

Relational Pedagogy: The Foundation for Success in the Classroom
How Do I Enact a Relational Pedagogy in the Early Childhood Classroom When the
Current Emphasis is Often on Academic Achievement?

by

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I pursued the question, how do I enact a relational pedagogy in the early childhood classroom when the current emphasis is often on academic achievement? Along this journey, I was confronted with words like creative dissonance and *currere*, words I had never heard before but later turned out to help me tremendously on my journey of inquiry. Throughout my narrative, I wrestle with the idea and the name of classroom management, the thought of not relying on rewards and punishments, survive a cognitive earthquake, build a new foundation based on relational pedagogy to replace my old and cracked foundation based on behaviorism, and propose the replacement of the term classroom management with classroom engagement. With the introduction of classroom engagement comes the opportunity to stop teaching to the test and to engage students through inquiry-based learning. Throughout this quest, I constantly found myself grappling with new ideas, turning over old ideas, only to create new discoveries of my own. I have learned so much about myself, so much about my pedagogy, and I know the learning will not stop here. I look forward to these new adventures in teaching and in the inquiry of life!

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Relational Pedagogy: The Foundation for Success in the Classroom

If someone asked me why I wanted to become a teacher, my answer would be for the relationships and love of learning that I will instill in my students. Teaching is my passion and something I have wanted to do since I was a little girl. I still remember reading to my “class” of stuffed animals, always faced with the dilemma of which way I wanted to hold the book. While my passion and love for teaching hasn’t changed, the dilemmas I will be facing as a real teacher have.

Today, it appears, classroom management and standardized testing have dominated teaching. With the focus in the classroom seemingly turning towards rewards and punishments instead of building relationships and the emphasis on academic achievement measured by high-stakes standardized tests instead of focusing on engagement in the classroom, I am fearful that I will lose my passion for teaching. What constitutes academic achievement has changed over the years:

Academic achievement is now limited to a single measure: the standardized test. As pressure mounts for all students to meet a specific standard on these assessments, more emphasis is placed on the preparation needed to meet this goal at the expense of all else. (Barrier-Ferreira, 2008, p. 138)

I believe academic achievement shouldn’t have to come at the expense of all else, but how?

On my journey to becoming a teacher, I have been met with eye-opening changes and ideas that have shown me how to get to where I want to go as a teacher, but in a way that I was not anticipating, cracking the foundation upon which I had planned to build my classroom. I was faced with the choice to continue down the path I had anticipated that was familiar or to explore the path of new ideas and information that was unknown.

As Maria Piantanida, Patricia McMahon, and Marilyn Llewellyn (2019) put it so eloquently, “When we encounter new experiences or unfamiliar ideas, we tend to accept those that fit easily into our stories and reject those that contradict them” (p.152). Confronting such change and embracing new ideas can be overwhelming:

At times the pace and enormity of change can all seem too much. So we tell ourselves stories about change, not just about its inevitability, but our reaction to it. For some, both the pace and nature of change threatens a sense of a stable and orderly world. When change overwhelms an individual’s capacity to adapt and adjust, it may be viewed as a dangerous, disorienting disruption of “the way things are supposed to be.” Unable to keep one’s bearings, one can feel out of control and, in turn, anxious, angry, and frustrated. Within this story, change is an enemy to be resisted and advocates for change may be viewed with suspicion and resentment. A contrasting story frames change as exciting, as progress, as a source of opportunity. Rather than evoking dread, change is embraced with a sense of wonder and adventure. (Piantanida, McMahon, & Llewellyn, 2019, pp. 154-155)

This is my story about change and my reaction to it.

On this journey of inquiry, I encounter moments of cognitive dissonance, where I am given a choice, to view change as a disorienting disruption leaving me to feel out of control and anxious or to view change as exciting and a source for opportunity leaving me to feel a sense of wonder and adventure. The choices I make will help me to grapple with what I feel is the biggest dilemma and most important question I will face in teaching: how do I enact a relational pedagogy in the early childhood classroom when the current emphasis is often on academic achievement?

Chapter 1: Cognitive Dissonance – To Accept or to Reject, That Is the Question

*“The ultimate ignorance is the
rejection of something you know nothing about
yet refuse to investigate.”
-Dr. Dwayne Dyer*

Classroom Management Is Shaken by Cognitive Dissonance

Like many teachers, I know one of the biggest dilemmas I will face is “classroom management.” I think all teachers know that, in order to teach effectively, there must be some sense of order in the classroom. I, too, want a classroom that is free of chaos and confusion. I sometimes feel, however, that I am faced with the dilemma of how to bring order to the classroom while staying true to my passion of teaching by engaging in quality relationships with my students. I put classroom management in quotation marks because I have discovered that, thanks to Alfie Kohn, I no longer like to use this familiar term. Yet, whether I like this term or not, it is still something I must face as a teacher. So how do I figure out something that is now hard for me to even say? First, I should explain how this great inquiry started.

It was my first semester at Carlow University. I was enrolled in Curriculum and Assessment with Dr. Rae Ann Hirsch and Designed for Differences with Dr. Keely Baronak. One of the assignments for Dr. Hirsch was to pick any of Alfie Kohn’s books to read, as he would be coming to campus to give a presentation. I had no idea who Alfie Kohn was, but both classes required that I attend the event. I was excited about this because I love learning anything about education, and with this being my first semester, I was eager and ready to start uncovering

classroom management strategies that would guide me in the classroom. Well, I *was* excited until I saw one of the titles of Alfie Kohn's books, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*. (Insert braking noises here.) What?!? What do you mean *trouble* with incentive plans? Incentive plans *are* my plan for classroom management! Sheer panic set in. My heart rate increased, my palms became sweaty, and I started breathing rapidly, so I quickly steered myself in another direction, not even acknowledging that book as an option. Phew, crisis averted.

What I didn't realize was I had just experienced a cognitive earthquake, an earthquake called cognitive dissonance, which shook the foundation of rewards, incentive plans, and praise upon which I planned to build my classroom. As if they were in my mind, Piantanida et al. (2019) describe exactly what was happening with me:

Cognitive dissonance can engender anything from mild to extreme anxiety—never the most pleasant or welcome feeling. So we have choices. We can avoid to the greatest extent possible any experiences that might challenge our stories of self. (p. 152)

Pause here. There are other choices that follow, but those will come later. For now, I definitely had anxiety, it definitely wasn't pleasant or welcome, and I definitely was avoiding to the greatest extent possible experiencing anything that might challenge my story of self and what I had thought I wanted as a teacher. To voluntarily choose a book that challenged everything I wanted to use in the classroom was not what I had in mind, so I decided to pick a different book.

I settled on Kohn's not-so-scary-sounding book, *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, because community is what I want in my classroom, and it included the word "discipline" so I figured there had to be some mention of classroom management strategies that could help me. The first page of his introduction sounded promising. Kohn (2006) decided to

visit extraordinary classrooms and see what it was these teachers were doing that made their classrooms so extraordinary. Yes! This is what I am interested in! Kohn (2006) goes on to say:

As it turned out, I rarely got the chance to see these teachers work their magic with misbehaving children because it seemed as though the children in their classes almost never misbehaved...These classrooms were characterized by a chronic absence of problems. (p. xi)

I was on the edge of my seat! I was so excited to read about the classroom management strategies these teachers were using in the classroom to promote such a lack of misbehavior.

Cognitive Dissonance Aftershock

Then, I turned the page. Kohn (2006) realizes it is not what the teachers *are* doing, it is what they are *not* doing:

They are not concentrating on being effective disciplinarians...discipline actively interferes with what they are trying to accomplish. It took me a while to figure that out and to be able to explain why I believe it's true. That's what I attempt to do in this book, and the result is likely to be not merely controversial but deeply unsettling to many readers. (p. xii)

(Insert braking noises here, again.) Wait, what?!? Deeply unsettling? No classroom management strategies? The panic I had felt earlier was starting to set in again. I was being hit with an aftershock of cognitive dissonance. How was I supposed to experience this euphoric classroom environment that lacks misbehavior with no tips on classroom management, the very foundation upon which I was building my future classroom? I started to see cracks forming in this foundation I thought was so strong, but I chose to ignore them.

However, it was on this page that things slowly started to change for me, albeit completely against my will. I was confronted with what the term “classroom management” truly implies. “The *raison d’être* of discipline or classroom management is almost always to secure children’s compliance with adults’ demands. Thus, it is assumed, teachers have a responsibility to get and maintain control of their classrooms” (Kohn, 2006, p. xii). Therefore, I have come to no longer like this term. Since reading this, I have never been able to look at the term “classroom management” the same. This little bit of dissonant information I was willing to accept.

I finally made it through the book, and it was, as Kohn put it, “unsettling.” I felt myself becoming less anxious and, instead, angrier and more frustrated. I wrote questions all throughout the margins like, “So what do I do instead?” and “How do I effectively accomplish this?” Looking back at what Piantanida et al. (2019) said about one way to view change explained how I felt about Alfie Kohn, “...change is an enemy to be resisted and advocates for change may be viewed with suspicion and resentment” (pp.154-155). He was advocating for a change I wasn’t ready for, causing me to view him with suspicion and resentment. I began to feel threatened because I started to understand what Kohn was saying and even worse, it was supporting a relationship-based classroom, which is what I wanted. So why was I so resistant to this? Why was I choosing to reject ideas that might help me develop the relationships I want with my students?

My cognitive dissonance continued to be tested, and I didn’t know how to handle it. I was choosing the second response that Piantanida et al. (2019) refer to when faced with cognitive dissonance; “Failing this, we can take steps to minimize the anxiety by rejecting the dissonant information” (p. 152). Well, I can say with confidence I was minimizing my anxiety by rejecting

Alfie Kohn's ideas after reading his book! Knowing that I would be seeing Kohn in person and I would be listening to his beliefs and ideas for a couple hours was bringing on that panic and anxiety once again. Needless to say, I wasn't super thrilled to go see Alfie Kohn in person when he presented on campus. However, I had no choice, so before I knew it, there I was, faced with Alfie Kohn and faced with my cognitive dissonance.

Classroom Management Begins to Crumble

It was February 14, 2019, Valentine's Day, a day for love. Yet, I was feeling anything but love as I sat in my seat waiting for Alfie Kohn's presentation to start. I was preparing myself to feel the anger and frustration I had experienced when I read his book, but that anger and frustration never came.

When Alfie Kohn started speaking, I reluctantly had to admit to myself that I was starting to accept some of his ideas, even though those ideas were bringing back some anxiety. Instead of avoiding ideas that challenge what I know to the greatest extent possible or minimizing my anxiety by rejecting dissonant information, I was starting to address and open myself up to the third choice that Piantanida et al. (2019) mention:

Or we can use the dissonance to raise questions for exploration and study. Choosing the third response can have a paradoxical effect of simultaneously increasing and decreasing anxiety. The possibility of discovering that one's story has been wrong all these years can be threatening, thereby increasing anxiety. On the other hand, tapping into one's curiosity and desire for greater understanding can keep the anxiety within tolerable and productive limits. (p. 152)

I felt the questions coming which was increasing the anxiety as I was realizing that so many ideas I had in regard to teaching might be wrong. However, I did find myself becoming curious

and wanting to learn more which helped to keep my anxiety at bay because I made the choice to start accepting these ideas, creating a new story with new questions.

Kohn addressed the dreaded punishments and rewards topic, but instead of immediately rejecting his ideas, I allowed myself to start listening, and I realized what he was saying was along the lines of what I believe teaching should be. Kohn (2019) explained how punishments and rewards can ruin relationships and make the teacher an enforcer to be avoided. I didn't want to ruin relationships, I wanted to build them. He encouraged the idea that teachers should work *with* students instead of doing things *to* students. Instead of dishing out rewards and punishments to ward off undesirable behaviors, create engaging lessons that inspire and cause students to focus their energy on learning instead of misbehaving.

So, now what? I now had cracks, big ones, in the very foundation upon which I had planned to build my classroom. I could feel that what I had once thought to be a staple in the education world was now beginning to crumble. I don't want to *control* my students; I want to *teach* my students. I don't want to demand that my students *unwillingly comply*; I want to encourage my students to *willingly contribute*. At the same time, I have experienced situations where chaos has taken over and true teaching could not take place. The fear of this chaos following me into my own classroom still had me struggling with how to leave rewards and punishments behind. Afterall, it is almost impossible to enter the teaching profession without being bombarded with classroom management strategies.

Therefore, I face one of my dilemmas in teaching: how do I avoid basing my foundation on classroom management strategies while still being able to create an environment that is conducive to learning? How do I acquire control of my classroom without literally controlling

my classroom? How do I know for sure that behaviorism and using rewards and punishment is not for me as teacher?

Chapter 2: Why Doggie Biscuits Are Not for Children

“Please get the Behavior/Clip/Stop Light Charts off the wall!

My behavior is not a decoration for your classroom.”

-Brian Mendler

What is Behaviorism?

Let me go back to the beginning where this all started, back to that moment when the idea of classroom management began to leave a bad taste in my mouth, when what I had thought to be the main pillar of education came crumbling down around me in a dusty pile of rubble, causing the foundation of what I wanted to build my classroom on to crack. I was just starting to feel confident that I was well on my way to having a classroom management plan in place with all these cute Pinterest strategies and charts and then Alfie Kohn says that strategies are “...short-term fixes, instruments of control intended, at best, to stop bad behaviors rather than affirmatively help children to become good people” (2006, p. xv).

This was when I began to realize that what I had originally thought was the answer to my dilemma of classroom management had a name, and it was *behaviorism*. Over the years, I had heard these fancy names for educational theories, but I didn’t know much about them. I figured behaviorism obviously had to do with behavior and behavior was what I was concerned about, so I thought, yes, this is the one I want to focus on!

What I had yet to realize was behaviorism focuses on just that, the behavior, leaving the learning aspect by the wayside. According to Kramlinger & Huberty (1990), “The behavioristic approach is based on the premise that learning occurs primarily through the reinforcement of desired responses” (p.42). I find that I disagree with this depiction of behaviorism, because I

don't feel that learning *occurs* through the reinforcement. I feel learning is *distracted* by the reinforcement.

I thought the idea of a classroom run on behaviorism was exactly what I needed, but I'm not a controlling person. I want to create connections with my students, the way I did with Tommy, not become a dog trainer with my bag of treats to dish out or take away. The seed of doubt was planted, but it was still just a seed, so it was easier to ignore. My experiences of classrooms that seemingly lacked any sort of system at all provoked a fear in me to learn as much as I could about as many strategies as possible that might help to promote good behavior in the classroom.

I thought a behavior system such as a color-coded clip-chart was brilliant! If only this had been in the classroom where I saw children run around the room, hide under tables, dart from the classroom, and the list goes on. So, a clip-chart where students are provided a visual that holds them accountable for their behaviors sounded perfect!

What Does Behaviorism Look Like?

Here is how the clip-chart works. (There are many different variations of colors and wording, but for consistency, I offer this version as my example.) The chart is usually located in the front of the room with clips (clothespins), one for each student with their name on it. There is a main starting point in the middle of the chart that is Ready to Learn/green. For positive reinforcement, a student can clip up three different levels. The level up from green is Good Day/blue. The level up from blue is Great Job/pink. The level up from pink is Outstanding/purple. For negative reinforcement, a student can clip down three different levels. The first level down from Ready to Learn/green is Think About It/yellow. The level down from yellow is Teacher's Choice/orange. The level down from orange is Parent Contact/red.

All students start on Ready to Learn/green. Depending on the teacher, clips might be reset to green daily or weekly. When a student does something the teacher wants or shows positive behavior, they clip up. When a student does not do something the teacher wants or shows negative behavior, they clip down. If a student reaches the highest level, Outstanding/purple, they get to go to the treasure box. In addition to this, a corresponding take-home chart is used to communicate the student's behavior home to parents. Students would color in the chart with the corresponding color their clip was on that day. Problem solved! Not only does it help serve as a visual so students can be held accountable for their behaviors, but it also provides a line of communication with the parents.

I couldn't have been more wrong about clip charts. I reluctantly began to see what Alfie Kohn was referring to and how these operant conditioning systems work on a personal level through the eyes of my son, a first-grader who has been part of this behavior system for two years. Yes, it is a visual, for the *entire* class to see; my son always knew his color/clip position along with everyone else's color/clip positions. Every day I would hear who in the class had to move their clip down or change their color to a bad color; thus, he would refer to those kids as bad. Yes, there is a trip to the treasure box for good behavior; my son was rewarded and loved the coveted treasure box visits. Yet, this became an obsession. I would hear more about what color he was on or where his clip was on the chart than what he was learning about in school. He became frustrated that he couldn't go to the treasure box all the time, wondering what he was doing wrong even though he was on the Ready to Learn/green. In order to get to Outstanding/purple, he had to clip up *three* times, and what he had to do to clip up seemed inconsistent. Soon my son was coming home and saying that he was nice to someone, but he didn't get to clip up for it.

Yes, it provided a way to communicate my son's behavior home to me, but I found even I unconsciously fell into this trap of wondering why my son was not at Outstanding. Did he do something wrong? One day my son's color went from Ready to Learn/green up to Good Day/blue on his take-home behavior sheet. I immediately reacted with excitement and asked him what he did to be able to clip up. He wasn't even sure. The next day he was back down to Ready to Learn/green, and I found myself disappointed for him that he was back to green. Meanwhile, Ready to Learn/green is good and where everyone starts out, yet it makes my son feel like he did something wrong that he can't achieve Outstanding/purple status every day. What's even worse is it is almost impossible to be at Outstanding on a regular basis. It can leave the students who care always feeling like they aren't doing enough and the students who don't seem to care at the bottom—where they might stay for a myriad of reasons, one of which might be not caring where they land on the clip chart. I began to question if this would address behavior in my classroom or just shame them when they clip down or feel inadequate for not clipping up.

Why Isn't Behaviorism Ideal?

Despite all this, I desperately still tried to cling to my innate worldview that rewards and punishment were the surefire way to yield the desirable behaviors required to create a classroom environment where learning can be accomplished and that classroom management strategies were still the answer. I thought, okay, incorporating punishment into the equation is the problem. I will focus on only the classroom management strategies that are positive, rewards!

Enter Alfie Kohn once again, this time pulling the carpet out from under me, leaving me flat on my back, among the dusty pile of rubble and cracked foundation. While I thought rewards were positive, turns out they could be more of a distraction. “Do this and you'll get

‘that’ makes people focus on the ‘that,’ not the ‘this.’...Do rewards motivate people?

Absolutely. They motivate people to get rewards” (Kohn, 1993, p. 67). I don’t want to agree with this, but it is impossible to ignore the logic behind this statement, as much as I wish I could.

Ironically, our system of rewarding students for academic achievement devalues the very thing we say we want: learning. We send an alarmingly clear message, even if it is unintended: “If it weren’t for the reward we are offering, what we are teaching you would not be worth learning.” In short, a system of education based on rewards and punishment is fundamentally anti-educational. (Sullo, 2007, p. 5)

I don’t want rewards to distract my students from the learning process, and I especially don’t want to devalue learning.

As I contemplated whether tossing rewards out the window was a good idea, I encountered the book, *The Essential 55*, written by Ron Clark, an award-winning educator, who supports the use of rewards and punishment. Clark (2019) mentions rewards in Rule 15 stating:

At times throughout the year, I will give rewards for good behavior, academic performance, and other acts worthy of praise. If you ever ask me for a reward, however, it will not be given. It is rude to ask if you are getting something for good behavior. You should be good and try your best because you are trying to better yourself, not because you are anticipating a reward. I usually give some sort of reward to everyone who scores 100 on unit tests. If you make 100 and ask if you are getting something, no one who made 100 will be given anything. (p. 53)

This rule left me feeling confused because Clark seems to contradict himself as he mentions that you should be good and try your best to better yourself, not for a reward; yet, he follows this statement immediately with talking about how he gives rewards for those who score 100 on their

tests. After stating the rule, Clark goes on to explain the rule, so I decided to read on to see if he provided clarification.

It seems that Clark continues to contradict himself when he reinforces Kohn's point that rewards only motivate people to get rewards. Clark (2019) mentions that even though the rule says students cannot ask for a reward, students were still asking about rewards. At one time, he made cookies for the class but before he gave them out, someone asked what their reward was, so he didn't give the students the cookies. "It's a hard lesson to learn, but if it helps the kids learn to appreciate their efforts over their rewards, it will have been worth it" (p.54). This is the danger in relying so much on rewards.

Later in the book, Clark (2019) mentions that when he said he would reward students who scored well on their test with a pizza, "...that week I saw the highest spelling scores of the year" (p. 180). However, due to several circumstances the group who scored the highest didn't receive their pizza until the following week. "Needless to say, that Friday I saw some of the lowest test scores of the year" (p. 181).

There is so much wrong with this situation, the biggest one being that Clark clearly states in his rule that the students should be good and try their best because they are trying to better themselves, not because they are anticipating a reward, yet when the students were not given their reward, their effort plummeted. Is this what we want to teach our students? I began to see Kohn's point that this is exactly what happens when rewards become the foundation:

Our objective is not really to succeed at the task at all (in the sense of doing it well); it is to succeed at obtaining the reward...If you have been promised a reward, you come to see the task as something that stands between you and it. (Kohn, 1993, p. 65)

Rewards can send the message that not only am I implying that the learning taking place is so terrible I must bribe the students to do it, but it also kills the need for students to challenge themselves.

Again, this hit me on a personal note when I realized my older son who is in fourth grade was taking shortcuts to reap the benefits of rewards. Every night, he is required to log 20 minutes of reading. However, if he finishes a book, he receives “money” as a reward. I quickly saw a pattern as my son was reading short, simple books. When I asked him why he was choosing these books that were way too easy for him, he said exactly what Kohn (1993) said children would do. He chose shorter books so he could finish them faster to get his “money.” This begs the question – what effect is this having on improving his reading skills, which is the entire reason for this reward in the first place? The teacher wants the students to read more, but the reality is students are reading less in order to receive more rewards.

Ironically, last summer, my son finished the entire Harry Potter series, start to finish, without an inkling of a reward. His “reward” was finishing one book so he could eagerly start the next book. In an interview pertaining to his book, *Punished by Rewards*, Kohn addresses this idea of motivation in students:

We need to stop asking “How motivated are my students?” and start asking “*How* are my students motivated?” This kind of motivation elicited by extrinsic inducements isn’t just less effective than intrinsic motivation; it threatens to erode that intrinsic motivation, that excitement about what one is doing. (Brandt, 1995, p. 16)

In using the example of my son, the “money” my son received for finishing a book was extrinsic motivation, which proved to be less effective as my son chose lower-level books to receive more rewards. However, my son’s natural joy of reading was his intrinsic motivation for reading the

Harry Potter books, which was much more challenging with no promise of a gratuitous reward. The pattern I see is not so much that rewards can never be used, but when used as the foundation for success in the classroom, it may not be the strongest choice.

Thus, I begin to find myself starting to accept, more willingly, the idea of leaving behaviorism behind as I continue on my journey towards discovering this idea of relational pedagogy. Among that dusty pile of rubble surrounded by the cracked foundation of behaviorism, I am slowly starting to get up from my disheveled state on the ground, brushing myself off as I push forward to a new building site where I can break ground for my new relational foundation on which I will build a classroom environment that will support inquiry-based learning and student-centered instruction.

Chapter 3: Establishing an Unshakeable Foundation for Success in the Classroom, I Think

“People will forget what you said,

People will forget what you did,

But people will never forget

How you made them feel.”

-Maya Angelou

How a Relational Pedagogy Was Born

So now that I have made the decision to leave behaviorism behind, I ask myself again, how do I avoid basing my foundation on classroom management strategies while still being able to create an environment that is conducive to learning? How do I acquire control of my classroom without literally controlling my classroom? “It requires that we transform the classroom, give up some power, and reconsider the way we define and think about misbehavior” (Kohn, 2006, p. xv).

Kohn (2006) suggests that the first thing to do is find out what children need and how to meet those needs. I couldn't agree more, but this forced me to ponder *how*? *How* will I know what my students need, and *how* will I be able to meet those needs? Reminiscing on my experiences so far in the classroom, I am realizing I might understand the *how* better than I think.

As a teacher, there will be many students, many lessons, many teachable moments, but I will never forget the powerful, yet simple interaction I had with a student when I taught him how to find his cubby. This may seem like a small feat that many students learn within the first week of school; however, this was not a small feat for this child, and it was over halfway through the

school year. This was not an academic teaching moment, but some of the most important teaching moments in the classroom will not be academic. Some of the most important teaching moments will rely on the relationships I develop with my students, which act as a window for me to see what my students need and how I can meet those needs. This moment was the start of such a relationship, one that would build the foundation for future learning experiences.

At the time, I was an assistant preschool teacher in a three-year-old room. This student, whom I will call Tommy, had struggled all year remembering where his cubby was, and the teacher was beginning to feel frustrated. On this particular day, Tommy asked the question he would ask every day, “Where’s my cubby?” The teacher responded by telling him he should know where his cubby is by now, since we had been showing him where it was all year.

However, I could tell that Tommy truly seemed to struggle with finding his cubby. Seeing the confusion on his face broke my heart for many reasons; his disappointment in frustrating the teacher, his embarrassment in not knowing where his cubby was, and his confusion in not knowing why his teachers wouldn’t help him in his time of need. Therefore, I decided to show him where his cubby was once again. The difference this time was that I chose to address his need of *remembering* where his cubby was instead of merely addressing the objective of *locating* it. His cubby was all the way to the left of the cubby shelf and in the middle row, so I told him in order to find his cubby, he needed to come all the way to the left side of the cubby shelf and say, “Bottom, Tommy.” I had him touch the bottom cubby and then touch the cubby above which was his cubby.

I had no idea if this was going to work, but I felt he needed something physical he could do to help him remember. A few minutes later when he had to return something to his cubby, I heard him go over and say, “Bottom, Tommy,” and he found his cubby on his own! I will never

forget the feeling in my heart when I heard him do that, and the best part was he didn't show any signs of disappointment, embarrassment, or confusion. For the rest of the year, before he would head to his cubby or if I saw him struggling, I would simply say, "Bottom, Tommy," and he knew exactly what to do. It created a special relationship between us, because he knew I understood if he was struggling. He knew I would help him, creating a safe environment for him to take risks and learn new things, even if he experienced confusion and mistakes along the way.

Looking back, I made that decision because I decided to take the time to understand what Tommy's needs were, and I figured out *how* to meet his needs. Taking a step back and looking at *why* he wasn't finding his cubby allowed me to see *how* I could help him, opening the door to building a trusting relationship. Miriam Raider-Roth (2005) builds on this idea of a trusting relationship, highlighting four important features to keep in mind when in pursuit of that trusting relationship: "...the teacher's capacity to be connected to the student, the teacher's genuine interest in nurturing students' own ideas, collaborative study on the part of the teacher and the student, and an environment in which trust can prevail" (p. 30). I now realize, in that moment, he and I began the start of a trusting relationship. Showing him that he had the capability to find the cubby on his own not only prevented him from feeling disappointed when the teacher would become frustrated, but it also made him feel a sense of accomplishment, trust, and self-worth, building his confidence, which is crucial in these early years.

At the time, I could feel Tommy's anguish when he looked at all the cubbies and was frozen, not knowing which one to pick. As a teacher, it is important for me to have this empathy and capacity to connect with my students, as Raider-Roth (2005) states, to feel what they are feeling and to try to understand why they are feeling that way. In order to do this, I must call on

my imagination. Maxine Greene (1995) focuses on imagination as the means that makes empathy possible:

It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. (p.3)

Being able see these alternative realities through my students’ eyes and ears provides me with the *how* I need in order to know what my students’ needs are and what I can do to meet those needs.

Greene’s interpretation of imagination made me realize I used my imagination to cross that empty space between me and Tommy, allowing me to put myself in Tommy’s shoes, to feel what he was feeling, to see what he was seeing, and to hear what he was hearing. Through empathy, I saw Tommy’s need to learn a different way to find his cubby, and I was able to meet that need by teaching Tommy a way that fit his needs. I wanted Tommy to know that I understood how he was feeling and that it was okay if he didn’t remember where his cubby was, because I would show him how to find it. This gives him the security he needs to take risks, knowing that mistakes are okay, and he can learn from them.

Keeping in mind Raider-Roth’s (2005) four features of a trusting relationship, this small gesture allowed me to connect with Tommy. The rest of the year, I continued to look for ways to nurture Tommy’s interests, working collaboratively with him in order to create a safe environment in which his trust in me could prevail. For example, he loved anything to do with dinosaurs, so I used that to connect with him. He never liked cutting with scissors. He knew

how to use scissors, but it did not interest him. Yet, when we turned the scissors into a hungry T-Rex who wanted to eat the lines, he loved cutting!

This is the pedagogy I want to embrace in my teaching career, a relational pedagogy that provides a caring, nurturing, child-centered community where students discover how to love learning shaped by their individuality instead of unwillingly complying with my demands. I feel that when students are engaged in hands-on activities incorporating what their likes and interests are, they are more inclined to *want* to learn, thus developing the connections they need to help them *understand*, not just *retain*, while also helping to eliminate undesirable behaviors. Building relationships with my students will provide a bridge for what they need and what I have to offer them. In order to learn my students' interests and needs, I must first know the student, and in order to know the student, I must first build that relational foundation of trust and respect.

My idea of this relational pedagogy resembles the theories of humanism, progressivism, and existentialism focusing on what the students' needs are and providing them with the means they need to grow in order to discover who they are as individuals. Theorists such as Abraham Maslow, John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, Johann Pestalozzi ("Progressive Education," 2002) and Martin Buber (Mayes, 2010) share this belief of focusing on the child and learning his/her interests and needs in order to help him/her grow and succeed, not just in the school setting, but in life. I want to teach my students not only what they need to grow academically, but what they need to grow existentially.

What Does Relational Pedagogy Look Like?

When I think back to the teachers who had the biggest impact in my life, the teachers who come to mind are those who established relationships with me and made me feel like I was important. Relational pedagogy is what it is to create these feelings of trust and respect in

students. Crownover and Jones (2018) describe relational pedagogy as "...the systematic construction of appropriate relationships embedded within the schooling process. Construction and maintenance of positive teacher-student relationships is the foundation of relational pedagogy" (pp. 18-19). I remember an English teacher I had in high school who would sit in a chair with wheels, and he would wheel around the front of the class while he facilitated class discussions about relevant topics. He employed humor and storytelling and seemed to care about who we were and what we were interested in. I was always a quiet observer in class, but in his class, I felt comfortable enough to participate in discussions.

One time he was teaching us, and I piped up to share a thought. I think he was talking to us about descriptive words or being more descriptive in our writing and I said, "It's like wearin' a belt," as there are times when a belt, especially for women at the time, tends to be more like an accessory that adds to the outfit. It's not really holding the pants up, but it makes the outfit more interesting, as descriptive words do in a story. I remember how much my teacher loved my comparison. This led to an entire class discussion about it. At the end of the year, I gave him a belt with "It's like wearin' a belt" written on the belt in puffy paint. He loved it and hung it on his bulletin board the entire next year.

I'm not sure if I would have remembered it had he not given so much credit to what I said by turning it into the class discussion or by hanging my belt on the wall, but the fact that he did those things and cared makes this memory feel like it happened yesterday. The way he reacted to what I said and the attention he gave it, enough to make it the focus of class discussion, gave me, a usually quiet observer in class, confidence in my ability to make worthwhile contributions. I'm not sure I will ever forget it. That's what is amazing about being a teacher; I will never

know what my students will remember or how it might change their lives, but it all starts with the relationships and simple interactions I create.

This idea of developing relationships and creating simple interactions with students is so important, an organization called Simple Interactions exists to make teachers aware of the simple interactions they are or are not having in the classroom, especially in Early Childhood. Dr. Dana Winters, the Director of Simple Interactions and Academic Programs, came to Carlow University and spoke about the program and what it is all about. The name explains it all; “Simple Interactions (SI) combines a strengths-based approach and the use of video into a simple but sustainable process for professional development, specifically focused on adult–child interactions” (Akiva, Li, Martin, Horner, & McNamara, 2017, p. 289). Simple Interactions understands how important a simple interaction between teacher and student can be from a little game of patty-cake with a baby to helping a child, like Tommy, find his cubby.

I heard Dr. Winters talk about Simple Interactions while reading Alfie Kohn’s book and seeing classroom management and rewards in a different light. Hearing about Simple Interactions started to give me confidence in something I had always felt strongly about, which was developing relationships with my students. I was curious what Dr. Winters had to say about classroom management and rewards, and her response boosted my confidence even more that this idea of relational pedagogy was the way to go. When I asked how she felt about classroom management and rewards, Dr. Winters responded with, “As you know, in our work, we see the power of interactions and relationships as the foundation to all work with children.” This time, no panic set in. Dr. Winters had taken the words right out of my mouth, interactions and relationships as the *foundation* to all work with children, and there were no cracks in this foundation!

Hearing about Simple Interactions and the importance they put on just simply interacting with students to build that relational foundation reminded me of a little boy in class and the relationship we developed all from a simple interaction I had with him one day. We had been in school for a little over a month, and he came in wearing a Pittsburgh Penguins jersey. I told him I liked his jersey and his face lit up and he said thanks and then proceeded to tell me how excited he was to watch the game that night and told me who the Penguins were playing against. I was amazed this little three-year-old knew so much about hockey, but I think he was even more amazed that I knew who the Pittsburgh Penguins were!

Almost every day after that, he would come right over to me and tell me all about what happened in the game, who played, who was hurt, what team we beat or lost to, etc. His sports knowledge was truly impressive, and it was a great way for me to connect with him. Whenever I saw him zoning out while he was working on a worksheet, instead of drawing attention to the fact that he wasn't doing his work, I would ask him a sports question, and it was like life was breathed back into his little body. His face would light up and he would rattle off his facts, then put his attention back to the worksheet.

It is simple interactions such as this that can be used in the classroom to help not only connect with students but help keep their behavior on track in a positive way. This is when I began to understand the difference between a behaviorist approach and a relational approach. While behaviorism is all about the behavior, it doesn't usually deal with *why* the behavior is occurring. It just rewards or punishes the behavior. However, with a relational pedagogy, the focus on the *why* is vital. Brian Mendler (2014) states, "...understanding why a student misbehaves is the key to changing that behavior. Once understood, it is easy to realize how

ridiculous many of the traditional consequences we currently use are” (para. 1). I never stopped to think about this before, but how true it is.

Again, this made me think of the clip chart. If a student is acting out and they clip down to Teacher’s Choice/orange, instead of asking questions and understanding *why* the student is acting out and then addressing the issue, the teacher just chooses what the punishment will be. Mendler and Mendler (2010) elaborate on this:

Most students do not get real opportunities to practice improving their behavior. In fact, it is more common for them to be punished by denying the opportunities to practice.

Popular school consequences like time-out, detention, loss of privileges, and suspension rarely emphasize the teaching or practicing of better behavior. (p. 28)

Instead of punishing students with things such as time-out or detention without knowing the *why*, I would enact a relational pedagogy in my classroom, working to find out the *why* in my students’ behaviors and addressing that instead of blindly punishing, only for the same behaviors to show up again in the future. Smith, Fisher, and Frey (2015) affirm this:

Students need to know that they are valued but that the behavior is unacceptable...people who were shamed and stigmatized for their actions are far more likely to reoffend than those who aren’t...we have to focus on the actions without rejecting the individuals. (p. 110)

Without establishing relationships and relying on punishment, I would be building a wall instead of a bridge between me and my students.

Why Is Relational Pedagogy Ideal?

Relational pedagogy can be a powerful bridge between the student-teacher relationship and learning. Crowover and Jones (2018) state this beautifully:

Education occurs not in the mind of the student or the actions of the teacher, but in the relational space that connects them. The relationship is the site of and the medium through which education occurs. The premise that relationships have potential to aid or hinder the educative process is one not likely to be disputed by any individual who has spent time in a classroom and loved or hated a teacher. (p. 20)

This description brought such peace to the anxiety that continues to bombard me throughout this journey! I don't think I could say it better myself. This is such a powerful image to describe the importance of relationships in the classroom and how it connects me to my students!

This relational space is also what allows for the emotions that are needed to learn and remember things. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (2016) explains the power of relationships, emotion and the brain:

Our emotions, and our relationships, and our cultural experiences in the social world literally organize and shape the development of brain networks that allow us to learn...It is literally neurobiologically impossible to think about things deeply or to remember things about which you had no emotion. (American Education Research Assoc., 02:45)

Without these emotional connections, critical thinking and engagement in the classroom will not occur.

Education and learning require a team effort between teacher and students. It is not just what occurs in the mind of the student and their performance on tests, and it is not just the actions of me, the teacher, in doling out rewards and punishments. Education requires a relational pedagogy, a bridge, between the student-teacher relationship and the learning that takes place in the classroom, a learning that is true to the passion I have for teaching, one that is inquiry-based and student-centered. Yet, in today's world where it seems high-stakes

standardized testing has become the priority, it's as if relationships have been put on the backburner, and I find myself conflicted once again.

Chapter 4: What Is Happening to Children's Creativity?

**“Teachers shouldn't be forced to teach for the test,
They should be allowed to teach for the student.
Students shouldn't be forced to learn for the test,
They should be allowed to learn for life.”**

-Senator Jon Tester

Burnout Versus Demoralization

Relational pedagogy is so important, yet so many teachers seem to lose focus on building relationships in the classroom. “While a large and growing body of research on both classroom management and general and subject-specific teaching competency are available for teachers and teacher educators, the same cannot be said about relational competence” (Aspelin & Jonsen, 2019, p. 265). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) touch on why this might be the case in schools:

...the current educational system appears to assume that teachers have the requisite SEC [social and emotional competence] to create a warm and nurturing learning environment, be emotionally responsive to students, form supportive and collaborative relationships with sometimes difficult and demanding parents, professionally relate to administrators and colleagues, effectively manage the growing demands imposed by standardized testing, model exemplary emotion regulation, sensitively coach students through conflict-situations with peers, and effectively (yet respectfully) handle the challenging behaviors of disruptive students. (pp. 495-496)

No wonder it seems that so many teachers burnout today! Although, I think it is warranted to ask, is it burnout or demoralization that teachers tend to experience?

Doris Santoro (2013) describes burnout as a personal issue of the teacher's personality. She describes demoralization, however, as a much more complex issue:

Demoralization, as I describe it, occurs when the job changes to such a degree that what teachers previously found good about their work is no longer available. Moral rewards are what bring many of us to teaching: finding ways to connect meaningfully with students, designing lessons that address students' needs, using our talents to improve the lives of others. When teachers feel they no longer find these kinds of moral rewards in their work, I call that demoralization. It is more than just sadness or a sense of defeat, but a sense that the moral dimension of the work is foreclosed due to conditions that affect their teaching directly. (para. 3)

This caused me to really look at these two words and understand the important difference between them. While burnout and demoralization may appear the same on the outside, the causes of these two experiences is quite different.

The idea of demoralization scares me more than burnout. I feel like I would have more control of burnout. I can imagine how teaching can be stressful and hard to manage. However, regarding burnout, it is important for the teacher to seek the help they need in order to minimize the consequence stress might have in the classroom. Fredrikson and Rhodes (2004) explain the effect stress can have on the student-teacher relationship:

Teachers who are stressed may be more likely to display inappropriate negative affect, such as anger and hostility, thereby creating an adversarial stance with students.

Teachers' images of themselves as educators, as well as their beliefs about their efficacy

in the classroom and their expectations for students, also appear to influence the ways in which they interact with students. (pp. 47-48)

I feel that while burnout is something teachers may experience and can be intimidating, it is essentially something still in my control in how I choose to handle that stress. Demoralization, however, is dictated more by the school. As much as teachers may strive for those moral rewards that Santoro (2013) mentions, if a school severs these connections through scripted curriculum or stress on high-stakes standardized testing, it can be demoralizing to the teacher and the student.

“High score acquisition” is the mantra district leaders push onto its principals, teachers, and students. Many districts then set up course or classroom pacing charts and scripted lessons that tell teachers what they should be teaching each day (pacing) and what specific words to say and activities to follow in each lesson (scripting). What is wrong with this picture? Where are the students? What role do they play? (Lucido, 2010, p. 84)

There is something extremely wrong with this picture, especially because I plan on creating a student-centered, inquiry-based learning environment in my classroom.

I don't want to sacrifice the essence of who I am as a teacher along with my students' sense of individuality and yearning for discovery, ignoring their needs and how I might meet those needs, so that I can instead teach to the test. Teaching to the test also brings classroom management (aka rewards and punishment) back into the picture:

By means of increasing standardization (as imposed on schools by the new corporate masters) our educational sites are turning into places where teachers and students are whipped into uniformity through the lavish rewards and humiliating punishments for not scoring well on standardized tests. They are thereby turned into objects, trained into false

consciousness, alienated from themselves and others, and rewarded for losing the connection with their unique core selves. (Mayes, 2010, p. 30)

I refuse to allow myself to fall into this idea of treating students as if they are objects, training them with doggie biscuits as a reward for denying their inner self and stripping them of their right to an inquiry-based learning environment where learning beyond the test can be born.

Classroom Management Versus Classroom Engagement

As I continuously struggle to make sense of classroom management, rewards, and the focus on academic achievement and teaching to the test, I can't help but think there must be a better way of expressing these ideas in a more positive light. We need the ideas of classroom management and academic achievement but without such a negative connotation. I suggest replacing *classroom management* with *classroom engagement*. This not only replaces the stuffy, business-like word *management*, it also includes the idea of relationships and highlights academic achievement in a more positive light. Classroom engagement promotes engaging in relationships, engaging in learning, and engaging one's self. Instead of *managing* my students, I want to *engage* my students. Instead of *managing* learning, I want to *engage* inquiry.

Some of the best learning happens through inquiry. "Inquiry-based learning is more than asking a student what he or she wants to know. It's about triggering curiosity. And activating a student's curiosity is, I would argue, a far more important and complex goal than mere information delivery" (Wolpert-Gawron, 2016, para. 1). I have learned that learning through inquiry is much deeper than just the traditional rote and memorization. Maxine Greene (1995) captures the essence of inquiry in her book, *Releasing the Imagination*:

All depends upon a breaking free, a leap, and then a question. I would like to claim that this is how learning happens and that the educative task is to create situations in which the young are moved to *begin* to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, “Why?” (p. 6)

The question, “Why?”, is so incredibly important to learning. It reminds me of the innocent love of learning young children have around the age of three when they follow every answer to their question with “Why?”. Instead of assessing students on their ability to answer closed questions with a “yes” or “no” answer, we should be encouraging students to ask, “Why?” Greene (1995) goes on to explain:

Only when teachers can engage with learners as distinctive, questioning persons – persons in the process of defining themselves – can teachers develop what are called “authentic assessment” measures, the kinds of measures that lead to the construction of new curricula. Refusing externally provided multiple-choice tests and being willing to see things big when they encounter students, teachers can devise the modes of teaching that are appropriate for these persons, that can launch them in diverse ways into what we now understand as inquiry. (p.13)

It is through this inquiry-based learning that the intrinsic motivation that Kohn talked about can happen. To get students internally excited about learning, we must awaken their interests and encourage them to ask questions so that true learning can happen.

Aesthetic Experiences Versus Anaesthetic Experiences

This is what Sir Ken Robinson refers to as an aesthetic experience. “An aesthetic experience is one in which your senses are operating at their peak, when you’re present in the current moment, when you’re resonating in the excitement of this thing that you’re experiencing,

when you're fully alive" (The RSA, 05:59). He goes on to explain the opposite of the aesthetic experience, the anaesthetic experience:

An anaesthetic experience is when you shut your senses off and deaden yourself to what is happening...we are getting our children through education by anesthetizing them. I think we should be doing the exact opposite. We shouldn't be putting them to sleep, we should be waking them up to what they have inside of themselves. (The RSA, 06:13)

I love this description. This goes back to my passion for teaching a love for learning. I want to awaken students' interests and make them feel fully alive while they are learning, showing them that learning can be engaging and exciting and encourage them to question what they learn.

But how can we do this when we have an education model that is modeled on industrialization? While we are no longer in the Industrial Era, most schools have yet to be reformed. In an age where the newest piece of technology is obsolete six months later, why are schools still set up like factories? Sir Ken Robinson (2010) explains this industrialization model. Ringing bells are keeping a tight schedule instead of allowing for time to explore and question, subjects are separated yet they should be intertwined, and children are classed based on age ignorant to differentiated learning. Children learn differently at different rates and excel in different disciplines. Children learn better at different times of the day. Some children learn better in groups and some children learn better on their own. This is a production line mentality based on the industrial age focused on conformity and standardized testing. We need a paradigm shift from the industrial age to the age of the learner, focusing on an inquiry-based mentality.

Greene (2001) echoes this need for change, to move on from the predictable and quantifiable way teaching used to be and still seems to be in some schools:

We are interested in openings, in unexplored possibilities, not in the predictable or the quantifiable, not in what is thought of as social control. For us, education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn. (p. 7)

This learning to learn is vital to inquiry. Students need to be taught how to search for deeper meaning and how to solve real problems. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) explains that instead of fostering this deeper way of thinking called divergent thinking, it seems schools in the past and many still today kill this way of thinking by educating students. Students enter school in kindergarten full of creativity and imagination, but then they are educated to think there is one right answer and one right way to get there, and you can't ask your friends for help (aka collaboration).

By the time students are entering high school their divergent thinking has decreased dramatically, resembling more of an anaesthetic experience. It is my goal that while students are young, I can light the fire inside of them to want to learn, to want to read, and to want to think. The problem that faces students is how will they continue this critical thinking when they are confronted with teachers that no longer share my passion? I can see how it will be hard as a teacher, to only have a short amount of time to influence your students in a way that is positive and motivating.

Chapter 5: My Journey of Metacognition

**“Metacognition asks the question,
‘What do I know about how I learn and think
That will help me with this new situation?’”**

-Howard Pitler

It Started With a Story About Cognitive Dissonance...

Steve Jobs once said, “If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don’t have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.” While this may be where I am at in my journey now, this was far from where I was when I first started. I was in such a state of cognitive dissonance, I didn’t know what to do with myself.

At first, I thought behaviorism and rewards and punishments were the answer, then I thought I had to completely get rid of it, that it was a thing of disgust. Then I realized, I’m not saying I need to get rid of rules, procedures, expectations, consequences, or even rewards. I’m not saying this is a free for all for students to do whatever they feel they want. I’m not saying everyone gets a trophy for participating or that I won’t challenge my students to always strive for more.

What I am saying is I won’t rely solely on these things as the foundation for success in the classroom because without a relationship as the foundation to connect me to my students, these things that could be used to help build students up will instead shake their foundation to the core causing them to crumble and fall. I want to build my students up, not tear them down. Relying on rewards, says I don’t care *how* you are learning, just learn it and you will get a

reward. Relying on punishments says I don't care *why* you are acting this way, just act the way I want or you will lose something. However, relying on relationships as the foundation says I care *how* you learn and what you like, and I want to know *why* you are acting this way so we can work on it together.

It Became a “Quest” About Who I Am...

Charles Taylor said, “we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’” (as cited in Greene, 1995, p. 1). Greene (1995) goes on to say:

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the way things are. (p. 1)

This is such a great way to describe why narrative inquiry is so important for teachers. I have learned that to be an effective teacher, it isn't about clip charts and pizza. It's about learning to inquire, to face the cognitive dissonance that may come from that inquiry, and then inquire some more. “Narratives (e.g., life-histories) have become important sources teachers might use to improve their own teaching...the return to narrative knowing allows an examination of the past but also the opportunity to influence the future” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 106). “Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that, from the perspective of schooling, a teaching act is a ‘narrative in action’, that is, an ‘expression of biography and history...in a particular situation’” (as cited in Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 109). The narrative allows the teacher to enhance the present and future by learning from the past, and this learning is ongoing.

Greene (1995) continues to describe her own “quest” on understanding herself and education:

The quest involves me as woman, as teacher, as mother, as citizen, as New Yorker, as art-lover, as activist, as philosopher, as white middle-class American...at the same time, amidst this multiplicity, my life project has been to achieve an understanding of teaching, learning, and the many models of education; I have been creating and continue to create a self by means of that project, that mode of gearing into the world. And that project has crucially shaped the effort that has resulted in *Releasing the Imagination*. (p. 1)

I relate to this in every way as I continue my own “quest” about myself as woman, as teacher, as mother, as citizen, as book-lover, as white middle-class American and understanding this new education world that I am entering. While I wouldn’t consider my journey a “life project” yet, as I am just starting on this quest, I still share the same passion in achieving an understanding of teaching, learning, and education. However, I do see it becoming my life project as I continue on this journey of discovery.

I have learned a lot about myself on this journey, not just how I will enact a relational pedagogy in the early childhood classroom when the emphasis is often on academic achievement, but also how I respond to change and dissonant information. I realize now that I tend to immediately push away information that may challenge what I think is right. I have learned that by doing this, I remain ignorant to ideas that may get me closer to where I want to go. I have learned to approach new ideas with a sense of wonder and adventure instead of dread.

And It Finished with the Realization that My Inquiry Will Never Be Finished.

This project has taught me how to truly inquire. As much as I have learned, I know that there is still learning to be had. When it comes to teaching, there will always be new students with new personalities that require new ideas. I have learned that inquiry continuously goes deeper and deeper into not just telling stories but interrogating those stories. It involves being

part of the story, and then stepping back to look at it from the outside, and then jumping right back in to learn and question some more.

One must be able to move out of oneself, become conscious of reality and a possible future, move back into reality and share narrative, and move back out once more to examine and reflect on self and narrative. As Kegan (cited in Bullough, 1997) noted, this is extremely costly to the self, to the point where one begins to question if one has the ability or desire to understand, much less take on this task of becoming an amateur, transformative intellectual. (Kanu & Glor, 2006, pp. 109-110)

I felt this question of whether or not I had the ability or desire to take on this task of an amateur transformative intellectual, but besides being required to do this, I wanted to take the initiative to embrace active learning about something I was extremely curious and anxious about, just like I hope my students will do one day. Greene (1995) says, “Action implies the taking of initiatives...that is what those now involved in school restructuring mean when they speak of active learning. They are interested in beginnings, not in endings” (Greene, 1995, p. 15).

This is what I am interested in, the beginnings, not the endings. It is all about the beginnings, the beginning of a new term – classroom engagement – that will trigger the beginnings of relationships and the beginnings of entering into true inquiry, not being afraid to ask, “Why?” Teaching is not about the endings which focus on high-stakes assessment scores or doing this to get that through rewards. It’s about sparking beginnings that light the fire in students to want to learn based on a relational pedagogy, the foundation for success in the classroom, I think.

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