt way for me to participate in a never-ending dialogue with myself and others about spirituality and companionship in whatever form that may engage us. So, have planned for the images and words within these pages to represent a beckoning out of the status quo in all my teaching and into a conversation that needs to be constantly happening and monitored: monitored, supervised, or accompanied in a playful dialogic pedagogical way.

...non-discursive artistic material is also commonly used for phenomenological human science. Of course, each artistic medium (painting, sculpture, music, cinematography, etc.) has its own language of expression. (Van Manen, 1990, 74)

If I manage to follow through on any one thing within this poetic essay and virtual quilt, singly, then I am happy enough. If I produce something that will be able to return to as a pedagogical reminder of where I want and need to be, then I am delightedly pleased. If I have created something that invites others into a space where they can join my unfinished conversation about pedagogy, then it is a bonus, as I believe all of this writing and making is fine, first and foremost. In this, I am selfish: I collect, read, make, and write to improve my praxis, but I also understand that the capacity to act upon new understandings has a ripple effect on others. As a result, I must give life to its lessons my full emotional attention, as my emotions are like a thermometer giving a constant reading of what is healthy in my life and in the lives of those around me.

Meaning is body centered, anchored in the senses, and frequently about body conditions—a measure of how we are at any given moment, a platform for interpreting the “stuff” of our lives... (Brady, 2004, 624).

I remember reading somewhere, once, that emotions are simply bodily feelings—adrenalin coursing through the veins—and that it is recommended to simply sit and feel and name the emotion rather than act on it. Perhaps remember out of context—perhaps the act of such a meditative sitting is only for extreme emotions that can cause harm to oneself or others, or for those who are truly enlightened? The perspective I am coming from, in mentioning emotions, though, has to do with celebration. I cannot contain my joy, nor hide my grief. To not pay homage to the extraordinary feelings the ordinary moments of life is to disdain the gift I have been given. And that is where the arts come in.

The arts, making special—call it what you will—give credence to those emotions that are sometimes considered inappropriate, fanciful, private or extreme. Making meaning in whatever form that may be is a process documenting life, a method, a way of being, which, reduced to its simplest
form, is a biological, organic, and spiritual presence in this world. At least, this is my understanding and interpretation of the conversations I have had while stitching together the many quotes and artifacts I have selected to us in the virtual quilt.

In the name of companionship, I would now like to invite you to join me for awhile in further conversation amongst woven symbols of thought and experience, word and artifact. I share with you my quilted and interactive pedagogic creed called *Text/ure*. There is no right way of playing within this virtual space, no instructions, other than clicking on the quilt blocks—the images—in whatever sequence you so desire in order to reveal quotes that inspired the making of the artifacts, or quotes that paired nicely with the images. And so, I put my needle and thread down, for now, and share with you what my hands and heart have been busy making special. *From the manner in which a woman draws her thread at every stitch of her needlework, any other woman can surmise her thoughts.*

**Quilt legend and corresponding quotes**

Mouse over the quilt images to see the corresponding quotes.

Quilt images compiled by Christine Schaufert
Endnotes


References


**About the Author**

**Christine Schaufert** is an elementary general classroom and fine arts teacher. She is interested in exploring the arts with children as a way to enhance student learning. Her love of making things has come from her upbringing (thanks Mom and Dad!). Her desire to continue making things supported by her family (thanks Daddy and Vienne!)