

Encounters with a pedagoga

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cie**C. D. Vintimilla**

Capilano University, Canada

Abstract

This article documents the initial work and encounters of a pedagoga with a group of educators on the west coast of Canada. The article retraces the complexities and vulnerabilities of such encounters, and presents them as generative and rich conversations that were carried along by, and not despite, their difficulty. They followed a practice of putting-into-question that helped to keep open possibilities in intersubjective space not only to reconceptualize children's and educators' ideas, but also to make education and curriculum into something more than the mere organization of materials and activities for children, or the programmatic application of a particular pedagogical approach. This article wishes to engage and contribute to the broader ongoing and stimulating research in the field of childhood, curriculum and pedagogy.

Keywords

collective life, curriculum, educators, pedagogical encounters, pedagoga work, reconceptualizing practice

I don't know how many souls I have.
I've changed at every moment.
I always feel like a stranger.
I've never seen or found myself. (Pessoa, 1998: 243)
Countless lives inhabit us.
I don't know, when I think or feel,
Who it is that thinks or feels.
I am merely the place
Where things are thought or felt.
I have more than just one soul.
There are more I's than I myself.
I exist, nevertheless,
Indifferent to them all.
I silence them: I speak.

Corresponding author:

CD Vintimilla, School of Education and Childhood Studies, Capilano University, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V7J 3H5.

Email: mdelgado@capilano.ca

The crossing urges of what
 I feel or do not feel
 Struggle in who I am, but I
 Ignore them. They dictate nothing
 To the I, I know: I write. (Reis, 1998: 137)

A time, a place: a search for a beginning in an already begun

I have been working as a pedagoga and as faculty in the early childhood care and education department of a west coast Canadian university for the past eight years. This work, in sometimes awkward and always rich conjunction with my doctoral studies, has been the natal site of my so-called immigrant existence on Canada's west coast. This article documents my initial work as a pedagoga with a group of educators at the university's children's centre, and also engages with broader ongoing conversations in the field of early childhood education curriculum and pedagogy (Cannella, 1997, 1998; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006; Pinar et al., 1995; Rinaldi, 2006). An Italian professional figure, the pedagoga has aroused interest in North America, particularly in early childhood contexts, due to its pivotal presence in the world-renowned Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach. This approach has been of great inspiration to the work done in the centre since the early 1990s, and was the reason why I was hired. A pedagoga is someone who contributes pedagogically to educational projects; the exact work is profoundly contextual. The pedagoga's studies are interdisciplinary and integrate mainly pedagogy, philosophy, history, sociology and psychology. A pedagoga is someone who is devoted to thinking about pedagogical possibilities.

This article presents the history of the children's centre where I work and relates how I, as a pedagoga, entered that history. In significant ways, the article traces the initial inventive trajectory of a becoming-pedagoga in the context of western Canada. It is important to note that the centre was established in the rich and conflicted atmosphere of the late 1960s, and was founded by a group of formidable and wilful women who were faculty in the university's early childhood education and care department. These women wanted to think about early childhood in more just and innovative ways. I think that this desire is what still drives our work today.

Although the centre's history precedes me, my work has engaged with its changing conditions – its abundance of signification, difficulties and impasses – and particularly with the educators' theoretical commitments, epistemologies, uncertainties, creativity, fears, resistances and routines. Simultaneously, my practice has been traversed by its own hesitations, questions, doubts and ambiguities.

So, where do I begin? Perhaps at the intersection of history – in some ways a history of the Other – and my story as a pedagoga. This intersection is inaugurated by the encounter between a foreigner – the stranger who I was, who I am – and the centre – the educators, their own histories (in themselves and in relation to mine), and their openness to and ambivalence towards such an encounter. I am a stranger not only because of my background (as an Ecuadorian who was educated in Europe), but also because of the question of what it means to work with a pedagoga.

This intersection is a place where vulnerabilities can emerge to trouble both the educators and the pedagoga – those types of vulnerability that confront one when encountering the foreigner, that might make the foreigner an intruder. From this encounter I retrace a history of hospitality, and thus also inevitably a history of questions. As Derrida (1995: 3) argues, the foreigner might initially be thought of as the one 'who puts the first question or the one to whom you address the first question'; typically this question is 'Who are you?' Addressing the stranger with a question might involve inscribing the stranger (me) as a *being-in-question* – as I was, as I am – and being-in-question, I

suggest, constitutes the pedagogista's singular significance. But the pedagogista, as the foreigner to whom the first question is addressed, can also *put the Other into-question*. It is from this place of multiple being that my investigation of the work in the children's centre will begin.

The double movement of being-in-question and putting-into-question

This being-in-question and putting-into-question in my encounters with educators at the children's centre sustain modes of estrangement towards what otherwise becomes familiar (taken for granted, invisible). Being-in-question creates unfamiliarity between the educators and the pedagogista. My being-in-question was not only a 'Who are you?' but also a projective 'Might you be who I suspect you to be?' This mode of estrangement – this being-in-question – can induce a suspicious disposition or wary reserve, commonly identified as a 'lack of trust' to be overcome in advancing towards some implicit consensual ideal. For me – for us, I will presume to say – this disposition instead became a necessary place to be, and generative for our work together at the centre, not a condition to be alleviated in pursuit of an implicit or collusive comity. Doubts about my presence, although difficult for me, made our relations and encounters productively fluid, uncertain and disidentifying.

I uncovered a further meaning in being-in-question during my pedagogista studies at the University of Siena in Italy. The pedagogista coexists with and lives in questions – for the love of questions, as Rilke (1954) would say. These questions are concerned with pedagogical relations (e.g. between children, educators, families and communities) and with what can emerge in such relations, recalling Todd's (2010: 5) conception of pedagogy as 'the *process* through which these relational exchanges come to condition the kinds of knowledge we can have and, more importantly, the kinds of being we can become'. I often engaged the educators at the children's centre with questions regarding the pedagogical relation between teacher and children, inviting them to problematize their assumptions and naturalized routines of thinking that limit ways of engaging with others. We also explored questions of subjectivity, including what is considered valid within particular contexts. What (coexisting) images of the child might teachers hold? And how do such images influence the child's 'horizon of possibilities' within the classroom?

My work's own 'horizon of possibilities' has been set and its meaningfulness sustained by this 'pause with questions' and the endurance of uncertainty's uncomfortable touch; the shallow desire for an immediate reply, assertion, explanation, definition or solution is continually shadowed by the presence of the question – exactly what question, one may not even know. These questions engaged with ordinary daily moments of tension or disruption (children not sharing a toy, when to or not to interrupt children's play, or figuring out how to sustain an idea in the classroom) and invited us not to jump too quickly into predetermined ways of thinking.

My work as a pedagogista – as a stranger – is thus the work of defamiliarization. The Derridian stranger mentioned above is also the one who Arendt (1958) calls the 'conscious pariah', expressing a subjectivity that consciously does not want to feel at home, the one who lives well not belonging and assumes an estrangement from which to effect critical resistance to the status quo. This stranger 'never settles for belonging [taking] a stance which remains uncomfortable with structures of understanding and the recognition by which it is constituted' (Giles, 2007: 22). The pedagogista is, however, only a stranger by virtue of belonging (since there is no 'distantiation' without inclusion), and recognizes herself as inscribed and constituted by the contingent truths of her situation.

My presence as a pedagogista, still being-in-question even while becoming more familiar, maintains an estrangement provoked by a critical or conjectural mode of thinking that Derrida (1995) calls 'the perhaps'. My role is thus that of a pedagogical consultant who is charged to think

the particular, the daily, the familiar and the accepted through this ‘perhaps’, and thus to trouble what has become static or routinized – to evade ‘conceptual coagulation and the prejudice of taking the given for granted, the assumption that it could not be otherwise’ (Giles, 2007: 16).

In this role, and at the intersection of histories, the pedagogista tries to pose reverberant questions that open space for educators to put-into-question and, indeed, to put the educators themselves into-question. For example, we often had conversations about how teachers’ understanding of what an early childhood educator is influenced their work or how common professional discourses influence their ‘horizon of possibilities’. This being put-into-question was not meant to trouble their validity or legitimacy as educators; to be-in-question is to have ontological doubts about one’s own practice, but also equally about children, curriculum and education in general.

Consequently, my work frequently returned to, together with the educators, the putting-into-question of the ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1980) that produce, sustain and interweave understandings of their profession, of relations with children and families, and of the curricula that stage their intersection – for example, regimes of truth such as developmental-based understandings of children and childhood or the role of educators as nurturing and caregivers, or images of children as needy and innocent, to name a few. Conversations about these matters were traversed by the question: ‘What does it mean to live well with others in pedagogical contexts?’ (and thus also our ways of being in pedagogical spaces, how we challenge and refine our identity as educators, and the assumptions that enable and constrain our work with children). My work addresses *possibilities*: what it is possible to think, be and do, and why – a complicated conversation indeed.

This resonates with what Jardine (1992: 116) describes as ‘recollect[ing] the contours and textures of the life we are already living, a life that is not secured by the methods we can wield to render such a life our object’. If anything has unified these engagements, it is the concerted resistance to making our work, ourselves or children, partners and circumstances a managerial oeuvre. Education at any level is too complex for such ready reductions. This is thus an anti-technocratic attitude towards education – in Biesta’s (2001: 385) words, against education understood merely ‘as a means that can be used to bring about certain ends’.

Engaging with complicated conversations: between expectation and possession

In my view, being-in-question and putting-into-question have been the generative forces of multiple conversations related to our work at the centre as a pedagogista and educators. One difficulty that arose initially, however, was that framing these conversations in the discourse described above, rather than the familiar solution-fixated utilitarianism of the *how to*, left the educators frustrated that I did not meet their expectation of *being-an-expert* ready to solve the issues of the day, but instead tried to open a space where we could, together, think about the *conflict-in-itself*. Doubts also arose as I declined to impart knowledge towards the attainment of shared ideals, such as competence, professionalism, caring, community, ‘niceness’ or agreeability (an ideal with wide implicit professional sanctions). The teachers’ frustrations confronted me with my own vulnerability as a presumed ‘expert’, my doubts about how to proceed and, finally, my understanding that my pedagogical work exists within these tensions, inspiring what Pinar (2004) calls the ‘complicated conversations’ that constitute curricular and pedagogical ethics. These often very difficult conversations reveal the obscure landscapes of teaching – the *being* of teaching – in sharp contrast to salvific teleologies, and themselves constitute a response to the generative intricate matters of teaching.

Some questions underlying these discussions, propelling our transit into new modes of estrangement, included: Who is the educator allowed to be within the collective? Who is the child allowed to be? What are the politics of the I–Other encounter in these relations? What haunts our thinking about how education could be? What circumscribes the ‘natural’ or naturalized? What is its currency, its viability? Where do its fragile seductions lie and how might they be expressed? Such questions asked of us what Greene proposes when she writes:

To take the risk of thinking about what he [*sic*] is doing when he teaches, what he means when he talks about enabling others to learn ... to become progressively more self-conscious about the choices he makes and the commitments he defines in the several dimensions of his professional life. [To] look, if he can, at his presuppositions, to examine critically the principles underlying what he thinks and what he says. (Greene, 1973, quoted in Kohli, 1998: 181)

These conversations have not produced prescriptions for fixing the educator or for how to be with others in such educational contexts, or even necessarily yielded approaches to practice – this is an interesting adjunct, but not of primary concern here. Instead, these conversations asked us as educators and a pedagogista to encounter the paradoxical, the ambiguous, the difficult, the disruptive, the coldly institutional, the silences, the wounds of the I, the ones that wound and the not-ideal – that is, to respond to what education and the pedagogical relation *are* without indulging in an idealized concept of what our work and our being-with-others *should be*. Thus, integral to my own pedagogista work is the thematization of our work together – work done in a radical hermeneutical spirit (Caputo, 2000), aiming ‘to educe understanding, to bring forth the presupposition in which we already live’ (Jardine, 1992: 116). Done in this spirit, the work has opened a space for reflection on habits and presuppositions, and the difficult and sometimes painful understandings that result.

In order to further this thematization, the remainder of this article will follow three recursions back to the schematic delineations outlined above: *encounter*, *question* and *conversation*. These recursions will illuminate the conceptual dimensions of the work and offer new points of (re) commencement.

The haunting of the good and equable in the encounters

Our work at the centre involves the commitment not to efface anyone’s ideas or passions in the name of common harmony. This commitment is ongoing, not completed, because of its impracticabilities. For instance, a commitment to harmony might imply an image of the educator as always caring and loving – stereotypically maternal characteristics (Britzman, 2003; Grumet, 1988; Langford, 2007). This image may coexist with other images of the early childhood educator – for example, as a researcher working with children. Interruptions provoked by, for instance, a disruptive idea must maintain some fidelity to both these images. Perhaps the commitment to harmony and loving care is that which allows itself to be interrupted, and is never fully achieved. This idea is intrinsic to Mouffe’s concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’: striving to secure

channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues ... for ‘agonistic pluralism,’ the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs. (Mouffe, 2000: 16)

Mouffe means politics and democracy on the societal level. However, she clearly conveys the challenge and invitation posed to teacher–pedagogista encounters by agonistic pluralism: to rethink our

way of being-with-others and creating democratic spaces, not necessarily to erase disagreements or the passions they entail, but rather to see them as an arena where differences emerge and are confronted. Thus, democratic designs are agonistic before they are consensual; they presuppose disharmony. Our work at the centre, then, becomes a slow, ambiguous but fertile movement towards imagining the shapes of such designs in encounters among educators and children, and embracing an image of early childhood educators as those who live with the entanglements and impasses of being educators while being-with-others.

Thus, our first thematization concerns recovery from the agonism of the self–Other encounter. Here I am thinking of *recovering* by *uncovering* – that is, our encounters were less about recovering something missing than about uncovering what was already there, unspoken in the shadows between us. Our coming-together took place within a politics of niceness implicitly restricted to a putatively harmonious social project, privileging certain ways of being and shattering others.

Such a project of harmony or collegiality among educators may seem unproblematic – something to strive for – and I do not mean particularly to argue the opposite. However, many of the questions that incubated the putting-into-question introduced above revealed the price of a politics of niceness – a certain moralization of feelings, hiding paradoxes, fears and disappointments in/from encounters with others. The focus on harmony diminished the intricacies of being-with-others in a way made palpable by putting- and being put-into-question.

The work inspired questions such as: What is impossible to think about being-with-others? What is impossible to imagine without it? What has been cast away by our assumptions, our well-intentioned sensitivities? What haunts our silences? A politics of niceness, sedimented in self-confirmation of harmonious intentions, had paradoxically created relations that were oversensitive to how our encounters took place, bringing a sense of unspoken prejudice, of the right to be offended or of resentment of the ways of being of one's colleagues. Simultaneously, the politics of niceness precluded engagement in complicated conversations or thinking-with-others to open space for thinking and being differently, and particularly for thinking about education and curriculum beyond what was already known – a precept inherent to the pedagogista's work as I see it.

Some educators' fear of creating dissonance led them to abandon curricular explorations that their ideas had stoked, so as to avoid troubling their colleagues – for example, to give up exploring 'developmentally inappropriate' ideas. Similarly, the educators tried to implement more creative activities for the children early in the day, but this required them to relax constraints of time and space. Hence, the following question, compelling but obscure, became central: Who is the educator allowed to be within the politics of her encounters? And the same question faced me: Who am I allowed to be, as a pedagogista, not only within the politics of my encounters with educators, but also within the broader community of the children's centre?

Encountering the I-educator: affirming unknowing, confronting mastery

My second theme is the process whereby a *question* is brought to the encounter; this act of putting-into-question presupposes an affirmation – a yes to the question itself but also to the Other who asks it. Derrida puts this well:

To ask a question, I must address someone. Even innocent questions presuppose a primary affirmation. I address myself to someone else and I am saying it's better we speak than we don't, it's better that I relate to the Other than not. And so I affirm a sort of yes, sort of 'anterior' acquiescence. (Derrida, 1995: 5)

But this openness or affirmative attitude can be shy, obfuscated by the need – typical of ‘professional’ fields that are dependent on recognition of expertise – to master and to know. This dynamic became quite complicated during my work alongside the educators at the centre.

By the institution, by their parents, by their own historical understanding or by their anxiety to escape inadequacy (or its exposure), educators are commonly expected to be ones who know, not ones who question. This expectation creates a particular relationship to knowledge and thinking. Educators assert the knowledge claim as an inevitable result of their professional role (‘I know the child’, ‘I know my room’, ‘I know the work’, ‘I know my colleagues’). Much of our work together involved considering the relationship between teachers’ professional identity and their knowledge – particularly the multiple ethical dimensions of knowing, especially knowing the Other. My intention was, of course, not to argue for unknowledgeable educators, but to reflect on the taken-for-granted, the imperium of knowledge and its exclusions and auto-delimitation of possibilities, particularly of thought.

Possessing knowledge, being in certainty, knowing what to do and knowing how to decide are qualities that are commonly attributed to ‘good’, ‘effective’ educators. These qualities also help educators feel in control and in possession of the objects (human and otherwise) that are proper to education – a control and possession reified and reiterated in daily routines, decisions, transitions, schedules, and so on. Thus, many of our conversations aimed to understand how the educators, through an image of mastery and control, took ‘possession’ of a room, a time, a curriculum or a child. One point of entry was our reflections on the rules imposed on the children at the centre, which we saw as symptomatic of a broader dominant discourse regulating our ‘being-with-children’ – for example, children cannot run inside, children must nap at nap time, and children must clean up after themselves.

These conversations were complicated by questions of *dispossession*, or the attempt to alleviate the stifling safety of the *master educator* role and open up new possibilities. I want to discuss two such attempts. The first involved the burden that educators may feel (as did many at the centre) in hiding their uncertainties and, as Jardine (1992: 124) describes, being ‘caught up in the exhausting and consumptive pursuit of “mastery” and “excellence”’. The need to master (understood as assuming control and thus as that which fixes, in the double sense of repair and immobilize) solves and even eradicates ambiguities and difficulties, but it can be exhausting and bring an existential desolation to educators and children. As Jardine (1992: 124) writes: ‘life as something to be mastered seems to deny what we already know about being alive’.

Being alive becomes something to *solve*, and finding one’s life difficult, ambiguous or uncertain is a mistake to be corrected. In education, once our understanding of being human becomes something estranged from the ongoing, interpretive narrative of everyday life (a narrative rife with possibilities, ambiguity, and risk) and is reconstructed into an object ripe for technical manipulation – once the difficulty of human life comes to be seen as a mistake to be corrected – we begin the horrifying task of chasing our own tails with the hope of eventually closing down the risk-laden conversation that such a narrative involves and requires. (Jardine, 1992: 122)

At the beginning of our work at the centre, there was a disposition towards closure of the sorts of conversations that Jardine names here – and a consequent closure of thinking together. Instead, there was a sort of spectral frustration that was sometimes expressed as a sense of impotence, accusation or exasperated impatience for me, the pedagogista, to solve the problem. All this is symptomatic of the burden of mastery.

During these conversations with teachers, the questions that excited me as a pedagogista – in our becoming-in-question, my being-in-question – were questions such as: What would it mean for

educators to relieve their subjectivities of the burden of mastery? What would be the implications of this relief regarding their thinking life? How can we, in pedagogical contexts, distance ourselves from our assumptions about what constitutes everyday knowledge, our beliefs regarding who we are and, especially, regarding who the Other is that we encounter?

Encountering the child

The second attempt or moment to which I refer above in the conversations regarding dispossession concerns the encounter between educator and child. As mentioned, my work has focused on the taken-for-granted: educators' ways of being and the centre as a place of encounters – matters so familiar that further thinking had become seen as unnecessary. Such familiarity is sustained in part through control and possession, which regulate what becomes (im)possible to imagine. Familiarity can be voiced through a possession of understanding and knowing of the Other – here, the child. Many of my encounters with educators would start by listening to such a voicing, as they spoke from assumed familiarity with who the children were, what they were capable of and what was best for them.

This familiarity emerged from the educators' rich daily encounters with the children, although often the voice had been overtaken by the authoritative presumptions of developmental psychology regarding who the child was and could be – for instance, that children 'naturally' fall into 'stages' by age, that teachers should be governed by the idea of propriety (appropriateness) with respect to children, or that children of certain ages cannot engage in abstract thinking. Thus we asked: What is foreclosed when we say, 'I know the child'? Does the singularity of a child become superfluous through the familiarity this invites? These queries put-into-question or, using Jardine's (1992: 125) term, invite a 'dispossession of understanding' regarding familiarity and its presumptions or assumptions (of control).

As in many pedagogical contexts, at the centre the force of routine became an atrophic obstacle to the ethical and ontological exercise of acknowledging that our knowledge and image of the Other will always fail to contain the infinite multiple she or he consists in. Echoing Levinas (1969), to encounter and respond to the Other (not only the child, but also, for example, the Other in thought) is to give her or him the *right to be Other*.

This exercise is demanding, particularly for educators, because it must occur alongside the paradoxical acknowledgment that no pedagogical context is innocent of or exempt from violence against the subjectivities that dwell therein. This crucial leavening of the ethical exigencies – of the right to be Other – regards education as guided by ideals, implicit or explicit, which aim, most often unconsciously, to 'produce' a certain sort of humanity. Rules, routines, socialization into norms, authoritative expectations about children's 'behaviours', moments of guidance: Todd (2010) argues that all these represent and perform moments of implicit pedagogical violence. Thus, she writes: 'the question that remains for educators is how, in the face of the violence implicit in the pedagogical demand for "learning to become", might they be open and responsible to the Other?' (8).

At the centre, we have undertaken complicated conversations about Todd's question and also about those moments when, as educators, we voice the familiar and, in so doing, silence the infinite multiple the Other can be. Through the familiar, we are prevented from imagining other ways of being-with-children and thinking about education and curriculum, as well as our identities as educators and our condition more broadly.

Encountering curriculum: reinvigorating images, listening and being-with-ideas

This article's final movement attempts to retrace our encounters at this children's centre with how curriculum was thought in these intersections, in its myriad connections to images of children and

educators, its translations, disintegrations and difficulties – inaugurating, it is hoped, a series of such retracings.

The history of the centre reflects the contemporary interest within early childhood education in understanding curriculum as *emergent*. First, I want to explore translations – spaces layered with meaning through which this concept appeared in daily encounters between educators and children at the centre. These translations provoked many questions and deconstructive conversations about curriculum.

The most immediate significance of the emergent curriculum concept is twofold. First, emergence as such is all about the child and, second, it is about exploring a range of materials and children's interests. Both ideas shaped daily practice at the centre and afforded new ways of being-together. Most of the educators at the centre were interested in reimagining their ways of being with the children. I came to find, however, that the presumptions underlying such ideas can be problematic in unexpected ways. For example, the idea that emergent curriculum is all about the child is not merely the simplistic devolution of power from educator to child it purports to be; it also seems to invite avoidance or erasure of the pedagogical encounter between educator and children. If curriculum is 'all about the children', educators may understand their role in being with the children as passive supervisors of play, setters up of activities, as mere caregivers who monitor and praise children's engagement with peers or who simply encourage exploration of the many activities set up in the room. Many of our conversations delved into this 'child-centred' reductionism.

With other educational theorists (Cannella, 1997; Dewey, 1902; Langford, 2010), I maintain that this is a reductionism, which does not consider our relational condition between humans and with the more than human or the interdependency characterizing much pedagogical experience. A passive, child-centred concept of emergence seemed unable to allow imagining education as a mutual encounter, serving instead to inappropriately cleanse the ambiguity, conflict, dissymmetry and difficulties inherent in relationality, especially as regards certain encounters that were rife with possibility to explore different understandings and significations. This reductionism makes a poverty of encounters with the Other, and the alterity the Other represents - encounters with, to echo Levinas (1969), the otherness of the Other. I refer here to those pedagogical encounters where intersubjectivity (between children and adults) mediates life as a creative, dialogical process arising from a pedagogy of listening (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006), where relation and radical dialogue take precedence over precept.

The second idea locates emergent curriculum in exploring different materials and activities; it thus devolves from different presumptions about the child and curriculum. For example, each day the educators would arrange various materials around the classroom for children to explore until they decided to mingle elsewhere. The children explained their movements by saying things like 'I am bored' or 'This is not fun'. According to some of the educators, the class had to be organized in this way because 'children can't be engaged for long periods of time'. We owe some of the presumptions involved in this self-fulfilling practice to the vast influence of developmental psychology on early childhood education and on the ways a child may be imagined. However, they are also symptomatic of a broader consumerist ethos, with the educator as provider and the children as consumers of experiences that must be simple, fast, diverse and, like a cat chasing its tail, 'developmentally appropriate'. The difficulty of thinking is reduced, represented only in the different areas of the classroom, where thinking and exploration of meaning are framed within fragmented, rushed, consumeristic processes under a pseudo-psychological blessing and legitimation. Some of the educators have wondered – and I certainly think one needs to ask – why is it a worthy task to put-into-question such ideas? At first glance, they seem so supportive of the child, so respectful of her or his interests, and the various challenges I provoke against them easily incite stereotypically anti-intellectual discourses.

I have offered this article in the spirit in which the pedagogista's work proceeds more generally – that is, in engagement with such questions and in fruitful resistance to their easy dismissal. Perhaps initially obscure, this work nonetheless carries the spirit of my conversations with educators – conversations carried along by, not despite, their difficulty. This practice of putting-into-question helps keep open possibilities in intersubjective space not only to reconceptualize children's and educators' ideas, but also to make education and curriculum into something more than the mere organization of materials and activities for students, or the programmatic application of any pedagogical approach.

In conclusion, the work has involved mutual immersion with educators in our understanding(s) of education and particularly curriculum as the existential experience of ideas and concepts explored among practitioners and with children, while maintaining the commitment to a sense of memory and history that those explorations evoke, and hoping ultimately to foster an educative milieu of infinite richness and implication. Put another way:

What starts to come forward is not a bluster of activities for the classroom, but a way of taking up the world that breaks the spell of the consumptivism, exhaustion, and panic of activities in which so much of our lives is inscribed. (Jardine et al., 1998: 125)

In this sense, our work at the centre has flirted incessantly with the *being* of education, and asked us to slow down amid the multiple reverberations of thinking- and being-with-others in order to speak and create a history bigger than oneself that whispers constantly of the impossibilities, inconsistencies and multiplicities of meaning within which education may, and must, continue to be reinvented.

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Author biography

C. D. Vintimilla teaches at Capilano University and is a pedagogista at the Capilano University Children's Centre. Her research and pedagogical interests engage with the ethical question of living well with others within pedagogical contexts and its relation with teacher subjectivity. Currently, in her work as a pedagogista, she is furthering and intensifying this focus by exploring with children and educators multiple conceptualizations about living with others. She is interested in explorations that can provoke and advance thought about subject formation, place and inventive responsibility in times of overdetermined crises.