

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 academic research. The poems are 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 be ignited 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
eddy 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.

