

RELATIONS TO LIVE BY

MORGAN GARDNER

ABSTRACT:

In 2017, I experienced the ARTS Pre-Conference of the Canadian Society for Studies in Education as a welcome refuge. As participants, we gathered to feed our minds, bodies and spirits via arts-based, contemplative practice. It became a day of (re)visioning academic life. In gratitude for this day, I share two poems from my research journal supporting my own (re)visioning of research. academic The poems meditations on the small and large wonders of nature and their connection to the wealth of our fragile, mysterious lives. They explore our immeasurable interconnectedness to all of life and the life-giving relations that can beignited as we awaken to these connections. Such kinds of poetic inquiry have expanded and deepened my understanding of voice and relationality within the context of research on democratic and social justice educational change.

Bio:

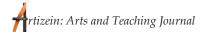
Morgan Gardner is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Her participatory action research (PAR) and collaborative self-study projects focus on partnering with marginalized youth and low-income communities confronting social-educational barriers in the goal to foster democratic and social justice change in high school. Engaging arts-informed, narrative and contemplative approaches play key roles in her research and teaching activities. Transformative education, place-based learning, eco-pedagogies, social justice and strengths-based approaches are also incorporated in her work. She has authored the book, Linking Activism: Ecology, Social Justice and Education for Social Change, co-edited the volume, Narrating Transformative Learning in Education and published numerous articles in educational journals. Dr. Gardner is a co-recipient of the R.W.B Jackson award from the Canadian Journal of Education for best peer-reviewed paper and the Canadian Network for Innovation in Education award.

Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, arts-based, contemplative practices have guided and energized my research partnerships with urban youth and economically disadvantaged communities seeking voice in educational change. These practices have sown healthy gardens of transformative learning and research. In turn, our possibilities for imagining relations we want to live by in and outside of school have been strengthened. As sites of educational innovation and nourishment, arts-based contemplative work continually supports

me to (re)envision my understandings and practices of research, teaching and social change. These practices offer me critical and tender openings to dwell in wonder(ing) and gratitude for daily encounters in our human and more-than-human world, encounters that are often overlooked in fast-paced academic environments.

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Red Winter Jewel

The cardinal landed like a red jewel against the silky landscape of freshly fallen snow.

It began poking the tender cloth with its beak, looking for seeds in the undergarment of dark earth.

It pierced the snow, this way and that way, like a needle marking a fabric trail.

I watched in wonder as this radiant red morsel etched a snow poem, in offering, as return.

And I asked myself, how often am I imparting a poem in gratitude for the nourishment of my own wee life?

Everywhere to Land

I have dwelt in the curves of dogberries,

placed both hands in milkweed down,

and lingered in gardens of forgotten branches.

There is everywhere to land.

I have traveled by red leaf canoe,

tangled through eddied streams,

and stretched like a yawn in fields of rust.

There is everywhere to land.

I have harnessed spirit on rising tides and rode through clouds of mist.

There is everywhere to land.

I have been a pebble picking itself up a thousand times

so I can throw myself back into the stream.

I have feasted on nature's immeasurable worth all along the trail.

I have caught life and released it,

caught it and released it again.

There is everywhere to land.

