Two poems:
running with the moment and Cement Boots

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when it is a sunny morning and you notice dark clouds outside the window and it starts to rain at the same time the light is shining in your eyes and you invite your class out to “see if you can find a rainbow” and when you see one you all stand there in space and time and the here and now in silent awe and look at it and ask questions like What colours do you see? and How do sun and rain connect to make a rainbow? or whatever else comes to mind and then everyone goes back in the room and you offer your students a secret code to remembering the colours of the rainbow and ask more questions when you hear a seven year old boy defined on the autism-spectrum talk about the opposites and the in-between that he saw in the sky and then later that afternoon when the resource teacher comes to your room to read The Three Kings to your class you hear the heavy rains and turn the lights out and the rain turns to hail and your students are so quiet at the open windows because they are listening to the thunder and counting for lightning and asking, “Where’s Thor?” and they run out to scoop handfuls of hail and bring the ice balls in for you to feel and smell and tell you that God has sent a message to be thankful for your home and all that you have including the warm cup of hot chocolate that you’ll get after you walk home.
with your Grammy and then at the end of the day a mom tells you how today’s rainbow was the first rainbow her three year old ever saw and she was glad she didn’t rush off to do all of the things she needed to do because on the walk home her son watched a cement truck and saw an oil slick in a puddle and said, “Mom look, there’s my second rainbow,” and the mom is telling you this with tears in her eyes…

And at 3:00 you run to the parking lot to tell your principal what happened and you show her the writing your students did in their science journals after the rainbow and you say, “This is why I don’t leave a day plan on my desk for you to sign, because I never know what is going to happen and where we are going to go and who is going to lead and who is going to follow,” and she smiles, and hands you a pink slip that says, “I’ve always wanted to do what you do. I’ve always wanted to let my students be, but I’ve never had the courage,” and you smile back and say, “It’s because of the courage that you have to let me be that I can do what I do.”

Nicole Thibault, (December, 2006)

(Written in response to classroom magic and William Pinar’s calling for the re-understanding of curriculum as “currere”)

Dedicated to Susan Johnsen, the principal who came, when I as a teacher, just couldn’t hold my breath any longer… the principal who finally showed up for a true game of follow the leader… and for the first time, led me to believe that I could be a principal too…

and to feel that I might even want to be…

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Cement Boots
Last night you dreamt
of Tolstoy
and the lack of
awareness
or consciousness
that he didn’t even
know he had.
The absence that
Vygotsky saw,
when he wasn’t even
looking.
Or feeling.
Or knowing.

And woke wondering,
if you think you are
seeing things
in your classroom
and in your students
that aren’t really
there.
Seeing the things that
someone else looking for
would shake their head
and say,

“I heard you are great,
but I see nothing.”

And after you hear that
whisper from
the darkness,
you go to the paper cupboard
to have yourself some
premium vodka,
quadruple distilled.
And lick the shot glass
clean.

You mix up
some cement.
Pour the cement
in your boots.
Your Blahnik boots
that you paid
big teacher money for.
Pull them on,
noticing how dangerous
you look
in the full-length mirror.
The mirror
by the classroom door,
where the kids go
to see themselves
when they draw
self-portraits.

You walk out to your car
and get in.
Heading north to the bridge,
over Fraser’s middle arm.
The #2 Road Bridge
that wasn’t there
when you grew up.

And think about jumping.

But realize in that moment,
as you stand so weak
on the side of the bridge,
balancing precariously
in high heels,
looking down at
the muddy waters
flowing below,
catching the inch of
fishnet that peeks
out from under
your skirt,
in the corner
of your eye,
that it doesn’t matter
what someone else sees,
or doesn’t see.

What matters is,
what you as the teacher
know,
about yourself,
and your students.
And what you know is
that they love to be
at school.
That they love
to be
at school
with you.

So you jump
off the edge,
bridge side.
Get back in your car,
driving pedal to the metal
south to school.
Admire yourself once again
as you walk through the door.
Knowing that those boots
aren’t coming off
because the cement has set.

And the kids say,
“Teacher you look WoW!”
Asking,
“Were those boots made
for walking?”
And you say,
“No, they were made
for jumping.

But I remembered you.
And I came back
to be here
when you walked
through the door.
To see that light
in your eyes.”

And to hear you say,
“I am so happy.”

And to hear you say,
when I ask you,

“Why are you so happy?”

“Because I am at school.”

“Because I am at school, with you.”

Nicole Thibault. May 2006

(Adapted from an e-mail written in response to a cutting comment heard in an adult learning environment, and the voice of Hope who meets me at the door every morning when I walk into our classroom. And just to assure, I have never considered taking my life over my job or used alcohol, other than brandy filled chocolates, to get through my workday. These metaphors are expressions of self-doubt and attention to external agendas that have silenced my inner teacher. Poetry as inquiry is a practice that holds the gift of bringing limiting programs and spiritual cramping to consciousness for healing.)

Dedicated to Maureen Dockendorf who was the first teacher to ever say to me, when I was twenty-six, “Thank you Nicole, for being you.”
About the Author

Nicole Thibault is a teacher waiting to become a principal for S.D. #43, Coquitlam, and on-leave as a doctoral student from Simon Fraser University’s Philosophy of Education program as she engages in an epistemological project of de-schooling herself… she is also “Mama” to Juliette and Ruby, who illuminate the invisible.