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Cartographic Storytelling for a Changing World:  
The Pedagogical Praxis of Home in School

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*Abstract*

*What are we doing now that will be good for our children? What are we teaching and how are we teaching? What does sustainable teaching look like? Sustainability pertains to intergenerational equity. In thinking about systems theory and the interdependence of living and learning, I realize the system can only change with each individual thinking about what is closest at hand while still seeing the broader picture. One avenue to begin to address the big questions this paper poses is simply through storytelling and fictions. Storying develops re-envisioned community through pedagogies of safety, hope, and liberation; and agentially challenges colonial and neo-colonial discourse. The paper describes how global literacy, problem solving, innovation, and creativity can be intentionally integrated into learning when living is considered as schooling. Additionally, through the metaphor of home in school, I am not merely rethinking curricular content, but restructuring sense-of-place as a critical educational goal.*

*How is my story like and unlike the stories of others who are struggling to make sense of themselves to retrieve their suppressed selves, to act ethically?*

*Laurel Richardson in Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966*

Berg, Blank and Melaville (2006) report that 40-60% of high school students are chronically disengaged from school. Discouragingly, these figures do not include the number of students who have already dropped out. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2008) reports that 65% of students are unexcited about their classes. In a nationwide poll of registered voters, Americans are concerned about young people not being prepared with the skills they need for competing in the global economy. 80% of voters from this study feel that schools are not keeping up with changing needs. Skills such as global literacy, problem solving, innovation and creativity are identified as being critical for our children's future. How can these issues be addressed? This paper suggests that the answers lie in much bigger questions and systems.

What are we doing now that will be good for our children? How are we living while thinking about our children's futures? What are we teaching and how are we teaching? What does sustainable teaching look like? Sustainability is an idea that pertains to intergenerational equity (Manuel-Navarrete, Kay & Dolderman, 2004; Newton, 2003, Capra, 1982; Nolet, 2009). In the provocative movie *Mindwalk* (Capra & Cohen, 1990), one of the main characters laments that plutonium will never become less poisonous. Can the damage we have created be reversed by the

way we continue living and teaching? In thinking about systems theory and the interdependence of living and learning, the only way I can attempt to think about sustainability is to think about what is closest to me – that the system can only change with each individual making the change; yet even then, the broader system must always be considered. Education is simply one facet of a larger system in distress. Social, economic and technological shifts are impacting us all. Education traditions must change. The figure at this site: [[http://comfusion.pbwiki.com/f/cfAaP\\_House\\_of\\_Cards.html](http://comfusion.pbwiki.com/f/cfAaP_House_of_Cards.html)] broadly presents ideas of proactively directing “The Landscape—social, economic and technological” (Dubel, 2008). This illustration presents the larger system while this paper addresses one speck in the education portion that has the potential to affect the system as a whole. The figure is used to model this systems thinking approach because I feel that the problematic issues facing youngsters today often result from their inability to see the broader ramifications, or thinking about the big picture. Most children work on assignments and stand alone concepts with little understanding of how one subject is connected to another. The avenue to initiating change supported in this paper is simply that of using storytelling and fictions (see Leggo, 2005; Sameshima, 2007a, 2007b, in press); and promoting the metaphor *home in school* which is a restructuring of sense-of-place as a critical educational goal. Stories provide hope. Freire (1992/1999) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) agree that hopeful stories steeped in trials and intercessions are pedagogic, a form of instruction for they perform sacred values and foster critical thinking.

## Storytelling to Find Self in Relation

This story begins with Hierocles, a Greek stoic philosopher from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD who used an image to create an understanding of cosmopolitanism. He described a circle around the human mind, a larger circle around the person's family, yet a larger circle around the extended family, the local community, the town, neighboring towns, the country and eventually the human race. The task here is to imagine how one fits within the circles and how the individual is in relation and responsible to everyone in the big circle. (See Nussbaum, 1997). By visualizing the self in relation, children can begin to see their places of belonging.

*The Human Security Program* administered by the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) programs seeks to develop a secure world and promote Canadian peacebuilding. CIDA acknowledges that with increased globalization and the interconnectedness of the world, civilians are at risk because "the insecurity of others—sooner or later—becomes a matter of our own insecurity" (2005, p. 1). Social responsibility on a globalized scale thus becomes a personal threat. We need to develop healthy conceptions of self in relation. For society in the larger context, in the ballooning globalized *world-city*, finding one's sense-of-place is critical. As words such as *global citizens*, *globalization*, and *cosmopolitanism* become more and more mainstream and broadly defined, we need to rethink issues of security for we know that insecurity traditionally leads to a host of negative behaviors that begin with the individual and expand into communities.

In this paper, I demonstrate meaning-making based

on designing a personal cartography that enables one to see self in relation. This cartography creates a relational "home." Global literacy, problem solving, innovation, and creativity can be intentionally integrated into learning when we think about living as schooling. So schooling is not the medium or site for knowledge transference; Living and reflecting on that living is the act of schooling. Storying "living" thus, is the iteration of that learning and develops a re-envisioned community through pedagogies of safety, hope, and liberation; and agentially challenges "colonial and neo-colonial discourse that [inscribes] 'otherness'" (Bishop, 1998, p. 208).

In an interview in 1982, John Holt said,

I don't know of any definition of education that would seem to me to be acceptable. . . . I would talk about a process in which we become more informed, intelligent, curious, competent, skillful, aware by our interaction with the world around us, because of the mainstream of life, so to speak. In other words, I learn a great deal, but I do it in the process of living, working, playing, being with friends. There is no division in my life between learning, work, play, etc. These things are all one. I do not have a word which I could easily put in place of 'education,' unless it might be 'living' (Falbel, 1993, 13-14)

## Designing a Cartography for Understanding Self in Relation through Story

The poem "Long Longing" is a counter-narrative merging of memory and fiction which illuminates and locates pedagogical perspectives through

childhood experiences and memory. The work proposes that through autobiographic storytelling, general personal familial notions of security related to home can be established in public places like school and community. By encouraging the telling of stories and listening to others' stories, teachers can enable children to find their own sense-of-place (recognizing self-situatedness), belongingness, and community.

## LONG LONGING

how long can i long for you  
like the memories from long ago  
those childhood still photos that come to life  
fabricated just before and after the snapshot  
or the forbidden tastes  
i remember  
warm milk in a baby bottle in bed  
*your lips, sweet summer softness*  
the avocado green breakfast jug  
with its quiet milk skin hiding the  
heat of the tea milk  
always drippy and steaming  
no one wanted it but me

the taste of fear  
my seat at the end of the kitchen table  
closest to the door in case  
the terrorists came  
i never imagined they could come through  
the back door  
*like you*  
the memorized serial number on the underside  
of the blue Sealy Posture Pedic  
of the bunk bed above  
in case i needed to recite the numbers to

save my family from imagined gorilla torture  
*i erased everything from my mind when you  
traced the numbers of your love on my back*  
my fear of playing hide and seek  
of realizing my aloneness  
*when I looked for your emails*  
my fear of the dark  
the evil I can feel  
murky thicknesses  
blocking the fluidness of air  
*but you were bright and shining*

i can't remember what i stored in the drawers  
of my triple mirrored dresser  
i could see myself from all angles  
even the back of my head  
*how could i have not been ready for you?*  
the tiny alter i built behind my door  
covered with a white lace handkerchief  
a flimsy base for the serene ivory Madonna  
i received for my first communion  
my pink rosary beads draped so carefully  
can I still recite hail mary? i must if i know the  
words  
to ask for forgiveness in the dark musty  
confessional  
"bless me father for i have sinned. it has been 30  
years since my last confession. . . "  
who do i ask now?  
who can absolve me from being me?  
for loving you until I cannot be broken any more  
for breathing a faintness in the air  
of you  
so i think you're near enough to touch  
for knowing the power i hold  
in my words that can  
color that fullest love  
into empty sadness spilling over

my body in hate  
i write, i dream  
through my will  
though control  
to cope with living  
to save myself  
to save my family  
in the current photo

i can't go back  
gossamer breath on a frozen day  
only long for you  
like i long for the place of  
a childhood snapshot

This poem plays with discursive *illegitimacies* which illuminate and attempt to locate "academic life in childhood experiences and memories. . . [deepen] my knowledge of myself" and tell stories which enable "others who are struggling to make sense of themselves, to retrieve their suppressed selves, to act ethically" (Richardson in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 966). Where do I find my own belonging, community, and place? How does memory influence pedagogy and curriculum? These are the questions I ask, knowing that when the questions are fully answered by all in diverse and welcomed multiplicity, then the world will be a kinder, gentler, more compassionate place.

### **Constructing Place and Values through Story and Fiction**

We need to tell stories. Stories are not relegated to elementary classroom fairytales and Greek myths. The inquiring classroom focuses on Stephen Sterling's (2001) "third order learning"—transformative epistemologies based on gaining awareness of other world views and ways of

thinking; and Brent Davis' (2004) support of knowledge production as co-evolutionary, dialogic, integrative, and participatory. Through storytelling, commonly accepted taken-for-granted frames of thinking are questioned (Denzin, 2005; Freire, 2001; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Smith 1999). Stories teach; and stories and dialog may be one small way to make us think about our pasts and our futures. Take for example, "Exopedagogies and the Utopian Imagination: A Case Study in Faery Subcultures" by Tyson Lewis and Richard Kahn (in review) in which the authors deconstruct the creative generative space of a faery pedagogy – the notion that faery curriculum can be "a spectral rupturing element" that encourages relooking and rethinking curriculum (p. 5). In the construction of an iteration, the storying process, in the unrestricted imagination, meaning-making weaves knowledge generation.

Nick Bantock (2002) adds that knowledge is to be found everywhere and thus cannot be destroyed. Norman Denzin (2005) explains that fiction, memoirs, and other creative lyrical writing which embrace the storytelling imagination enact Paulo Freire's (1992/1999) sacred values of love, care, community, trust, and well-being. Denzin goes on to say that:

the critical democratic storytelling imagination is pedagogical. As a form of instruction, it helps persons think critically, historically, and sociologically. It exposes the pedagogies of oppression that produce injustice (see Freire, 2001, p. 54). It contributes to reflective ethical self-consciousness. It gives people a language and a set of pedagogical practices that turn

oppression into freedom, despair into hope,  
hatred into love, doubt into trust. (p. 948)

To write, tell, and listen to stories and memories are means to understanding and constructing identity, knowledge, and theory (Leggo, 2005; Neilsen, 2002; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Connections between my personal experiences, and my professional processes as a teacher-researcher shape pedagogical practice (Ayers, 1988; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Grumet, 1991, 1992; Sameshima, 2007b, 2008); and knowledge construction can be deepened through artful, creative scholarship (Broudy, 1988; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Irwin, 2004).

### **Story 1: Alaska**

I realize that I deliberately seek to build memories which perpetuate the values my family holds. For example, recently, after dinner, my family watched an edited home movie of our trip to Alaska. I created the video by carefully editing and including only the footage of particular “good” moments I selected. Through viewing and reviewing, the family commits those “happy” moments to memory. I literally construct my family's attitudes and values of the *belonging family unit* through the articulation of the recreated experiences of our times in different places. I construct that joy. David Sobel (1993) describes *touchstone memories* as significant childhood experiences-in-place which constitute an individual sense of self. My young daughter continually exclaimed, "I remember this now! I remember!" She sees a story she may not have witnessed. In fact, I know she did not see me filming some parts of this record. The viewed story is knowledge for her. She can identify with the footage as truth.

Poet Deborah Tall (1996) suggests that "A weak sense of the past encourages a weak sense-of-place" (p. 112). A weak sense-of-place influences interrelated notions of family and belonging which further sways constructs of identity, community, and pedagogy (see Wiles, 2008). Place connected to land enacts on and influences my sense of security. Tall goes on to say:

When people are attached to their forebears, they want to remain close to where they live, continue their traditions, tend their graves, embody their hopes. Many may remain where they were born out of habit or spiritual duty, but the staying itself is conducive to life because the lived-in land then becomes an extension of the self, the family, the group; to endanger the land is to wound one's collective body. (1996, p. 112)

Although I understand Tall's perspective, I view the lived-in land as contextual and only an extension of family groundedness if the family experienced a *belongingness* to their land. For example, my mother-in-law's Prairie farming family was deeply connected to the land because the land sustained their lives. As an immigrant to Canada, I grew up an urban child and spent little time out-of-doors. My sense of self, security, community, and place are not found in one geographical site, but rather various soils of the earth through inter-relational experience. My *geoautobiography* (Porteous, 1989), created through story snapshots of home and community develop touchstone memories which frame pedagogical outlooks for me. As a teacher, these lenses are important to acknowledge.

## Story 2: Johannesburg

I construct my world as a cartographer. I map my location to find security. Before moving to Pullman, Washington, I lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and before that, I storied my childhood in Johannesburg, South Africa. Looking back, I have always fabricated my freedom and security. As a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Chinese South African, I grew up in a land of loud, visible, understood, but unspoken racism. As a child, I attended school in a private Catholic convent because Asians were not permitted in local public schools in Johannesburg. I grew up on a land that was not free for me to belong to. Wherever I went, voices in the land called out, "Ching, chong, Chinaman!" or "Chinese, Japanese, money please!" I had no place to stand on the African map and this knowledge greatly influenced my constructs of community and security even in my childhood home.

Ecological identity refers to “the feelings and relationships people develop with landscapes and how they identify with nature in the process” (Thomashow, 1995, p. 62). Mitchell Thomashow likens ecological identity work to an unfolding process, much like peeling away layers of an onion, taking one closer to the core of understanding oneself and becoming aware that one is deeply connected to the environment. Richard Borden, a psychologist, suggests that:

the study of ecology leads to changes of identity and psychological perspective, and can provide the foundations for an ecological identity – a reframing of a person’s point of view which restructures

values, reorganizes perceptions and alters the individual’s self-directed, social and environmentally directed actions.  
(Thomashow, 1995, p. 62)

Thinking about how beliefs and values are connected to geographical landscape provides a frame for situating and understanding oneself.

Edith Cobb (1977) likens embodied knowing and lived experience as the bodymind connection to the natural world. Cobb believes that through comparative or metaphorical knowing of the relationship between land and person, the human species can develop a deepened worldview. Douglas Porteous and Sandra Smith's (2001) book, *Domicide: The global destruction of home* starkly supports the importance of familiar objects, structures, and environments which act as props to memory and identity (also see Wiles, 2008). Porteous and Smith discuss the loss of home as not limited to a loss of territory but as a fundamental threat to identity. The loss of residence removes the possibilities for establishing belongingness which allows one to see situatedness. Eco-philosopher, Joanna Macy (1991), describes herself as *flow-through*—a systems theory term which names the human body a flow-through matter which is transformed by experience and which transforms others through interaction. The idea of the *flow-through-being* emphasizes the interconnected rhizomatic meshingness of community and neighbourhood.

## **So Where is Place and Home? Where do we Build our Stories?**

My home is no longer where I was born, nor is it only where I have lived or my current address. Home is *dwelling*, an Old English word which means to delay or to come back to. Home and sense-of-place are temporary situational domiciles, pauses, which change with the flow of time. (Sbrocchi, 2005; Tall, 1996; Tuan, 1977; Wiles, 2008). Gary Knowles and Suzanne Thomas (2001, p. 210) describe place as:

an individual and socially constructed reality (Hutchison 1999; Relph, 1976) – a notion that interweaves the elements of geographical location, social consciousness, and the meanings derived from experience-in-place . . . it is a place that represents in literal and metaphoric terms, a focusing of a (person's) emotive response to the "sociophysical" context (Berleant, 1977).

Historically, *home* and *city* have been conflicting polar words with associations to dichotomous pairs such as safe/unsafe, private/public, good/evil, warm/cold, or female/male. Adrienne Rich (1976) connects home with motherhood, privacy, and safety. Jane Gallop (1988) describes home as intimate, protected, and separated from "the city of man and the brokering of power" (p. 2). Gallop writes of Roland Barthes (1975) and Rich (1976) who both refuse "to respect the separation between objectivity and subjectivity . . . challenging the split between public and private which keeps our lives out of our knowledge" (p. 4). Both authors merge autobiography and scholarship, the private and the public, to deliberately further the

development of social and cultural understanding. Jane Gallop (1988) explains that American feminism and French post-structuralism, two non-aligned intellectual movements of the seventies, laid the pathway between theory and life story. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) believes a sense-of-place develops order, frames space and is "necessary to the sense of reality of one's empirical world" (p.88).

### **Teaching Pedagogic Place through Story**

As a teacher, it is my responsibility to actively and reflexively seek understandings of how I constitute my values and beliefs. Through writing, storytelling, and sharing, I challenge commonly accepted taken-for-granted frames of thinking. I take responsibility for my community by liberating myself and others from marginalizing the non-dominant and unarticulated ways of being and becoming, inside and outside the classroom. I must try to develop an atmosphere of home in school (hooks, 2000; Noddings, 1992) and enable my students to establish their own sense-of-place and position of responsibility for their place in the classroom and as members of the school and community. When security, sense-of-place, belonging, and home are established in the school setting, many behavioral and relational issues will dissipate. Instead of focusing our energies solely on restructuring curriculum content, we must redirect our eyes to holistic systems which open the possibilities for interdisciplinary connections, ongoing collaborations, fluidity, and participation of all (see Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kappler, 2000; Riley-Taylor, 2002).

A beginning place is to enable the development of our students' notions of place. Encourage

collaborative projects with local and global groups so students can think of themselves as contributors. Include regular school-wide events to allow students to commune with what is happening around them. Other local projects may include participating in local gallery exhibitions or taking field trips to local parks or service industries. Global projects could include fundraising projects for informed concerns or sharing information through virtual communities. Encourage identity building through story sharing and life representation through arts and writing. Telling, sharing and listening are all crucial to constructing identities of belonging-in-place. When students find their sense-of-place and belongingness, they will be empowered to find security, situatedness, and responsibility, which I believe lead to compassion and system awareness.

Carl Leggo once told me that we could prevent war with stories. At the time, I thought he was being outlandish. Now I agree and am happy to be an outlander myself.

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