2008

Storied by children: authored by adults

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Troubling Terrains engages with the idea of educational research as locations, as places, as sites, as spaces – as terrains. It explores multiple ways in which these terrains may be contentious, contested and controversial and shows how such terrains may be troubling:

- in their impact on educational researchers and research participants, and
- in the capacity of educational researchers and research participants to resist and transform competing forces and interests and thus create new and more enabling research terrains.

This book pursues one of the ambivalences of educational research. Does educational research help to replicate existing sociocultural privilege? Or does it work to disrupt privilege and to construct alternative understandings of current issues? In this process, the book presents helpful tactics for traversing and transforming the troubling and sometimes troubled terrains of contemporary educational research.
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Chapter 3

Storied by children: Authored by adults

Kirsten Kinash & Shelley Kinash

Kirsten’s abstract
Children aren’t asked their opinions about how their school is. I think that writing about us, rather than interviewing us or asking our opinions, doesn’t help adults see what we are thinking. I have had the lucky experience of spending a day at a school that is totally different from what I had experienced before. Most children don’t get to experience this, and so they think that every school is like their own. I hope to help other children and teachers see what it is like to visit a country school in Australia, when you are used to a city school in Canada. I think that sharing one of our (children’s) voices really matters.

Shelley’s abstract
The dominant school discourse is urban, American, authored by academics in a linear format. This chapter troubles the spatial, agency and modal terrains. A critical read of educational research necessitates three questions: Where is the school experience situated? Whose voice is shared? And how is it represented? As academics in faculties of teacher preparation, a primary concern is how best to help children learn. Ironically, most educational research is about rather than with children, and is truncated from their phenomenological experience. Adult researchers frame the questions and choose the population, sample, and methodology. The adults disseminate the results and interpretations in academic journals inaccessible to the children and most of their teachers. This chapter is situated in a rural Queensland primary school.

The authors of this chapter are a nine year-old Canadian schoolgirl and her much older Canadian tertiary-educator mother. The text is composed in an interrupted format with two dominant voices.
Kirsten’s process reflections upon reading Shelley’s abstract

I find the language is a lot of bigger words and confusing. As children, we have trouble understanding the words. I do understand why adults use these words, because the big words are necessary for adults to get what you really mean out. Children need to learn the big words and what they mean. However, when children do learn big, fancy words, people laugh at them and say, “Aren’t you cute?” Personally, I find this a little insulting. It makes me think twice about trying new words and ideas.

Positioning narrative

Congratulations! You have earned a brand new Eggy! Now watch it hatch.
I will name it Fish Mimic. May I buy it some items?

Chhhkkk Chhhkkk

Here we are at the store. First, you will need to select its bed. Would you like the cave bed or the canopy bed?
I will take the canopy bed. How much does it cost? How many points do I have?

Oh no. In Eggy World, there is no money. You earn items through doing work for other people. If you want this bed for your Eggy, then you will need to do something for the store keeper.

Chhhkkk Chhhkkk

Shelley’s interpretation of the positioning narrative

These are the sounds of my children – Josh aged seven and Kirsten aged nine – learning on the 896 kilometre drive from Toowoomba to Sydney. They are playing on each other’s Websites, using a MagnaDoodle© drawing board. With each Chhhkkk Chhhkkk of the erasing lever sliding across the board, they are linked to a new page. I once asked them to play on paper because I wanted the hard-copy of their game. They refused. Their learning is dynamic, fluid, oral, creative, interactive and non-linear. Their game emerges from contemporary children’s ways of knowing. Hassett (2006) eloquently wrote about the ontology of texts preferred by children who live and play in the digital age:

In a world influenced by technology, children encounter new forms of texts that indicate new ways of reading, writing, interpreting, interacting, and thinking. Ontologically, texts have changed and they look different from traditional print-based texts where alphabetic letters and printed words are the primary carrier of meaning. New forms of texts combine visual, verbal, and written elements in ways that rival the printed word, indicating that literacy as a school subject might need to be re-conceived because alphabetic print literacy, while remaining ever-important, is no longer enough to meet the demands of new forms of texts and new literacies. (p. 135)

Hassett grounded this critique of traditional print literacy in Foucault’s theory. Foucault (for example, 1972, 1972-1977) used rigorous tools of archaeology, genealogy and discourse to trouble the taken-for-granted societal systems and structures. Hassett (2006) applied his methods to questioning the enactment of traditional notions of literacy. He is not suggesting that low-tech schooling is bad and that transformative schooling is simply achieved by using computers. As Kendall and Wickham (1999) insightfully explained, “history should be used not to make ourselves comfortable, but rather to disturb the taken-for-granted” (p. 4).

My observation of Kirsten and Josh’s website-play reminded me that growing up in the digital age affords new opportunities for thinking and learning. As Kirsten shares, When we grow up in this kind of world, this is how we play. Hassett (2006) applied theory that was first shared by McLuhan (1964) to explain that, “as any new technology is used in the classroom, then, we need be aware of the ways in which technologies become a part of us, a part of our very being” (p. 155). Listening to the words and actions of children like Kirsten, as she explores previously uncharted terrain, activates Foucault’s power-knowledge domain such that we may trouble the taken-for-granted and inquire into children’s ways of knowing.

Shelley’s introduction

This chapter is authored by Kirsten Kinash and me, her mother. Kirsten is nine years old. I am much older. Our family is spending one year in Queensland, Australia as I am a Visiting Academic from the University of Calgary to the University of Southern Queensland. Our home city of Calgary in Alberta, Canada has a population of over one million and Kirsten’s primary school has approximately 700 students. Kirsten had the opportunity to spend a day at a rural Queensland school, which is the school she will be attending in the upcoming year. The community has just over 1,200 people living primarily on ranches and there will be approximately 35 students in the two-room, multi-age school in the new year.

Kirsten’s introduction

Harry Chapin wrote a song about keeping an open mind in teaching. He believed there is more than one way to do things. Even though it seems like there is just one possibility, there could be a better solution. The song is available on the web – http://www.harrychapin.com/music/flowers.shtml
The song goes like this. There was a little boy at a school. The teacher asked him to draw and colour a picture of flowers. Once he was done, he went up to the teacher to show her his picture. It was very colourful with lots of flowers. Even the leaves were painted in rainbow colours. Instead of enjoying the picture with him, the teacher scolded him, telling him that his colours were not realistic and accurate, and that he should follow the rules and paint like all the other children. The little boy was painting from his soul. He knew that there are lots of colours in nature and even more in his heart. He tried to explain this to the teacher. She thought he was being rude and disobedient and she sent him to the corner as punishment. When he got lonely, he went up to the teacher and said in a sad, sad voice that he would paint the way she told him. He even repeated her exact words back to her. A couple years later the boy moved and went to a different school. The teacher asked him to draw flowers. The boy drew and coloured a picture of red flowers with green leaves. The teacher said that there are so many colours in nature and in our hearts and that it's okay to paint with all of the colours of our soul. In a robot-like voice, the boy repeated the words of his old teacher that there are proper ways to do things and these rules need to be followed.

What this means to me is, you should keep an open mind. There's not just one way of doing things. For example, when I was in grade three the teacher asked us a question. She asked, "If you didn't have any of this and could choose one thing to have, would it be: (a) clean water; (b) food; (c) a safe home; (d) a television; (e) a computer; or (f) proper schooling?" I picked clean water and the teacher said that I was right. My answer was the one that the teacher was supposed to teach us. Then another girl said that she would pick (f) proper schooling. The teacher asked her, "Why is that?" The girl said, "Because, if I had proper schooling, then I could get myself a job, and when I get a good job, I will get a lot of money so that I can buy clean water and food." The teacher told her that she had thought really well. She told the whole class that we had taught her something that day. After that, the teacher didn't have a correct answer for some things. She knew that, if you kept an open mind, you never know what you can do.

I was going to begin my introduction by didactically asserting my commitment to grounding my thinking in experience. I was going to write about the importance of turning my intense gaze to a child's conceptualisations of her first-hand sensory experience in a school context which challenged her presuppositions. I was going to explain the importance of phenomenological epoch, which Seamon (1979) described as when the researcher "begins to question these things [the world or his or her experience of it], as well as all concepts, theories and models designed to describe and explain them" (p. 21).

The ethnographic event of Kirsten’s day at Flagstone Creek school enables us to trouble the terrain of primary schooling through three means. First, we are intentionally situating our inquiry in an alternative terrain (Haraway, 1998). We are casting our net far upstream from most of the metaphorical research fishermen, and in a different river from what we are accustomed to. As indicated within the literature review below, the majority of educational case studies are situated in city schools in the United States of America. This inquiry is situated in a rural Australian school. As Kirsten describes below, experiencing that which is so distinctly different from her unexamined day-to-day lifespace opens her eyes to phenomena and relationships which are unconscious for her accustomed and acclimatised peers (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997, 2002).

The second and arguably most important contribution of this chapter is perturbing the dominant research voice. A search of the literature revealed no academic publications authored by children. It might be countered that academic publications are written by people with academic credentials. In other words, they are not written by children without this ticket. This is a hegemonic question and what Bateson (2002) would call a dormitive principle. Bateson defined the dormitive principle as a type of "empty explanation" (p. 80). In plain terms, we assert that something is, because it is. This is what my German teacher used to call doppel-kumuppelt. The explanation turns in upon itself and is thereby insidious in that the logic is "self-validating" (p. 126). When the topic of our inquiry is children's learning, would it not be logical to ask the children? Instead, we negate the children's aptitude to inform by denying the permission, which in turn reinforces the lack of proof as to their competency.

The third means of troubling the terrain is through interrupting the sanctioned, expected presentation format of the research. As Kirsten and Josh’s website-play described in the positioning narrative demonstrates, the digital age affords creative vehicles for self-expression. Kirsten is currently fascinated by dolphins and spends time researching their habits. Her research is largely conducted on the Web. As I observe her, she does not read from top to bottom, left to right. Fonts, images and information bits catch her eye. She surfs, surfs and follows hyperlinks. Conversely, we as traditional educators have confined our means of school-based information representation to an inaffordable modality (Rose & Meyer, 2006; Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2005). Further, we have denied any evolution of format within academic information expression. Hassett (2006) and Kendall and Wickham (1999) reiterated the Foucauldian assertion that mindsets of the age are so powerful that our actions reinforce the
taken-for-granted even when we gain insight into their undesirability. As a testament to the power of the sanctioned, Hassett used a traditional, linear, left-to-right, top-to-bottom format to deconstruct traditional print literacy.

My practices as well are constructed within my time and place context. In 2006, my book *Seeing Beyond Blindness* (Kinash, 2006) was published. The goal of the book was to share and celebrate the voices of the blind. The book’s thesis is that the consumerism of western cultures is perpetuated through our viso-centric mindset. It is an oxymoron that the book was published as a linear print-based text without an accompanying digital, Braille or audio version. The social critique of visual culture is accessible only by the sighted; the blind informants have no access. I too am guilty of a mismatch between form and function, talk and walk. Ghandi compelled us to be the change we want to see in the world. This chapter experiments with seeking alternative means of presenting multiple formats to express non-sanctioned ideas.

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<tr>
<th>Shelley’s process reflections</th>
<th>Kirsten’s process reflections</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kirsten and I began our conversation dialoguing within my authorship of the abstract and introduction. It is important to Kirsten that you as reader take her contribution seriously, just as it is important that you contemplate my own. You will see that she is equally represented in the text. She has the privilege of authoring her own contributions in first person text. She is the first author of this chapter. I interpret her text and she interprets mine. We dialogue together.</td>
<td>I want this chapter to read positively. We have to keep in mind that there are good schools out there and good people. Adults do help children learn. It’s just not as good as it could be and we need to work together to make it better. I think that the best way to make change is for an adult and child to team up, like my mom and I are doing here.</td>
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**Shelley’s review of the literature**

*Where is the school experience situated? (spatial terrain)*

My search for case study research situated in grade-schools almost exclusively evoked primary classrooms in the USA. I conducted the literature search through EBSCOhost MegaFILE Premier, which includes Academic Search Premier, EJS-E-Journals, ERIC and Professional Development Collection. The search specifications were research manuscripts, scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals, 2005-2008 publication year and the search terms *school* and *case study*. Sixteen documents emerged in the results list. Six of the sixteen documents were situated in post-secondary, or addressed issues specific to teachers and administrators rather than students. Ten of the sixteen manuscripts described case study research with respect to students in grade-school classrooms (Barnett, Elliott, Wolsing, et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2007; Guglielmo & Little, 2006; Haywood & Megan, 2007; Kjellon & Wennerskrum, 2006; Mangan & Gerald, 2006; Plaut, 2006; Pressley, Solis, Gaskins, et al., 2006; Purcell, Horn & Palmer, 2007; Sandberg & Green, 2007). Of these, eight were situated in classrooms in the USA. One was set in Europe and one in Australia. Six were situated in primary classrooms. Two were set in early childhood environments, one across early childhood and elementary, and one in secondary. Only one case study explicitly identified a non-urban context. This review indicated three gaps in the classroom case study literature: beyond the USA; beyond traditional primary classrooms, and outside urban contexts.

*Whose voice is shared? (agency terrain)*

I conducted a second literature review using triangulated research strategies, including multiple search engines, word-of-mouth and scaffolding from the citations of target manuscripts. I specifically searched for scholarly (peer-reviewed) published manuscripts in the domain of education literature authored by children. I could not find any articles meeting these criteria. I expanded my search to articles addressing children’s perspectives on quality education. Again my search was fruitless. I was hopeful when I located Ceglowski’s (2004) article in the *Early Childhood Education Journal*, entitled “How Stakeholder Groups Define Quality in Child Care”. Here is Ceglowski’s list of stakeholders:

- Parents, licensed and legally unlicensed family child care providers,
- centre-based child care and Head Start staff, administrators of preschool, Head Start, and school-age child care programs, legislators, employers,
- researchers studying families enrolled in Minnesota Family Investment Program, conducting the Minnesota household child care survey, faculty in 2 and 4 years early childhood education teacher preparation programs,
staff from the Department of Children, Families and Learning, and staff from community organisations. (p. 104)

The glaring gap is children. The researcher did not consider children to be stakeholders with respect to the question of what defines quality in child care.

To be fair, child agency and child as researcher are beginning to emerge as stances within the education literature. The most renowned example oozing innovative approaches to child agency and child as researcher is found in The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education. Notably, the inspirational, stellar text, The Hundred Languages of Children (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993), was edited and authored entirely by adults. The children are honoured, respected and valued throughout the text, but are not acknowledged as authors. As another example, Darbyshim, Schiller and MacDougall (2005) addressed a research paradigm shift, including seeking acknowledgements of diverse voices, including young children. They wrote that “children do have valid and valuable views and opinions that deserve to be elicited and taken seriously” and added that “the adult view cannot be the only valid research perspective” (p. 467). Smith, Duncan and Marshall’s (2005) article contributes to this challenging discourse in explicating methods for seeking and representing the voices of young children.

Meehan, Holmes and Tangey (2001) applied the epistemological stance that children have important insights and valuable perspectives to share. They asserted that it is vital to listen to and share multiple roles and voices, including children’s. They situated their inquiry into peer tutoring between Years Five and Six female primary students in Ireland. The students learned and taught one another two software programs; the researchers inquired into phenomena such as the shift from children as knowledge consumers to knowledge generators. The authors shared verbatim narratives from academics, teachers and primary school students. Notably, the academics and teachers were acknowledged as authors while the children were not.

How is research and experience represented? (modal terrain)

Scan the latest stack of research documents that litter your desk. How do they look? How do they afford you the opportunity to read? I predict that, without exception, they include linear text that requires you to read from left to right, top to bottom, beginning to end. Does text have to be presented in this format? By contrast, I have been introduced to three research artefacts in which there is no linearity. These are two software programs: the researchers inquired into phenomena such as the shift from children as knowledge consumers to knowledge generators. The titles of the compelling contents are plastered around the periphery in playful fonts. These headline articles read “the stick insect diet; of course you’re not hot; photoshop ‘til you drop; and poses you wouldn’t strike at home (and a man wouldn’t strike anywhere).” The faux women’s magazine is a critique of this cultural icon and thus a social commentary promoting information literacy, conscious awareness and potentially action.

We have emulated these authors’ break with convention in the layout and formatting of this chapter. We invite you to consider your response to the dual abstracts. One reader shared that she was “increasingly irritated by the format until she reached the third page, when a light went on for her.” She described herself as “all-at-once getting IT.” She elaborated that she returned once again to the first page and started reading the document again from the beginning, armed with her understanding of the format significance. Another reader shared that the dual abstracts required her to “switch back and forth, back and forth between the left and right side of the page and that she enjoyed this new reading sensation.” I also invite you to return to the Positioning Narrative. Notably, Josh and Kirsten do not experience and author text, communicate or play from left to right, top to bottom. The refreshing children’s approach to knowing, expressing and reading can be interpreted as a form of modelling for us adults who are entrenched in the-way-it-ought-to-be.
Shelley's introduction to Kirsten's narrative

Kirsten and I recognise three important oversights in the literature which has been produced in the educational domain. It is our goal to trouble the terrain of education literature through Kirsten's narrative about her day at the state school. The first oversight is in confining the literature largely to a prototypical urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of a rural, multi-age classroom in Queensland, Australia. The second oversight is the exclusion, muting and/or devaluation of the child's voice. This narrative is authored by Kirsten. She is honoured as the first author of this chapter. She has the power not only to describe but also to interpret. The third oversight is the exclusion, muting and/or devaluation of the child's voice. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context. This narrative describes a Canadian city girl's experience of an urban USA context.

Kirsten's narrative: My day at the rural Australian school

My name is Kirsten Kinash. I am nine years old and my best friend's name is Jacinta. She goes to the school I visited. I am a Canadian and she is Australian. I am here in Australia for a year because of my Mom's work. She is a university professor. In Canada we go to school from September through June. We arrived here in July. At home, this is our summer vacation. So my Dad is home-schooling my younger brother Josh, who is seven years old, and I until the next Australian school year begins at the end of January.

Kirsten's interpretations of Shelley's interpretation

This is about the mind, which is inspiration, and how when they bind they create something big and totally new. I think that people are all smart in their own way. Some people just don't see it. Everyone has a talent but some haven't discovered it yet. The way that you discover your thinking talent is by letting it out. I experience this thinking through other people. I listen to their words and through my experiences new words come to me. When adults say something big, I interpret it. That's the way I think. Other people have to find their own way of experiencing their thinking talent to find out what it really is.

I shared a worry with my Mom that none of the thoughts I wrote here are really mine. They are not original thoughts. They are the conversations I have had, only written in my own words. My Mom looked at me strangely and said, "You know, I've never really thought about it that way, but that's what all authors do. That's the way people think."

Kirsten's narrative about the rural Australian school

I'd like to tell you a little bit about my day at the state school. Jacinta invited me to go to school with her for a day and sleep over at her house the night before. We got up in the morning and ate pancakes. They live on the top of a hill. Her Mom, Michelle, drove us down the steep driveway to meet the bus. Michelle followed behind the bus so that she could talk to the teachers and introduce me. The bus driver was very kind and friendly. The kids were also friendly, but very curious about my voice and who I was because they were all wearing uniforms and I wasn't. I felt nervous about looking different from them because usually kids from bigger schools tease you about those sorts of things. But they didn't tease me at all. They were super nice and started asking me all these great questions. They wanted to know where I was from because of my accent, and what my name is, and they wanted to know what Canada is like. They asked me what snow is like, because they had never seen or felt it. They were amazed by what I told them. I told them that snowflakes look like pretty, tiny little shapes and every single one of them is different. I told them about ice hockey. I told them that it is a big sport in Canada. People go on ice skates holding sticks. Each team tries to shoot an oval thing called a puck in each other's nets. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.
Shelley’s interpretations of Kirsten’s narrative

This passage reinforces an interpretation of Kirsten’s ontology as relational. She stories her existence in the actions and interactions with others. Kirsten has a lively, engaging conversational style which is untempered by adult standard conventions. She engages with the reader in a playful manner. She invites us into her world. Her world is one of phenomenological activity. Seaman (1979) explained the focus of phenomenological research as “people’s day-to-day experiences and behaviours associated with places, spaces and environments in which they live and move” (p. 15). While I have to don lenses intentionally to make day-to-day life salient, this focus is natural to Kirsten. She embodies the research she constructs through this narrative.

Jacinta showed me around. I heard a lot of kids laughing, running and giggling and doing really active things. I had such a wonderful time at the state school that once people read this it may become a big school too. That would be a shame. In Canada, I go to a big school with four or five classes of every grade from Prep (we call it kindergarten) to Year (we call it Grade) Six. Jacinta’s school has around 30 kids altogether. My school in Canada has around 600. It seems to me that kids are more active at little schools. At bigger schools, like the one I come from, I find that it’s a lot less active. For example, the people at my school sit around and talk. The boys at the state school run around trying to catch grasshoppers. The girls skip and run and they have all sorts of other games they play. Once Jacinta introduced me to the teachers and her friends, a few kids ran up and said, “Let’s play British Bulldog altogether.” So we rounded up most of the kids in the school and we all played. Here are the rules to the game. There’s a British Bulldog, who’s the It, and everyone else is on the other side of the fence. They run across. Whoever the British Bulldog catches also becomes a British Bulldog. Once everyone but one becomes a Bulldog, the game is over and that last remaining person wins.

I noticed that no one was afraid to play together. At our school in Canada, everyone separates into groups of boys or girls and into their separate grades. We don’t mix. At the state school some of these kinds of groups tease each other just for fun—not in a mean way—but they play together anyway. I saw big groups of kids all playing together and absolutely nobody was left out.

The school is in the country rather than in the city. There are no buildings besides the school nearby and few cars. All of the children arrived on the school bus, so the only cars belonged to the teachers. There were three teachers, including the principal because he also teaches the kids. One of the teachers lives right beside the school in the school grounds. She has a fence around her yard and lots of flowers blooming. When we studied Canada, she popped next door into her house to get her mini jade sculpture of a grizzly bear to share with us. Jade is a precious stone found in Canada. At the state school, there are big fields leading into a forest. There are two horses and a creek. However, the creek was empty, likely because of the drought. There is a big jacaranda tree, although there were only one or two purple blossoms still on it because it was done blooming.

Something that struck me was the rooms. It wasn’t one big school house. Each room was separated and you could go in between them without going inside. In fact, you couldn’t go from room to room without going outdoors.

Instead of a bell over a speaker, there was a real handbell that someone rang. When the bell rang, everyone lined up in front of their room. There were two everyday classrooms. Prep through Year Four (what we call Division One) go in one room. Years Five through Seven (Division Two) go in another. Our school in Canada ends at Grade Six.

The room I was in at the state school is a double room with an open sliding divider wall. On one side of the room there is a play corner for the youngest children. It has toys like blocks and books. Some kids even brought their own toys to play in there. On the same side of the divider, there are about six computers and two hexagon shaped tables. On the other side, there are around 20 desks arranged in a square with a bigger desk in the middle for the teacher. I looked around and saw tons of neat things on the walls like artwork of skull and crossbones flags and pirate ships, so I could tell they were studying pirates. There are two white boards. One is movable and one is up on the wall. The whole room has carpet. Not including recess, we spent about half the day in our desks and half the day in various spots on the carpet, like in front of the movable whiteboard.

Right after recess, another teacher, who comes in only on Fridays just to teach music, came and got us to take us over for her class. The teacher is very creative and wore a funky dress. I liked her. Sometimes the kids go to an indoor room for music, but we went outside instead. We went outside by the music room in the field. The children were practising a play. It didn’t surprise me that it was a pirate play after seeing everything in the room. I got a chair in the shade and watched the play. It was extremely hot outside. They said it wasn’t that hot compared to what they’re used to, but the teachers did ask them to put their hats on. The teacher had a part in the play for every child. In a big school, you have to audition or you won’t get a part. It is likely that you’ll only get a part with one sentence. At our school in Canada, only Division Two gets to be in the play. Jacinta’s brother Jarrod played the main character, Captain Smelly Boots, and Jacinta played Princess Sweetpea.

When music was over, we went back to the classroom and all of the kids were going to start spelling. I didn’t know the spelling words they were studying, so the teacher asked me to go help the Year Ones learn how to print letters. My point is that the teacher doesn’t leave anyone out just to wait. She always has something to do for everybody, especially if it means helping
someone else. Helping the Year Ones reminded me of how much I had learned in the past three years of school.

Then we had a 25 minute morning recess. I learned another new game called Fly. Here is how you play. There are two skipping ropes and a red line. The players jump-stride in between the skipping ropes and the line without touching any of them. You can only touch one foot in each gap. The gaps start out narrow so that you have to go on your tippy-toes. Each time you go in without touching, the moves the rope wider and wider. After a few turns it is fairly easy because you can fit your whole foot, but do not have to jump very far. A few turns later it is hard to make the space between the gaps. You have to take a running start to make it. Once someone hasn’t made the jump, they are out. The one person left is the winner.

After recess we wrote our own Christmas poems. A lot of people were writing about how it is so hot at Christmas. I thought it was a little bit funny, because in Canada at Christmas it is cold and snowy. They wrote about what they eat. I learned that they eat seafood, whereas we eat roasted turkey dinner. I realised that Christmas in Australia and Canada are very different. Every child wrote a poem. The Year Oners wrote a simpler poem. The teacher expected more from Year Fours and less from Year Ones. We wrote the words:

C down the left-hand side of the page. Then we wrote words beginning with each of the letters. For example, for the C I wrote – Cheers and Crackers. When we completed our rough draft, we took it up to the teacher. She made corrections to our spelling, then we rewrote a final draft. We took them home for our parents to see. We continued on to math. We did double-digit multiplication using our nine times tables. I found this difficult because I had not learned this. My best friend Jacinta helped me learn it. I’m not going to write much about math because it’s not my favourite subject.

Shelley’s interpretations of Kirsten’s narrative
I have stayed intentionally silent for 10 paragraphs, an intentional absence, as Kirsten’s narrative was so powerful that it demanded to stand alone. However, I am now compelled to make two comments. First, I struggled to understand the format of the Christmas poem and asked Kirsten to clarify verbally. She looked at me with a perplexed expression and asked, “Didn’t you say that part of what this is about is not writing it like a book always looks?” I replied, “Yes.” She corrected my oversight: “Then why not just put the word Christmas in like the teacher showed us?” My second comment is my pride in this authentic contribution to children’s agency. Just as we choose to write what engages us and not write what bores or confuses us, Kirsten delightfully wrote, “I’m not going to write much about math because it’s not my favourite subject.”

While we were playing, the teacher who lives in the house on the school grounds came out and asked, “Do you want to hear a bee-tree?” A bee-tree is a tree that if you’re really quiet you can hear the constant buzzing of bees and you can see them pollinating the flowers of the tree. We all stood silent and listened. It sounded soothing. I heard the wonderful natural buzzing of bees. The teacher said that when she is in her house after the children have all gone home the bees become very loud.

We then had our lunch recess, which was 45 minutes. We ate our lunches outside at picnic benches. In Canada we always eat inside, even during summer days. We ate fairly quickly so that we could play. I suggested we play Grounders, a game that children sometimes play in Canada. Grounders is played in the playground. One person is It. If the person who is It is on the playground equipment, like the bridge, she has to have her eyes closed. The rest of the players have their eyes open. If the person who is It is on the ground, she can have her eyes open. If someone who is not It has left the playground equipment and is on the ground, the person who is It yells out “Grounders” and the person on the ground becomes the new It.

Shelley’s interpretations of Kirsten’s narrative
This passage stands out as significant owing to Kirsten’s multi-sensory presentation and the emotion she connects to this embodied experience. When Kirsten was seven, her teacher encouraged her to use “juicy” words within her stories. I identify three such compelling words in this passage: consistent, soothing and natural. These terms are intriguing in their situated context. Kirsten initially used the term consistent three times within this paragraph and later deleted two instances of the word to avoid repetition. The enduring, consistent quality of the bees in their natural environment is important to Kirsten. She finds the sound of their work comforting or soothing. The significance of the bee-tree is consistent with the primordial symbols of these phenomena. Cirlot (1971) presented the bee as symbolising from-the-earth industry and persistent embodied contribution. Cirlot described the tree as “one of the most essential of traditional symbols” (p. 346). He provided numerous examples of its encultured significance, such as in the Bible and in Greek and Roman mythology. The tree is associated with sustenance, knowledge and life. The combined symbolism of the bee and the tree as it is melded in the bee-tree stands for effervescent energy in the natural world. As written by a lover of the bee-tree, Kirsten’s text is interpreted as being in and of the world. It is lived, embodied and real.
After lunch, we sat down on the carpet. The teacher called me up to the front with her to talk about Canada. I was thrilled! I didn’t think I would get to do that. We talked about many things, like Canada’s sports like hockey that I told you about earlier, and the native animals like the beaver, moose and grizzly bear. Of course, they asked me more about snow. Everyone started asking questions. I was glad that they asked questions because it showed they were interested. For example, someone asked me more about snow. Everyone started asking questions. I was glad that they asked questions because it showed they were interested. For example, someone asked me more about snow. Everyone started asking questions. I was glad that they asked questions because it showed they were interested. For example, someone asked me more about snow. Everyone started asking questions. I was glad that they asked questions because it showed they were interested. For example, someone asked me more about snow. 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