

Exploring a Curricula of Visual and Poetic Aesthetics

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Abstract: In this article, I explore the role of visual arts in shaping the future direction of the literary arts in my pre-service teacher education classroom. I outline a cross-curricular curriculum by exploring a theoretical and practical relationship between visual and poetic aesthetics. Drawing upon the imagination, we are able to become critical storytellers as we engage in ekphrastic poetics, that is—a poetic response to a form of art. Ultimately, we modify and expand on the practice to include responses to photography or works of art—that are themselves aesthetic responses.

Key words: Arts; Education; Imagination; Ekphrastic Poetics; Curriculum.

As I consider the visual and literary arts in contemporary pre-service teacher educational practice, I begin with Maxine Greene's (1995) reminder that: "the role of the imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected" (p. 28). With an eye on imagination, Greene is asking us to be open to such unexpectedness that can arise through an engagement with the arts. In taking up Wiebe and Snowber's (2012) question about the importance of the role poetic practice plays in creating opportunities for teachers and students of art education, I outline a curriculum that explores the relationship between poetics, visual arts, and teaching and learning. For this special issue on art education and the poetic, the editors specifically ask: "What role do the visual arts play in shaping the future direction of the literary arts and written expression in general?" It is my hope to offer an answer to this question by outlining the ways in which I theorize the importance of creative curricula with an emphasis on poetic practices that merge with/in the visual arts. What follows is an overview of what informs my understanding of the importance of poetics and arts education in contemporary educational practices.

On Poetry, the Arts, and Aesthetic Response: Curriculum as Aesthetic Text

The writing of this article is informed by theoretical and poetic readings, dialogues with graduate students, elementary and secondary school teachers, and university colleagues. I teach in a two-year Bachelor of Education program in a rural Ontario university. I have the opportunity to engage pre-service teachers in the visual and literary arts. My interest in poetry as a form of aesthetic response is inspired by Tom Barone's (1993) understanding that: "...strong poets participate in critical storytelling" (cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 574). Poetic engagements become sites for learning and self-identification. Simultaneously, poetry performs through a powerful interplay between form and content and has the capacity to move its readers. Yet, in the 21st century classroom, poetry often continues to play second fiddle to fiction. Jonathan Culler (1997) writes:

Once upon a time, literature meant above all poetry...since the 1960s, narrative has come to dominate literary education....People still study poetry – often, it is required – but novels and short stories have become the core of the curriculum. (p. 83)

It would seem that within the discipline of language arts education, poetry itself can still be marginalized. With a great interest in juxtaposing the literary and visual arts, I am reminded of Greene's (2001) belief that: "The arts will not resolve the fearful social problems facing us today; they will not lessen the evils and the brutalities affecting the modern world. But they will enhance the consciousness of possibility if we learn how to attend" (p. 47). By bringing together the imagination, being open to unexpectedness and critical storytelling, we can open ourselves to learn how to *attend* through aesthetic response practices. In my writer's workshop as part of my larger course, aesthetic response activities include, but are not limited to, a) attending to form and content by copying works of art—through a process of imitation, b) stream of consciousness responses—using timed-writing techniques, and c) creating aesthetic texts—as a pedagogical site for learning.

There is a unique relationship between the reader and the poem, providing a location as pedagogical site to explore the human condition as a form of learning and meaning-making (Barone, 1993). Bring to this a visual form and it opens up an opportunity to explore William Pinar's (1995) theorization of "curriculum as aesthetic text" (p. 567). He writes:

[T]o understand the role of imagination in the development of the intellect, to cultivate the capacity to know aesthetically, to comprehend the teacher and his or her work as inherently aesthetic: these are among aspirations of that scholarship which seeks to understand curriculum as aesthetic. (p. 604)

Further, he believes that: "curriculum comes to form as art does, as a complex mediation and reconstruction of experience" (p. 567). Pinar (1995) builds on his work with Madeleine Grumet (1976) in their seminal text, *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, and developed an interpretation of curriculum from the Latin: *currere* – literally meaning a course to be run.

For Wolfgang Iser (1993), aesthetic responses to works of art have to do with the staging of ourselves, the limitlessness of self-cultivation, the disruption of epistemological and ontological assumptions about human relations as an exercise of courage and an interruption of the familiar to bring something anew (p. xviii). For example, engaging with poetry contributes to a sense of learning and imagining differently by provoking questions about the ways in which aesthetics can play a role in educational practices. It has been my experience that evoking curriculum as aesthetic text through aesthetic response activities offers legitimate and exciting ways to strengthen and rejuvenate pre-service English language arts education.

As a curricular practice, aesthetic response is conceptualized as a site for learning and self-identification that can inform epistemological understandings by examining relationships among cultural aesthetic forms and practices, representational methods, and experiences of visual and poetic engagement. For Iser (1978, 1989, 1993), aesthetic response involves a dialogical relationship between text, reader and interpretation without seeking out validity. Rather, aesthetic response investigates assumptions that lead to questions. A literary text such as a poem is "verbal" and "affective" as a reader both receives and composes the text. Similarly, David Abram (1996) draws upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) influential text, *Phenomenology of Perception* in his understanding of the embodied philosophy of language, by suggesting that human language is "profoundly carnal" and rooted in our "sensorial experience of each other and the world" (p. 74). Although words carry referential and conceptual levels of meaning,

words continue to inhabit phonemic “affective” meaning, which translates into meaning beneath the level of thought and of words themselves—rooted in felt experience summoned by sounds and rhythms of language—a kind of song (Abram, 1996). For Abram (1996), “communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gesture by which the body spontaneously expresses feeling and responds to change in its affective environment” (p. 74).

Pinar’s (1995) conceptualization of curriculum as aesthetic text evokes the imagination and emotions as affective meaning involves an evocation of the senses. The affective is an individual experience that evokes the senses in personal ways. I believe that by evoking the senses learners are also evoking the imagination, which in turn evokes an empathetic emotion toward others. By empathizing with others, learners may move toward social change or at least begin to conceptualize a theory and practice of social change because the senses enable learners to experience (even if only briefly) a different perspective and begin to act on their empathy. Clearly, my understanding of aesthetic response draws deeply on the philosophical readings of Maxine Greene (1995), Wolfgang Iser (1978), and curriculum theorists, William Pinar (1995), and Tom Barone (2001), as I begin to envision poetry as narrative, as an encounter with the human condition, and other epistemologies through critical storytelling made of visceral and poetic metaphors. I have begun to discover language that enables me to write about and document a process of teaching and learning through poetry.

My aesthetic responses are not limited to texts. In fact, works of art in museums and art galleries are also cultural objects that are important to aesthetic response practices. The vivid and sometimes haunting colors used in paintings may also move their viewers. Colour is linked to learning and as anthropologist Oliver Sacks (1995) reminds us: “...is a sense that interweaves itself in all our visual experiences and is so central in our imaginations and memory, our knowledge of the world, our culture and art” (p. 33). The original meaning of the word art included scholarship and learning. The word art literally meant skill attained through study and practice and was originally associated with learning the schools of rhetoric, dialectics, logic, and grammar. John Dewey (1934) understood the importance of art in learning. He wrote:

Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in new experiences of life. (p. 104)

Similarly, Greene (1995) reminds us that often while engaged with the arts, the unexpected happens as interpretations of cultural forms such as paintings reveal the genesis of the poetic in human cognitive development. Correspondingly, Pinar (1995) states:

The arts, and curriculum experienced aesthetically, provoke questioning that supports sense-making and the understanding of what it is to exist in the world (Greene, 1978). This undertaking, in Greene’s words, must allow a turning back to the stream of consciousness, to the contents of one’s experience, and a critical grasping and transformation of the moment. The task is to see colors for the first time, each time. The task is to experience “color” as a verb, not a noun. The task is for the teacher to be a verb, not a noun, and to express such an intensity of perception and feeling to her or his students. To understand the curriculum as aesthetic text questions the

everyday, the conventional, and asks us to view knowledge, teaching and learning from multiple perspectives, to climb out from submerged perceptions, and see as if for the first time. (p. 605)

If literary forms provide learners with an opportunity to pay attention to self-other experiences, they also involve imaginings, perceptions, assumptions, questions and epistemologies. Aesthetic response involves an investment in objects, interpretation, and critical storytelling. If poetry has the ability to address the complex relationship between language and culture, it can also often open doors to dialogues around difficult knowledge that offer legitimate and exciting ways to strengthen and rejuvenate educational practices. In particular, reading and writing poetry play an essential role in my teacher education classrooms. Engaging with poetry contributes to a sense of learning and imagining differently, addressing questions about the ways in which ambiguity, aesthetics education, and ecological and social equities play a role in educational practices.

I turn to Adrienne Rich's (1993) text: *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* and explore her chapter entitled: "Woman and Bird" in relation to my ekphrastic writer's workshop about learning to teach, model, and write poetry in relation to the visual arts. In her chapter, Rich writes about how she spied a Great Blue Heron poised on a low roof of the house next door. The heron suddenly flapped out of sight into the air. The image of the heron compelled her to try to confirm her "naming" of the bird by spending time in a book titled *A Guide to Pacific Coast Ecology*. As she poured over the pages of the book, she found names of birds such as: "...Veiled Chiton, Hooded Puncturella, Dusky Tegula, Volcano Barnacle..." and so on. She became acutely aware of the naming of birds. She writes:

...these names work as poetry works, enlivening a sensuous reality through recognition or through the play of sounds...to evoke other worlds of meanings... human eyes gazed at each of all these forms of life and saw resemblance in difference – the core of metaphor, that which lies close to the core of poetry itself, the only hope for humane civil life. The eye for likeness in the midst of contrast, the appeal to recognition, the association of thing to thing, spiritual fact with embodied form, begins here. (p. 6)

Rich links what is at the core of poetry with what is at the core of metaphors, namely, "resemblance in difference." It is through my aesthetic response to works of art that I am transformed, changed through transaction, even if only momentarily. It is through my aesthetic imagination that writing becomes a place of possibility and transformation. Similarly, Susanne Langer (1953) reminds us: "that illusion of life is the primary illusion of all poetic art" (p. 213). I have begun to conceptualize poetry as something that is integral to my work as a pre-service teacher educator – "as a construction of something" in relation to spending time in someone else's thinking. Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us that: "Poetry is the way we help give names to the nameless so it can be thought" (p. 37). As I consider my educational practice, my identity emerges from remembered and lived experiences. I re-visit the past in relation to the present, in order to come to a new understanding achieved through self-constructed narratives.

According to Jerome Bruner (1990), the lives and selves I construct are outcomes of this process. Assuming that the self is located in cultural-historical situations, as well as in the immediate consciousness, the process begins with the self as a storyteller (narrating one's identity), based on remembered and lived experiences. The process continues through a presentation to the other, all of which is achieved through language.

As narratives require interpretation, Bruner (1990) argues that interpretation is a joint production between the self and the other throughout the meaning-making process.

Part of my writing technique involves copying texts and studying forms in other poets' work, which enables me to begin to put myself in the thinking of other writers. Greene (1995) writes about the artist-poet who helps us to put ourselves in the place of others through the imagination. She understands the importance of empathy in the formation of identity. Similarly, Laurel Richardson (1992) believes that by writing about the other, we rewrite ourselves. If poetic practice is linked to cognition, epistemologies, ontologies and curriculum, then it becomes generative and enables readers and writers of poetry to empathize with others and consider how aesthetic forms organize our experiences in language arts education classrooms. I model and participate in classroom writing practices and incorporate responses to works of art. I encourage a dialogue about difficult events by questioning our own assumptions about human development, identity and knowledge construction. It is important to take the time for aesthetic response activities in pedagogical practices. It is equally important to consider terminology such as "form," "process" and "aesthetics." Eisner (1991) suggests that aesthetic categories need to be created to frame curriculum questions in the manner that are generative because aesthetic curricular inquiry in teaching may provide for a heightened consciousness and aesthetic experience.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 1989) states that *inquiry* is an: "act of inquiring" or the seeking of information by questioning (p. 1444). By engaging Pinar's understanding of "curriculum as aesthetic text", it is possible to evoke Barone's notion of "strong poet as critical storyteller" (cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 574) in the pre-service classroom. Eisner professes that teachers in the arts and education programmes must have a command of their subject matter. My courses provide a writing workshop wherein I must "make judgments during the teaching process based on qualities discerned during the course of the process" (cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 581). Eisner calls for a balancing of "automacy and inventiveness" through "routinized behaviours" in the classroom. Habitual practices allow for what Eisner terms as: "the unanticipated and the creative" in teaching practices (cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 581). In other words, as an educator, it is important to create the conditions that evoke the imagination in pedagogical settings as described by Eisner (Kulnieks & Young, 2014). In my writer's workshop, we engage in writing exercises along a continuum of inquiry into learning. Eisner believes that it is the teacher who must model an environment that provokes the possibility of surprise in teaching and learning. What follows is a variation on ekphrastic poetics through aesthetic response practices in my pre-service classroom.

On Pedagogy and the Poetic and Visual Imagination: Ekphrastic Poetics

Ekphrasis has origins from both Latin and Greek—meaning to "describe." "Originally: an explanation or description of something, esp. as a rhetorical device. Now: spec. a literary device in which a painting, sculpture, or other work of visual art is described in detail." (OED, 3rd ed. online, 2016). Ekphrasis, as a literary depiction of visual art—conceptualized in this article as a pedagogical site for aesthetic practices in response to a visual work of art in written form—has been a form used for centuries. This form resurged in 1967 with Murray Krieger's *Ekphrasis and the still moment of poetics* followed by *Ekphrasis: the illusion of the natural sign* (Krieger & Krieger, 1992) with a renewed understanding of ekphrasis as an engagement with natural signs. More recent examples of ekphrasis as theoretical study include Benton, 2017; Dolin, 2017; Denham,

2010; Heffernan, 2004; Kennedy, 2013; Mather, 2017; and Mitchell, 1994. However, since my interest lies in the practice of ekphrastic poetics, more specific examples include Young, 2006 & 2012; Kulnieks & Young, 2014; Hovanec, 2016, Moorman, 2006, Prendergast, 2004 & 2006; and Wiebe, 2015. It is through an enactment of ekphrastic poetics that I juxtapose visual and literary arts—providing possibilities to engage in critical dialogue. In my English language arts pre-service classroom, we draw upon ekphrastic poetics as a curriculum of aesthetic response, engage the imagination, and learn to “attend” through poetry as critical storytelling (Barone, 1993; Greene, 1995; Pinar, 1995).

While there are numerous themes that we address in our ekphrastic writer’s workshop offering culturally responsive ecological writing practices while exploring visual arts, I include three examples. We consider “hope and fear” via a response to the events of September 11, 2011; “mental health and well-being” via a response to Vincent van Gogh’s work of art *Starry Night* together with Don McLean’s song-poem, *Vincent*; and “childhood and the natural world” via an exploration of identity-formation and nature. All of these themes connect to the Ontario curriculum. Throughout our writing journey, I am reminded of Georgia Heard’s (2016) encouragement of engaging in authentic writing experiences to explore feelings, vulnerabilities and wonderings in her practical approach to writing. What follows are vignettes outlining my pedagogical practice.

Vignette 1: Theme: “Hope and Fear”. I had the opportunity to attend the *International Conference on Language and Literacy* held at Hofstra University just three days after the events of September 11th, 2001 (also referred to generally as the events of 9/11). Many conference participants were unable to attend for various reasons due to the 9/11 attack. Some were understandably not willing to travel to New York City such a short time after 9/11. I recall that on September 15th, 2001, we experienced an intense journey as we crossed the Canadian border into the United States. Security was extremely high and there were military tanks moving along the highways heading toward New York City. It was an extraordinary time as Louise Rosenblatt, Maxine Greene, and Ken and Yetta Goodman were presenting on language and literacy to a small group of us. It was also an extremely somber time as vigils were shared at the end of each day to honour the front-line workers and those who perished due to the tragic events. As it was a very small conference gathering, my colleague and I were honoured as special guests from Canada as the majority of attendees were from the United States. Before returning to Canada, we toured New York City and found that many people had begun to respond the events in aesthetic ways. I found a doorway where a collection of artwork had started to grow. I took a picture of the artwork and returned home. Later, I was able to share my photo and engage learners in a “variation” of an ekphrastic poetic response practice. As I was unable to bring my students to New York to witness the art work, I photographed the responses by New York City residents attempting to come to terms with the 9/11 attack. By spending time ruminating in the presence of a photo that captures aesthetic responses to the events on September 11, 2011, in New York City, I wrote “Jubilation Thrives” (2002).

In the ekphrastic writer’s workshop, I share my experience after the events of 9/11 and the responses to intense hope and fear in New York City via the arts. As a variation on ekphrastic poetics, we “attend” to the photograph of works of art left in a doorway. I share my poem, “Jubilation Thrives” and we continue with a stream of conscious writing activity. Students are then asked to re-write the nouns, verbs, and adjectives in a poetic

form. We become open to dialogues about how the arts can help in times when we may experience fear and provide possibilities of hope and jubilation.



Figure 1. Artistic Response to 9/11, New York City (Young, 2001).

Jubilation Thrives

Tuesday September 11, 2001

Today, we became *noticers* in a different way than before. We search for meaning, discern trivial acts through notional lives. We turn to artistic practices, interpret tragedy through works of art, embrace a poetics of relation, a way of knowing the world through aesthetic forms. We write, hold on to each word, comfort is *momentary*.

Wednesday September 12, 2001

Globe and Mail headline: *Jubilation Dies*.

Jubilation: public rejoicing, a loud utterance of joy in face of silence: as silence wraps tongues to frozen poles, a new language washes over America and the world, colonialist seamless discourse lingers, moves beyond an attack of terrorism, to an act of W-A-R.

From the Oval Office the President says to his people and to the world:

*we saw evil
the very worst of human nature
and we responded with the very
best of America
through responsible justice
security precautions
protection of the people.
the resolve of our
great nation is being tested
make no mistake
we will show the world
we will pass this test.*

Test: a word generally used in educational discourse appears in the political arena and weaves a horrific paradox. John Dewey once asked: *What is the promise of education?* Poet Carl Leggo might reply: *Education promises poetic rumination that involves courage of the heart.* We reply: *We need poetic intervention not retaliation.* As history returns to structure its present, language moves in waves across lips and screens as we repeat the words: *War on Terrorism.* And in New York City, poets reply to horror in poetic forms along city streets, painters seize on canvas what language fails to capture, left in doorways, on walls, moments encapsulated in time, as we learn to make a relationship to an absence.

We (re)interpret our memories and histories in relationship to the images of the burning planes and buildings, construct new selves in relation to the old, the dead, we turn to books, sculptures, paintings, poetic intervention that grips us from inside, a pedagogy of surprise full of unfolding gifts that push boundaries through artistic inquiry, a work of art woven out of complex theories bearing witness to difficult knowledge, life-histories of stories that could not otherwise be told.

Poets respond void of language all their own with unyielding sadness below silent skies. Landmarks, which no longer help children find their way, crumble into memory. Yet through the arts:

Jubilation thrives.

(Young, 2002)

Vignette 2: Theme “mental health and well-being” We begin with art education as we explore the life and work of Dutch Post-Impressionist western artist, Vincent Willem van Gogh and his struggle with mental health. We engage in a dialogue about the ways in which mental health has not been outwardly addressed in society until recently. We consider that many children and adults suffer with depression and mental illness at some point in their lives. We also raise questions about why so many humans are reluctant to talk about their mental issues. Whereas if they had diabetes, they would take insulin medicine and talk about it as part of their larger general health. We consider how as pre-service teachers, we can engage in difficult dialogues and support students by bringing in school counselors and mental health professionals to continue the dialogue. As part of the experience, we consider the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013) draft

document, *Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-being*. It states:

Making curriculum connections where appropriate provides relevant opportunities to build capacity among students to promote their own and their peers' mental health. Students have opportunities to learn about different aspects of mental health and emotional well-being through the Ontario curriculum. (p. 8)

We further consider relevant guides and resources that are applicable to helping teachers engage in dialogues about mental health and well-being across the curriculum. Poetry and the arts provide one possibility. We consider the power of song-poems such as in Don McLean's *Vincent*. James Carlson (2010) writes:

The song-poem, in combination with poetry, novels, non-fiction, and other genres, is one important genre for teachers to use to encourage students to be critical-edge readers, trying on multiple perspectives, asking questions not only about the texts but also about the advantages and disadvantages offered by various genres and points of view (p. 69).

In our ekphrastic writer's workshop, we listen to Don McLean's song *Vincent* while looking at a large collection of van Gogh's paintings, beginning with *Starry Night* enabling a juxtaposition with McLean's song. We copy out stanzas and respond to each line as we listen to the song-poem and spend time ruminating over van Gogh's famous painting, *Starry Night*. In particular, we link the lyrics to mental health as van Gogh suffered with severe depression and took his own life.



Figure 2. *Starry Night*, Van Gogh (Wikimedia Commons).

Vincent

Starry
Starry night
Paint your palette blue and grey

Look out on a summer's day
With eyes that know the
Darkness in my soul.
Shadows on the hills
Sketch the trees and the daffodils

Catch the breeze and the winter chills

In colors on the snowy linen land.
And now I understand what you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen
They did not know how

Perhaps they'll listen now.

Starry
Starry night

Flaming flo'rs that brightly blaze
Swirling clouds in violet haze reflect in
Vincent's eyes of China blue.
Colors changing hue
Morning fields of amber grain

Weathered faces lined in pain
Are soothed beneath the artist's
Loving hand.
And now I understand what you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
Perhaps they'll listen now.

For they could not love you
But still your love was true

And when no hope was left in sight on that starry
Starry night.

You took your life
As lovers often do;
But I could have told you
Vincent
This world was never
Meant for one
As beautiful as you.

Starry
Starry night
Portraits hung in empty halls

Frameless heads on nameless walls
With eyes
That watch the world and can't forget.
Like the stranger that you've met

The ragged men in ragged clothes

The silver thorn of bloody rose
Lie crushed and broken
On the virgin snow.
And now I think I know what you tried to say to me

How you suffered for your sanity
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen
They're not
List'ning still
Perhaps they never will.

(Don McLean, 1971)

Vignette 3: Theme: "Childhood and the Natural World". In the latter-half of the second decade in the 21st century, humans are aware of the environmental degradation of our planet more than ever. We are at a crucial time when plastic materials are floating and covering kilometers of oceans, endangered animals are on the rise, water pollution is at an all-time high, and biodiversity that all life depends upon is under threat. Environmental Educator, David Orr (1992) writes:

The failure to develop ecological literacy is a sin of omission and of commission. Not only are we failing to teach the basics about the earth and how it works, but we are in fact teaching a large amount of stuff that is simply wrong. By failing to include ecological perspectives in any number of subjects, students are taught that ecology is unimportant for history, politics, economics, society and so forth. (p. 85)

We take up Orr's call to address ecology literacy in educational settings as we consider the importance of *sitting in nature* surrounded by bird song and trees. We discuss how humans spend a good portion of their lives indoors. We explore how Ontario public

schooling is very much an endeavour that excludes natural spaces. The majority of class time is spent inside with a few opportunities for students to engage with nature during field trips. Richard Louv (2008) understands the importance of nature in childhood as he dedicates an entire chapter in his book, *Last Child in the Woods* to: “The Genius of Childhood: How Nature Nurtures Creativity” (pp. 86-98) He writes:

Nature—the sublime, the harsh, and the beautiful—offers something that the street or gated community or computer game cannot. Nature represents the young with something so much greater than they are; it offers an environment where they can easily contemplate infinity and eternity. A child can, on a rare clear night, see the stars and perceive the infinite from a rooftop.... (p. 98)

By attending to the wonder of nature, in the ekphrastic writer’s workshop, we spend time outdoors writing about our earliest memories of being in the natural world. We muse upon the natural world around us, the trees, the river, the animals and plant world. Storytelling about our experiences with nature is not new. These traditions date back to time immemorial as many Indigenous peoples’ identities are inextricably linked to their natural environments. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from traditional Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Elders about the importance of nature and storytelling (see Kulnieks, Longboat & Young, 2013), and I was recently introduced to *Activating the heart: Storytelling, knowledge sharing and relationship* (Christensen, Cox & Szabo-Jones, 2018), which is a wonderful collection that, in part, uses storytelling to explore relationships to place.

As I muse upon my own memories of my childhood in nature, I recite a poem about my son playing in *Emerald Woods* beyond the meadows. It is where he is carefree to explore through his senses.

Emerald Woods

In the forest where he dreams
branches rustle under little feet
leaving imprints along the trail

he scampers in tattered sneakers
playing about in Emerald Woods
tracing pathways
strolling amid the mist
in a marsh that never sleeps
where layers of moss run deep
covering fallen trees

he moves among the shrubs
twirling and giggling
falling down laughing
as song birds softly hum
a slow waltz in cherished gardens

little eyes sparkle in errant rays of light
as he skips among the flora and fauna

and winds whisper sweet lullabies
wrapping him in a sense of wonder

(Young, 2014)

Ekphrastic Poetics: Pedagogical Implications for Visual and Literary Arts

At the beginning of this journey, I was responding to Wiebe and Snowber's (2012) inquiry into whether the visual arts can play a role in shaping the direction of the literary arts. Aesthetic response presents challenges to the academy because of its apparent lack of permanence, fluidity of meaning, multiple interpretations, lived experience and alternative forms of narrative. Theorizing "curriculum as aesthetic text" does not offer answers to questions (Pinar, 1995). Rather, aesthetic response practices enable dialogues about difficult topics by investigating human life, learning, the imagination, teaching, and the possibilities of generating new questions that concern ecological and social change. By sharing curricular practices that set out to help learners attend to and evoke the imagination (Greene, 1995), we become poets as critical storytellers (Barone, 1993). We address themes such as hope and fear, mental health and well-being, and childhood and the natural world by bringing together the arts and the literary in juxtaposition through a variation on ekphrastic poetics. Evoking curriculum as aesthetic text can help us create and tell the stories that we need for advocacy for ecological and social justice. Modeling and engaging in an ekphrastic writer's workshop in pre-service education provides a venue for exploring personal, historical, and conceptual relationships with humans and the natural world. It is my hope that bringing together the visual and literary arts may help deepen understandings of the role of ecological and social justice in teaching and learning.

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